

American Studies Department and Urban Studies Program, Rutgers University

American Land, 050:301:02 and 10:975:444:01, Spring 2006, 3 credits

Monday, 1:10-4:10, Ruth Adams Building, Room 018, Douglass Campus

Taught by Frank J. Popper, Civic Square Building, Room 178, College Avenue Campus, 732-932-4009 X689,
fpopper@rci.rutgers.edu

Office hours: Tuesday and Wednesday afternoons, after class or by appointment

Texts: Joan Didion, "Where I Was From" (2003); Ted Steinberg, "Down to Earth: Nature's Role in American History" (2002); and Tom Vanderbilt, "Survival City: Adventures among the Ruins of Atomic America" (2002). The first two are in paperback, and all are available at the Rutgers University Bookstore.

This course explores the diverse connections between America's national development and its land environment. It is essentially a course in ecological history. As such, the course offers nontraditional approaches to how the United States originated; how it expanded to cover a continental land mass; how and why major parts of its economy (for instance, farming, industry, energy, services and government) have grown and with what impacts; how it has incorporated different ethnic and racial groups and with what results; how and why it has globalized and conducted its foreign policy and with what results; and why its landscapes have looked the way they do.

Twenty percent of the student's grade comes from each of two take-home exams. Another twenty percent comes from the book analysis due on April 3, and thirty percent comes from the term paper. The paper, which is expected to use sources beyond the text and to be an original product for this class only, may be on any topic the instructor approves. The paper should be in the range of 10-12 pages. All work for the course should be typed double-space. Ten percent of the grade comes from class participation and general conscientiousness, including getting work in on time.

The instructor wants the written work for the course to meet advanced collegiate standards of writing and will lower the grade of any that does not. The usual plagiarism warnings and penalties apply. In addition, the instructor expects students to attend all classes, do all the reading for them and be prepared to discuss it. The class will be relatively small, so any lack of student preparation will quickly become clear and affect the student's grade.

Schedule

January 23 Introduction

January 30 Early America: Steinberg, Preface, Prologue and Chapters 1-4

February 6 Expanding Southern and Western America: Steinberg, Chapters 5-8; first take-home exam distributed

February 13 Exam due in instructor's office at class time

February 20 Grasping the enviroprice: Steinberg, Chapters 9-11

February 27 Consumption, uneasiness and the emergence of modern-day environmentalism: Steinberg, Chapters 12-16 and Conclusion; second take-home exam distributed

March 6 Exam due in instructor's office at class time

- March 13 Spring vacation
- March 20 Environmental ambivalence in California and elsewhere: Didion, entire book
- March 27 The military environmental past and possible future: Vanderbilt, entire book
- April 3 Analysis of Didion and/or Vanderbilt due in instructor's office at class time
- April 10 Two-page description of term paper due in instructor's office
- April 17 Individual meetings on paper descriptions in instructor's office
- April 24 To be announced
- May 1 To be announced
- May 5 Term papers due in instructor's office at noon

A note on sources

There is no lack of sources on US environmental history. Alternative texts for this course might have been Chris Magoc's "So Glorious A Landscape: Nature and the Environment in American History and Culture" (2001); John Opie's "Nature's Nation: An Environmental History of the United States" (1998); or Louis Warren's "American Environmental History" (2003). There are interesting envirohistories of Chicago (by William Cronon), Las Vegas (Hal Rothman), Los Angeles (Mike Davis), Pittsburgh (Joel Tarr) and Portland, Oregon (Carl Abbott), among many other cities. Regional and state envirohistories are sometimes available—for instance, Donald Worster's "Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s" (1979, new edition in 2004) and Carolyn Merchant's edited collection, "Green Versus Gold: Sources in California's Environmental History" (1998). There are what amount to envirohistories of the suburb—for instance, Dolores Hayden's "Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820-2000" (2003) and Adam Rome's "The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism" (2001).

Specialized encyclopedias are often good places to start research. (One must always go further.) Over the last decade such encyclopedias have appeared on the Midwest, the Northeast, the West, the South, Cleveland, Los Angeles and New York City. Also useful are Carolyn Merchant's "Columbia Guide to American Environmental History" (2002) and Shepard Krech III, J.R. McNeill, and Carolyn Merchant's "Encyclopedia of World Environmental History" (2003).

All states, most large cities, many regions and some counties and neighborhoods have been the subjects of serious historical investigation, although not always from an environmental perspective. Visit their websites or the Rutgers library for more information. A fascinating site on the American conservation movement from about 1850 to 1920, maintained by the American Memory project of the Library of Congress, is memory.loc.gov/ammem/amrvhtml/conshome. The National Park Service has a fine historical site, cr.nps.gov/history. The Geological Survey has a site on the Land Use History of North America at biology.usgs.gov/luhna. A good environmental history website is eh-resources.org. Do not overlook the publications and websites of state, city, county and neighborhood historical societies.

There are large literatures on specific issues of envirohistory such as ecological restoration, ethical/religious

perspectives, environmental justice, the environmental sides of science and engineering, the federal public lands, gender experiences, Native, African and Hispanic American concerns and other ethnic ones, natural resource economics, particular animals, plants and industries, population pressure, and urban and suburban development. Environmental figures have been subjects of recent studies: for starters, Rachel Carson, Bernard DeVoto, Lois Gibbs, Alice Hamilton, John Muir, John Wesley Powell, Wallace Stegner, Frederick Jackson Turner, and the instructor and his wife. There is also a vast literature on the envirohistory of cherished places: the Everglades, Central Park, the Mississippi River, the New Jersey Pinelands, the California coast, numerous small towns, and on and on. Two good sources on the global environmental effects of American domestic and foreign policy are J.R. McNeill, "Something New under the Sun: An Environmental History of the Twentieth-Century World" (2001) and, more quirkily, Bret Wallach, "Understanding the Cultural Landscape" (2005).

Any number of specialized periodicals can be useful. Look, for instance, at [Environmental History](#), the [American Historical Review](#), [Annals of the Association of American Geographers](#), [Journal of American History](#), [Journal of the American Planning Association](#), [Journal of Urban Affairs](#), [Journal of Urban History](#), [Natural Resources Journal](#), [Planning](#) and [Urban Affairs Review](#), plus regional periodicals (such as [High Country News](#) for the West) or disciplinary ones (such as those on air pollution, forestry, hazardous waste, housing, farming, mining or wilderness). Many of these periodicals are partly or wholly on the Web, as are many newspapers from around the country. A fascinating new website is [scholar.google](#).

No American Studies course should ignore artistic contributions to environmental history. For example, Robert Frost, Winslow Homer, Sarah Orne Jewett, Edwin Arlington Robinson, Edith Wharton and Thornton Wilder are wonderful sources on turn-of-the-twentieth-century northern New England. "Giants in the Earth," "My Antonia," "Little House on the Prairie," "The Last Picture Show" and "Dances With Wolves," both as novels and as movies, are invaluable for understanding the Great Plains. The photographer Camilo Jose Vergara may be the best interpreter of the contemporary American city. Find your own favorite artists. Use your imagination to find additional sources and to participate otherwise in this course.