

American Studies Department, School of Arts and Sciences; Planning and Public Policy Program, Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy; and Public Policy Program, Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, all Rutgers University

Making American Landscapes, 01:050:244:01, 10:762:244 and 10:833:244, Spring 2013, 3 credits

Monday, 12:35-3:35, Ruth Adams Building, Room 018, Douglass Campus

Taught by Frank Popper, Civic Square Building, Room 356, College Avenue Campus, 848-732-2790, fpopper@rci.rutgers.edu and fpopper@princeton.edu. Instructor's website is policy.rutgers.edu/faculty/popper, where more copies of this syllabus are available.

Office hours: Tuesday morning, before or after class, or by appointment.

Readings: Joan Didion, "Where I Was From" (2003, ISBN 0: 679752862), Alan Ehrenhalt, Adam Rome, "The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism" (2001, ISBN 13: 9780521804905 and Ted Steinberg, "Down to Earth: Nature's Role in American History" (second/third editions, 2009/2012, ISBN 13: 9780195331820). All are in paperback at the Rutgers/Barnes & Noble Bookstore. There may be other, shorter readings as needed.

The goal of the course is to provide an advanced-undergraduate understanding of the diverse connections between America's national development and land environment.

Taking an ecological approach, the course examines how the United States originated, then expanded to cover a continental land mass, and in what ways the expansion changed the nation. It explores how, why and with what results major parts of the U.S. economy—for instance, farming, industry, energy, services and government—have grown or in some cases shrunk. It examines how and with what consequences the U.S. has incorporated different ethnic and racial groups. It looks at how, why and with what results it has conducted its foreign policy and globalized. It shows why its landscapes look and have looked as they do.

Thirty percent of your grade comes from a February take-home exam, 30% from an April analytic comparison of the Didion, Rome and Steinberg books, and 30% from an April-May term paper. The paper, which I expect to use sources beyond the assigned readings, may be on any topic that you choose and I approve. You will find plenty of material from which to choose topics or approaches. I want you to use your imagination to develop adventuresome analytic (not solely descriptive) subjects and treatments. Your paper should be in the range of 10-12 pages, not counting notes, references and graphics. All your written work should be typed double-spaced. Ten percent of your grade comes from class participation and conscientiousness, including getting work in on time.

I want the written work for the course to reach mid-collegiate standards of writing and will lower the grade of any that does not. I expect you to attend all classes, do all the reading for

them carefully and be prepared to discuss it. The class is relatively small and conversational, so the depth of your preparation will quickly become clear and affect your grade. A warning: I rarely recap the day's reading. If I do, the recap is short. You should be prepared for frequent unpredictable jumps and digressions in class discussion. They all have a point somewhere. The best way to prepare for them is to know the reading.

To help class communications I've formed a closed Facebook group, "Making American Landscapes, Spring 2014, Popper," which you should join. Go to the site, ask me to let you in and I will. If you have a reason not to join, perhaps because you are uncomfortable with Facebook, please let me know, and we'll make other arrangements.

Wikipedia, other encyclopedias and dictionaries, on-line or off-, are good places to begin research and terrible ones to end it. Use them as starting points, but please don't cite them. Doing so makes your work look bad and tempts me to lower your grade.

I expect you to attend all classes. If you must miss a class, please get in touch with me directly.

I also expect the exams and term paper to be original products written for this course only. You must know, understand and live up to Rutgers' standards of academic integrity explained at academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/policy-on-academic-integrity. See also plagiarism.org. If you have questions about these standards, please ask me. Rules of thumb: if you think you may be violating them, you probably are. To avoid plagiarism, do original work.

Schedule

- January 27 Introduction.
- February 3 Early America: Steinberg, Preface, Prologue and Chapters 1-4. Get the map on p. 5 straight in your mind, including the small print.
- February 10 Expanding Western and Southern America: Steinberg, Chapters 5-8.
- February 17 Grasping the enviropriice: Steinberg, Chapters 9-11.
- February 24 Consumption, uneasiness and the emergence of modern-day environmentalism: Steinberg, Chapters 12-16. Take-home exam handed out.
- March 3 Exam due at class, which will discuss the approaches you took to it.
- March 10 Mainstream environmentalism: Rome, Preface-Chapter 4.
- March 17 No class: spring vacation.

- March 25 Mainstream environmentalism 2: Rome, Chapters 5-7 and Conclusion.
- March 31 California and another environmentalism: Didion, pp. 3-114.
- April 7 California and another environmentalism 2: Didion, pp. 115-226.
- April 14 Five-page analytic comparison of Didion, Ehrenhalt and Steinberg due at class, which will discuss the approaches you took to it.
- April 21 Two-page description of term paper due at class, which will discuss the approaches you took to it.
- April 28 No class: individual meetings on paper proposals in instructor's office.
- May 5 To be announced.
- May 7 Term paper due in instructor's office at noon.

A note on sources

Sources on U.S. land and environmental history abound. Other texts for this course could have been (or actually have been) Michael Conzen (ed.), "The Making of the American Landscape" (2010, second edition), Mark Fiege, "The Republic of Nature" (2012), Richard Kluger, "Seizing Destiny: How America Grew from Sea to Shining Sea" (2007), Bill McKibben (ed.), "American Earth: Environmental Writing Since Thoreau" (2008), Anne Mackin, "Americans and Their Land: A House Built on Abundance" (2006), Daniel Mathews and James Jackson, "America from the Air: A Guide to the Landscape Along Your Route" (2007), Chris Magoc, "So Glorious A Landscape: Nature and the Environment in American History and Culture" (1998), Donald Meinig's four-book series, "The Shaping of America: A Geographic Perspective on 500 Years of History" (1986, 1992, 1995 and 2004), Carolyn Merchant, "American Environmental History: An Introduction" (2007), John Opie, "Nature's Nation: An Environmental History of the United States" (1998), John Stilgoe, "Landscape and Images" (2005), Louis Warren, "American Environmental History" (2003) or Colin Woodard, "American Nations: A History of the Eleven Rival Regional Cultures of North America" (2012).

You can find interesting envirohistories of almost every major American city. Local newspapers or blogs, on cities or other places and issues, are sometimes vividly invaluable but also can be a waste of time. If you have questions about them, ask me. Regional and state envirohistories are often available—for instance, Donald Worster, "Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s" (second edition, 2004) and Carolyn Merchant (ed.), "Green Versus Gold: Sources in California's Environmental History" (1998).

An emerging genre consists of general envirohistories of suburbs such as Dolores Hayden, "Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820-2000" (2003), Kevin Kruse and Thomas Sugrue (eds.), "The New Suburban History" (2006). Then there are cultural

histories of the suburbs such as Zachary Falck, “Weeds: An Environmental History of Metropolitan America” (2011), Paul Robbins, “Lawn People: How Grasses, Weeds, and Chemicals Make Us Who We Are” (2007) and Witold Rybczynski, “Last Harvest: How a Cornfield Became New Daleville: Real Estate Development in America from George Washington to the Builders of the Twenty-First Century, and Why We Live in Houses Anyway” (2007, 2009), Christopher Sellers, “Crabgrass Crucible: Suburban Nature and the Rise of American Environmentalism in Twentieth-Century America” (2012), Ted Steinberg, “American Green: The Obsessive Quest for the Perfect Lawn” (2006) and more generally, Ellen Stroud, “Nature Next Door: Cities and Trees in the American Northeast” (2012).

All states, nearly all large cities, many regions and some counties and neighborhoods have been the subjects of serious envirohistorical investigation. The Library of Congress’ American Memory project has a fascinating site on the American conservation movement from about 1850 to 1920. The National Park Service has a fine historical site, and the Geological Survey has one on the land use history of North America. A good general envirohistory site is eh-resources.org. Do not overlook the publications and websites of state, city, county and neighborhood historical societies.

You will find large literatures on specific issues of envirohistory such as ecological restoration, energy practices, 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, urban, suburban or extractive development, and war or defense perspectives. Environmental figures have been subjects of recent studies: for starters, Rachel Carson, Bernard DeVoto, Marjorie Stoneman Douglas, Lois Gibbs, Alice Hamilton, Jane Jacobs, Dorothea Lange, Aldo Leopold, Robert Moses, John Muir, Lewis Mumford, Frederick Law Olmsted, Gifford Pinchot, John Wesley Powell, Franklin and Theodore Roosevelt (specifically in their environmental work), Wallace Stegner and Frederick Jackson Turner. I and my wife, Deborah Popper, are the subjects of Anne Matthews’ “Where the Buffalo Roam: The Storm over the Revolutionary Plan to Restore America’s Great Plains” (second edition, 2002). Its first edition was one of four finalists for the 1993 Pulitzer Prize for general nonfiction.

The nation has a vast environmental literature on cherished places: the Everglades, the Hudson River, Central Park, the Mississippi River, the New Jersey Pinelands, the California coast, numerous small towns, Chicago’s Millennium Park, Manhattan’s Grand Central Station and the High Line, the Bronx’s Grand Concourse, the Washington Metro subway system, California’s Sierra Nevada Mountains and onward. 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), I.G. Simmons “Global Environmental History” (2008) and, more quirkily, Bret Wallach, “Understanding the Cultural Landscape” (2005). In an important global class of their own are Jared Diamond’s “Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies” (1997) and “Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed” (2005).

Journalists have much to offer. Consider the examples of John Barry (the Mississippi River), Rick Bass (the American West), David Cohn (pre-World War II Mississippi), Dayton Duncan (the American West), Tim Egan (the American West), Ian Frazier (Great Plains and Indian life), Tom Horton (the Chesapeake Bay), Charles Little (too much to mention), Barry Lopez (too much to mention), Anne Matthews (the Great Plains and New York City wildlife), John Madson (the rural Midwest), Bill McKibben (global warming), John McPhee (the New Jersey Pinelands and too much else to mention), James Michener (many place-based novels that are also journalism), Frederick Law Olmsted (the pre-Civil War South), Tim Palmer (landscapes, especially rivers), Michael Pollan (food and farming), Stephen Pyne (fire and the American West), David Quammen (wildlife and envirosience), Erik Reece (Appalachia), Rebecca Solnit (California, Detroit and other fought-over landscapes), Robert Sullivan (the New Jersey Meadowlands and rats) and William Vollmann (California migrant-labor farming).

Specialized publications can be useful. Look, for instance, at Environmental History, 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, Journal of the West, Pacific Historical Quarterly or Western Historical Quarterly for the West) or disciplinary ones (such as those on air pollution, farming, forestry, hazardous waste, housing, mining, natural resources or wilderness).

Every American Studies course should embrace artists and writers. For instance, 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. “Dances With Wolves,” “Giant,” “Giants in the Earth,” “In Cold Blood,” “The Last Picture Show,” “Little House on the Prairie” and “My Antonia,” both as books and as movies, are valuable for understanding the Great Plains, as are the photographic collections of Terry Evans and David Plowden.

The photographer and writer Camilo Jose Vergara may be the best interpreter of today’s American city, as Jacob Riis was a century ago. The Los Angeles-based Center for Land Use Interpretation, which despite its name is not academic, does excellent visual and prose work on a range of American places. A fine photographic study of Montana over most of the last century is William Wyckoff’s “On the Road Again” (2006), which has many counterparts for other states.

Many regionalist writers have a clear land/environment perspective. Ralph Ellison, William Faulkner, Barry Hannah, Willie Morris, Flannery O’Connor, Alice Walker, Robert Penn Warren, Eudora Welty and Richard Wright put indelible marks on the South. John Cheever, Richard Ford, Richard Russo, Isaac Bashevis Singer and John Updike offer keys to understanding the modern Northeast and New England. Music like the Beach Boys, the blues, Bruce Springsteen or zydeco can be revealing. Find your own favorite artists. Use your imagination to uncover more sources and otherwise participate in the course.

Often the best source to find out fast about an American place is, oddly, the biennial “Almanac of American Politics.” Regional encyclopedias can be good places to start research, and in the last few years fine ones have appeared on, among other places, the Great Plains, the

Midwest, the Northeast, the South, the West, New Jersey, New York State, Cleveland, Los Angeles and New York City. Many states have the equivalent of Maxine Lurie, Peter Wacker and Michael Siegel (eds.), "Mapping New Jersey: An Evolving Landscape" (2009) and Maxine Lurie and Richard Veit (eds.), "New Jersey: A History of the Garden State" (2012).

If you need help connecting the course material with overall American history, see Carolyn Merchant (ed.), "The Columbia Guide to American Environmental History" (2002), Carolyn Merchant (ed.), "American Environmental History: An Introduction" (2007), Shepard Krech III, J.R. McNeill and Carolyn Merchant (eds.), "Encyclopedia of World Environmental History" (2003) and Douglas Sackman (ed.), "A Companion to American Environmental History" (2012).