

American Environmental History
History 275
Spring Semester 2013
MWF 9:05-10:00, Holland Hall 307

Dr. Megan Raby
History Department
Holland Hall 513 B

Office Hours:

Mondays, 10:30 AM-12:00 PM
Wednesdays, 10:30 AM-12:00 PM
...and by appointment

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Course Description

By examining the interaction of people and environment on the North American continent from the 15th century to the present, this course shows how history "takes place" in ecological contexts that change over time. Students compare Native American and Euro-American religious beliefs, social values, economic aspirations, and technological developments and examine their consequences for the flora, fauna, and peoples of the continent.

This course will introduce you to the major themes and guiding questions of the field of American environmental history. It will equip you with historical methods for interpreting primary and secondary sources to understand the changing relationships between humans and nature in the history of North America. As a seminar, this course will depend on you to shape our conversations and the questions we pursue.

Readings

Books (available at the Saint Olaf Bookstore and on 4 hour reserve at Rolvaag Library):

Steinberg, Theodore. *Down to Earth: Nature's Role in American History*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Cronon, William. *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 1991.

White, Richard. *The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River*. New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1995.

Additional selections from books, articles, primary historical documents, and links to online content listed in the attached schedule of readings will be available at the Moodle site for the course:

<http://moodle-2012-13.stolaf.edu/course/view.php?id=1834>

Please email me right away if you have any difficulty accessing a resource.

Assignments

Assessment is through two essays; in-class or take-home writing responses assigned periodically through the course of the semester; and participation in class, on the course's online Moodle forums, and through involvement in group-lead discussions.

Participation (25%):

In-class—See guidelines for class participation on the back of the course syllabus.

Online—In addition to the guidelines above, post a substantive discussion question or comment on a classmate's post at least once a week on the Moodle forums for full credit.

Group-led discussion—Although everyone is responsible for active contribution to class discussions each day, once during the semester, your group will take the lead in guiding and suggesting questions for discussion of the week's readings.

In-class writing and take-home assignments (25%)

First Essay (20%): *A "biography" of an organism (group project)*

Final Essay (30%): *A Northfield environmental history*

My grading criteria for essays can be found on the last page of the course syllabus. I strongly encourage you to come to my office hours or make an appointment to discuss any concerns you may have about course material, your progress in this class, and strategies for effective studying and writing. If you wish to dispute a grade, be aware that re-grading may result in a lower grade.

Expectations

Participation

Our classroom is a forum for coming to new, shared understandings of course material. We will not simply reiterate information covered in our readings. Our goal is to build an intellectual community that will enrich your understanding and engagement with the content of the course. I understand that speaking in class is more difficult for some students than for others. With practice, however, joining in the conversation becomes easier.

For more information on the guidelines I use to evaluate class participation, see the last page of the course syllabus.

Attendance

In order to participate, you must first attend class! I will record attendance, and this will factor into your participation grade. If you must miss a class for an illness, emergency, or excused extracurricular activity, please contact me as soon as possible and consider making an office hour appointment.

Preparation

The quality of our conversations depends on you to actively read assigned material in preparation for class meetings. I expect you to fully engage with the readings and take notes to aid your participation during class. A good rule of thumb is to set aside 2-3 hours of study time for each hour spent in class. For tips on active reading, I highly recommend Patrick Rael's section on reading in *Reading, Writing, and Researching for History*: <http://www.bowdoin.edu/writing-guides>. Always bring

your notes and the course materials assigned for the day to class with you. Please feel welcome to visit me during my office hours to discuss strategies for reading and taking notes more effectively.

Respect

Our conversations will be lively and disagreement is encouraged. Contributions to discussion, however, should be made in a respectful manner and supported with evidence. Students should respect each other as part of a learning community; one of our goals is to understand differing perspectives and evaluate opposing viewpoints. I am strongly committed to diversity in the classroom and I ask that you join with me in making the classroom a space where individuals from all backgrounds would feel comfortable, whether physically present or not.

In order to be fully present in class and avoid distracting your classmates, I also ask that you refrain from using electronic devices during class for purposes other than accessing course material. I much prefer, however, that you print readings and take notes on paper. If you wish to look material up or share ideas online, I encourage you to take down notes and do so after class.

Academic Integrity

Borrowing the words and ideas of others without giving them credit with an appropriate citation is plagiarism. Plagiarism will result in a failure of the assignment and could lead to further disciplinary action. Please see Saint Olaf College's policy on Academic Integrity: <http://www.stolaf.edu/stulife/thebook/academic/integrity.html>. I also highly recommend that you take Cornell University's "Recognizing and Avoiding Plagiarism" tutorial during the first week of the course: <http://plagiarism.arts.cornell.edu/tutorial/index.cfm>. Please feel free to come see me if you have questions about how to properly cite your sources.

Disability Statement

If you have a documented disability for which accommodations may be required in this class, please contact Connie Ford (ford@stolaf.edu) or Laura Knobel-Piehl (knobel@stolaf.edu) in the Academic Support Center (507-786-3288, Buntrock 108) as soon as possible to discuss accommodations. If you have already arranged accommodations through Student Accessibility Services, please arrange for the submission of your accommodation letter within the first two weeks of class. Accommodations will only be provided after the letter is submitted to me and with sufficient lead-time for me to arrange accommodations. Although I will receive the letter electronically, I expect you to initiate a conversation with me about the accommodations.

Schedule of Readings

Week 1: Where are we?

Feb. 8: Introductions

Week 2: Knowing Nature

Feb. 11: Defining "Nature"

*****Nature response paper due*****

- [Skim] "nature, n.". OED Online.
- Williams, Raymond. "Nature." In *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, 184-89. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- Charles, Leonard, Jim Dodge, Lynn Milliman, and Victoria Stockley. "Where You at: A Bioregional Quiz." *Coevolution Quarterly* 32 (1981): 1.
- Gruchow, Paul. "Landscape and Desire: Questionnaire." *Whitewater River Letter* 1, no. 2 (2009): 4-5.

Feb. 13: What is environmental history?

- Steinberg, "Prologue: Rocks and History," p. 2-10.
- O'Brien, Jim. "The History of North America From the Standpoint of the Beaver." In *Free Spirits: Annals of the Insurgent Imagination*, edited by Paul Buhle, 39-48. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1982.

Feb. 15: Native America

- Denevan, William M. "The Pristine Myth: The Landscape of the Americas in 1492." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 82, no. 3 (1992): 369-85.
- Krech, Shepard. "Introduction" and "Hohokum." In *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History*, 15-28, 45-72. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999.
- Steinberg, "Chapter 1: Wilderness Under Fire," p. 11-20.

Week 3: New Worlds

Feb. 18: The Columbian Exchange

- Steinberg, "Chapter 2: A Truly New World," p. 21-38.
- Crosby, Alfred. "Metamorphosis of the Americas." In *Seeds of Change: A Quincentennial Commemoration*, edited by Herman J. Viola, and Carolyn. Margolis, 70-89. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991.

Feb. 20: Library Workshop [Meet in Rolvaag Library 250]

- Steinberg, "Chapter 3: Reflections from a Woodlot," p. 39-54; "Chapter 4: A World of Commodities, p. 55-70."

Feb. 22: Changes in the Land

- Cronon, William. "That Wilderness Should Turn a Mart." In *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England*, 159-170. New York: Hill and Wang, 1983.
- Price, Jennifer. "Missed Connections: The Passenger Pigeon Extinction." In *Flight Maps: Adventures With Nature in Modern America*, 1-56. New York, NY: Basic Books, 1999.

Week 4: Nature's Nation

Feb. 25: The View from Walden

*****First Essay Due*****

- Thoreau, Henry David. "Where I Lived, and What I Lived for." In *Walden; or, Life in the Woods*. Boston, MA: Ticknor and Fields, 1854.

Feb. 27: Sublime Landscapes

- Hudson River School websites.

March 1: Westward the Course of Empire

- Cronon, "Prologue: Cloud over Chicago," p. 5-22; "Chapter 1: Dreaming the Metropolis," p. 23-54; "Chapter 2: Rails and Water," p. 55-93.

Week 5: Commodities

March 4: Amber Waves of Grain

- Cronon, "Chapter 3: Pricing the Future: Grain," p. 97-147.
- Mill City Museum website.

March 6: Lumbering Giant

- Cronon, "Chapter 4: The Wealth of Nature: Lumber," p. 148-206.

March 8: Cotton Kingdom

- Steinberg, "Chapter 5: King Climate in Dixie," p. 71-88; "Chapter 6: The Great food fight," p. 89-98; "Chapter 7: Extracting the New South," p. 99-115.

Week 6: Industrial Landscapes

March 11: Meat to Market

- Cronon, "Chapter 5: Annihilating Space: Meat," p. 207-262.
- Steinberg, "Chapter 8: The Unforgiving West," p. 116-137.
- Steinberg, "Chapter 12: The Secret History of Meat," p. 190-205

March 13: Organic City

- Steinberg, "Chapter 10: Death of the Organic city," p. 157-174.
- Cronon, "Chapter 7: The Busy Hive," p. 310-340.
- [Optional] Cronon, "Chapter 6: Gateway City," p. 263-309

March 15: America at the World's Fair

- Cronon, "Chapter 8: White City Pilgrimage," p. 341-386; "Epilogue: Where we were driving," p. 387-390.

Week 7: Conservation and the Progressive Movement

March 18: Conservation/Preservation

- Steinberg, "Chapter 9: Conservation reconsidered," p. 138-156.
- Worster, Donald. "John Muir and the Modern Passion for Nature." *Environmental History* 10, no. 1 (2005): 8-19.

March 20: The National Parks

- PBS The National Parks website.

March 22: Debating Wilderness

- Nash, Roderick. "The Value of Wilderness." *Environmental Review* 1, no. 3 (1976): 14-25.
- Cronon, William. "The Trouble With Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature." *Environmental History* 1, no. 1 (1996): 7-28.
- Byerly, Alison Byerly. "The Uses of Landscape: The Picturesque Aesthetic and the National Park System." In *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, 52-68. University of Georgia Press, 1996.

Week 8: Enjoy Your Spring Break!

Week 9: Local Environmental Histories

April 3: The Columbia River as a System

- White, "Introduction," ix-xi; "Chapter 1: Knowing Nature through Labor," p. 3-29; "Chapter 2: Putting the River to Work," p. 30-58.

April 5: Northfield Environmental Histories Workshop

*****Bibliography and Research Questions for Final Essay Due*****

- Steinberg, "Chapter 11: Moveable Feast," p. 175-189

Week 10: Economic and Ecological Disasters

April 8: Lessons from the Dust Bowl?

- Worster, Donald. "Grass to Dust: The Great Plains in the 1930s." *Environmental Review*: ER 1, no. 3 (1976): 2-11.
- Cunfer, G. "Scaling the Dust Bowl." *Placing history: How maps, spatial data, and GIS are changing historical scholarship*. ESRI Press, Redlands, CA (2008): 95-121.
- PBS The Dust Bowl Website.

April 10: Nature's New Deal

- Maher, Neil. "'Crazy Quilt Farming on Round Land': The Great Depression, the Soil Conservation Service, and the Politics of Landscape Change on the Great Plains During the New Deal Era." *The Western Historical Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (2000): 319-39.

April 12: The Emergence of Ecology

- Leopold, Aldo. "Thinking Like a Mountain" and "The Land Ethic." In *A Sand County Almanac, and Sketches Here and There*, 129-132, 201-226. New York: Oxford University Press, 1949.

Week 11: WWII and Aftermath

April 15: War and Nature

- Selections from Russell, Edmund. *War and Nature: Fighting Humans and Insects With Chemicals From World War I to Silent Spring*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

April 17: Effluent Society

- White, "Chapter 3: The Power of the River," p. 59-88.
- Steinberg, "Chapter 13: America in black and green," p. 206-225; "Chapter 14: Throwaway society," p. 226-238.

April 18: DDT and the Fallout of Silent Spring

- Carson, Rachel. *Silent Spring*, 1-13, 85-100. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1962.
- Rachel Carson's Silent Spring, A Book That Changed The World website.

Week 12: The Rise of Environmentalism

April 22: Happy Earth Day!

- Rome, Adam. "The Genius of Earth Day." *Environmental History* 15, no. 2 (2010): 194-205.
- Gaylord Nelson and Earth Day website.

April 24: Government gets into the Act(s)

- Steinberg, "Chapter 15: Shades of green," p. 239-261.

April 26: Environmental Inequalities

- Davis, Mike. "The Case for Letting Malibu Burn." In *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster*, 93-148. New York, NY: Metropolitan Books, 1998.
- Cole, L., and S. Foster. "Preface" and "A History of the Environmental Justice Movement." In *From the Ground Up: Environmental Racism and the Rise of the Environmental Justice Movement*, 1-9, 19-33. NYU Press, 2000.

Week 13: Backlash

April 29: Jobs vs. the Spotted Owl?

- White, Richard. "Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?" In *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, edited by William Cronon, 171-85. New York: WW Norton, 1995.

May 1: Climate Change and Denial

- Selections from Oreskes, Naomi, and Erik M. Conway. *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues From Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming*. New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2010.
- Frank Luntz, "The Environment."
- Spencer Weart's The Discovery of Global Warming website.

May 3: Capitalism to the Rescue?

- Steinberg, "Chapter 16: In Corporations We Trust," p. 262-281; "Conclusion," p. 262-286.
- Steinberg, Ted. "Can Capitalism Save the Planet? On the Origins of Green Liberalism." *Radical History Review* 2010, no. 107 (2010): 7-24.

Week 14: From the Global back to the Local

May 6: US and the Global Environment

- Brownell, E. "Negotiating the New Economic Order of Waste." *Environmental History* 16, no. 2 (2011): 262-89.

May 8: Taking Stock (of Salmon)

- White, "Chapter 4: Salmon," p. 89-114.

May 10: Our Environmental Histories, I

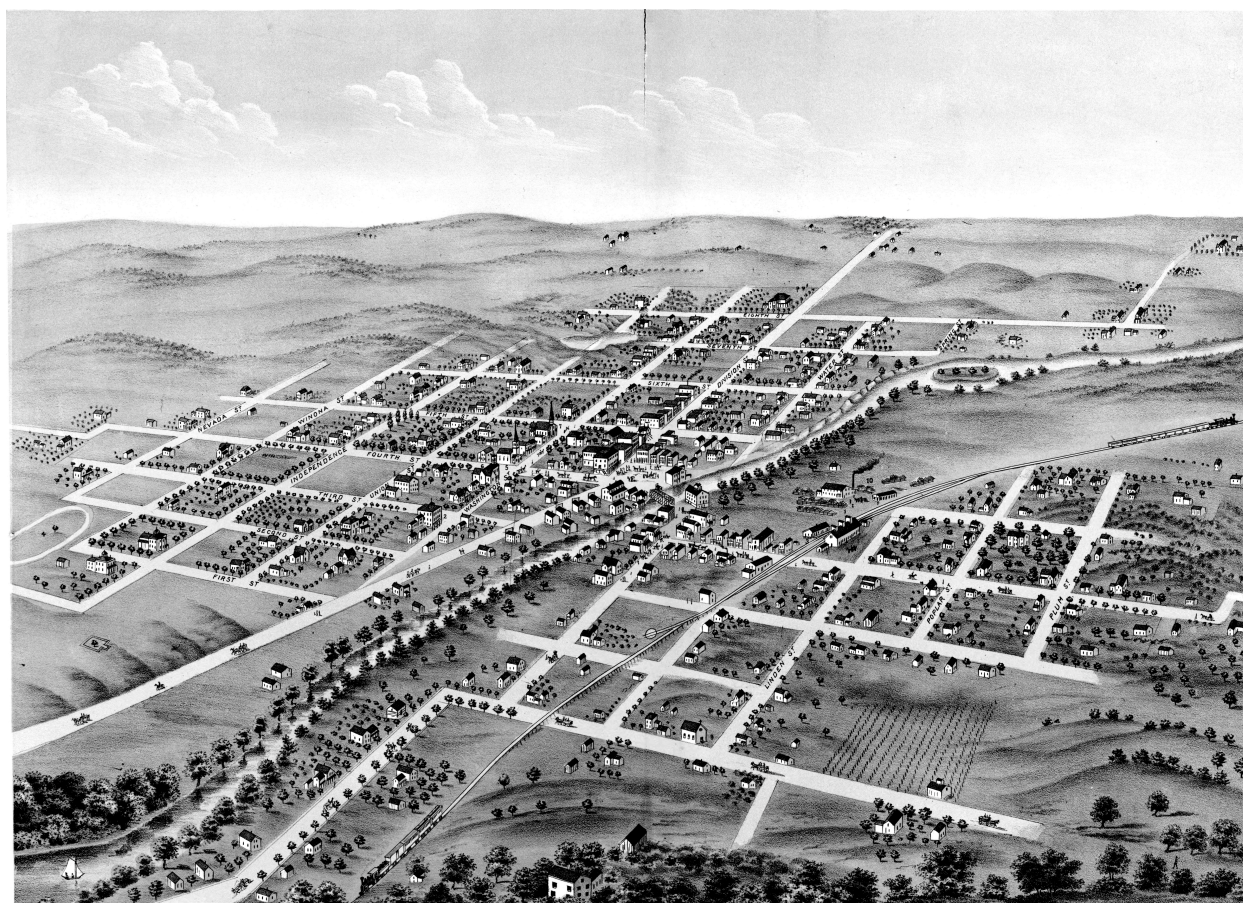
*****Draft of Final Essay Due*****

Week 15: Where are we now?

May 13: Our Environmental Histories, II

May 15: Looking backward, looking forward

*****Final Essay Due by the End of Final Exam Period: Saturday, May 18, 11:00 AM*****



Published by Ruger & Stoner, Madison, Wis.
73-693459



BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF
NORTHFIELD
LOOKING SOUTH EAST
RICE COUNTY MINNESOTA 1888



Chicago Lith. Co. N° 152 & 154 S. Clark St. Chicago.

Division of Maps
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Class Participation Guidelines

The academic world is essentially a bunch of learning communities. Each of the disciplines is a group of people who talk to each other about how to practice the discipline well. This seminar depends on the active participation of all of its members. Most class sessions will be facilitated by student members. But it's not their job to produce a discussion; it's our job to be ready with ideas and questions each and every day. So what's good history in conversation? In many ways the answer is the same as "what's a good conversation?" Because conversation is a form of communication, a good discussion is also like good writing.

There are lots of ways to participate productively in class conversations, both in class and on the course's Moodle forums. You can ask questions to get things started. You can offer opinions or explanations (an opinion plus evidence). You can provide information, citing material in different kinds of sources. You can make connections to earlier reading or conversations, or to things you've learned in other courses. You can review or summarize the different interpretations that are on the table. You can synthesize, interpret, or integrate, pulling together the threads of one conversation and getting ready to weave another. You can offer leadership by suggesting fruitful directions for discussion.

How can you evaluate class contributions? At one level of participation, people offer frequent and appropriate contributions, which pose good questions for the group, or use relevant reading material to answer particular questions. They invite others to contribute information or interpretations to the discussion, and they build on the comments of others, sometimes by repeating what they understood, sometimes by restating the argument for more clarity. They admit confusions, and ask for clarifications. They synthesize facts and concepts in integrative statements or interpretations. They try out explanations, offering opinions (sometimes personal) with evidence (sometimes contemporary). They offer reviews, summaries, and a sense of closure at appropriate times, as they help to direct the discussion. They don't worry about silences, as long as people are thinking. They ask questions. And they let other people talk too.

At another level, people offer regular contributions that are not so integrative or interpretive, contributing discrete facts and some new information. Contributions are single sentences or phrases rather than more complex formulations. There is less attention to the conversation as a whole, and less connection with other participants in conversation. There are no errors of fact or interpretation. At yet another level, people speak only a few times, offering just a little information. They offer ideas, but the ideas are vague or relatively unformulated; sometimes they are unsubstantiated opinions or educated guess; sometimes they are unconnected personal stories. Sometimes they just repeat what other people have already said.

Other people are present but participate only minimally; sometimes they say nothing. Sometimes they speak without having done the reading, and they offer information with factual errors, or comments that lead the discussion off the topic.

Finally, a few people are not present at all, so they do not add to the conversation.

Grading Criteria for Essays

- A-A⁺: For outstanding essays only. The thesis and argument are clear, thought-provoking, and based on correctly understood facts. Material used to support the argument synthesizes ideas from different parts of the course (readings, lectures, and discussions from different weeks). The relationships drawn between facts and ideas are sophisticated, subtle, and/or original. The writing is grammatically correct and succinct, and the argument flows well from point to point. Not a word is wasted!
- A⁻-B⁺: For very good essays that for some reason fall short of the criteria described above. The argument may be murky at one point; information may be presented that doesn't directly or clearly contribute to the argument; the writing style may be awkward occasionally, or flawed by one or two consistent (if minor) grammatical errors.
- B: The basic good grade. The essay may pursue a straightforward but not particularly deep or sophisticated argument; it is okay as far as it goes, but doesn't penetrate into the material very far. It may have a flash of brilliance that isn't brought to fruition, because it is counterbalanced by a weakness in argumentation, minor grammatical problems, and/or a significant misunderstanding of events or chronology.
- B⁻-C⁺: An essay in this range shows some of the basics of the ideal essay, but is weakened by a lack of serious thinking, or by writing problems. It may make superficial connections without offering sufficient evidence to make the connections plausible or persuasive, or it may have what is in principle a good argument supported by incorrect facts or chronology. Alternatively, it may provide a fairly solid argument with minor flaws, from which the reader is continually distracted by awkward or ungrammatical prose.
- C: A grade signifying some serious problem in essay writing. It may deliver facts without a recognizable thesis or argument; it may wander away from the point; or it may be a thoughtful attempt so weakened by writing problems (grammar, punctuation, word choice) that it is difficult for the reader to understand a crucial point you are trying to make.
- D: A marginal grade. There may be enough here to show that you have attended a few classes and/or done some of the reading, but the essay indicates no attempt at synthesis or thinking on your own, or shows a serious misunderstanding of the nature of the material and/or the assignment. Also used for essays that are just barely coherent.
- F: For unacceptable essays. An essay may be judged unacceptable if it contains plagiarism (please see the Academic Integrity section of the syllabus); if it consists primarily of content inappropriate to the question or the material for this course; if it shows a complete misunderstanding of the course content; or if the writing fails to meet standard college-level requirements of basic communication in English.

For more information, please see <http://stolaf.edu/catalog/1213/academicregs/grades.html>