

## Environmental Studies 317: Perspectives on American Environmental History

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Class Hours: Tuesday 1:15-4:05 pm

Office Hours: Monday 1:30-3:00 pm, Wednesday 10:00-11:15 am, and by appointment

### Course Description

How have human activities such as migration, colonization, land and resource use depended upon and impacted the natural world? How have different cultural perceptions of and attitudes toward environment shifted through time and helped to reshape American landscapes? We will explore examples of the history of human-environment interactions in North America from pre-colonial times through the 20th century and from different cultural perspectives. Case studies include ecological histories of Native America and Euro-America, slavery and land use, questions of wilderness vs. civilization, land ethics and conservation, and environmental racism and social justice.

### Texts and Other Materials

Class handouts and readings on Moodle

William Cronon, *Changes in the Land*

John McPhee, *Encounters with the Archdruid*

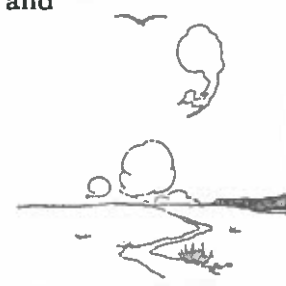
Carolyn Merchant, *American Environmental History: An Introduction*

Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (selected chapters also on Moodle)

"Learning to Do Historical Research: A Primer for Environmental Historians and Others"

(<http://www.williamcronon.net/researching/index.htm>)

Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (recommended)



### Course Requirements and Policy

For this interdisciplinary seminar to work well, everyone must read each week's selections carefully and come to class prepared to discuss the issues and raise questions about the content. Regular class attendance and active, prepared participation are essential and required! All students will be responsible for leading class discussions and giving oral presentations occasionally. Activities will also include debates, small group discussions and projects, and peer review of the research paper. Reading and writing are major components of the course. In addition to weekly commentaries, three short papers (3-7 pages each) and one longer research paper (12-15 text pages) *must be submitted* on the days indicated.

Evaluations will be determined in the following manner:

weekly reading (& audio/video) commentaries	20%
three short essays/papers (3-7 pages)	10% each
class attendance & participation (including oral presentations, debates, discussions, and peer review)	30%
research paper (12-15 pages of text)	20%

## Classroom Expectations

Class meetings will consist mostly of dialogue and discussion. We will on occasion read and talk about difficult, controversial matters that may elicit strong opinions and feelings. How to listen carefully and respect the positions of others is central to our work all semester, whether working in smaller groups or in the whole class. Laptops used for note-taking, for reading the materials discussed, and for in-class research can be part of that respectful participation. Texting/e-mail/Facebook/ Twitter/etc. are distracting and rude, undermining our collective endeavor. Please don't.

## Reading (& Audio/Video) Commentaries

Please post on Moodle, by 11 am before each class in question, a two- to four-paragraph response to the week's readings and/or AV material. Please bring a copy to class, too, for your own use. Your commentaries should include (but are not limited to) the following elements: 1) responses to questions or prompts on the reading guide; 2) a summary of key points of the readings/AV material and thoughts on how they relate to each other; 3) a reflection on how the readings (or videos/audio) explore and narrate the past; and 4) at least one insight, question, or reaction that you had. Please note that late commentaries will not be accepted after the class in question, except under the most unusual of circumstances and with prior notice and my approval. Commentaries are due no later than 11 am on the day we consider the topic in class.

## Late Essays/Papers

Late papers will receive a half grade reduction for each 24-hour period after the due day (i.e., an A paper receives an A- if turned in a day late, a B+ if turned in two days late, etc.). No paper extensions will be granted except in the most unusual of circumstances and with significant advance notice.

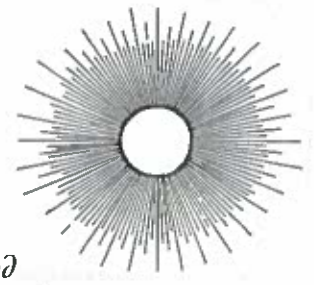
## Class Field Trip – Historic Deerfield (Tuesday, October 6th)

Deerfield is an ideal place to consider the collision of colonial v. indigenous lifeways in New England. Barbara Mathews, Historic Deerfield's public historian, will give us a tour of this colonial village, which was first established by English colonists on Native land around 1669. The 17th-century plan of a compact settlement with broad meadows is still visible on the land and frames the village today. Our trip will be approximately four hours in total, including driving time. We can leave MHC either around noon or return to campus after 4:30 pm in order to accommodate your schedules as best possible. We will plan in class.

## Schedule of Topics

9/15 & 9/22    **Introduction - Understanding an Environmental Past**  
**Defining Environmental History - What Is It? Why Do It?**

Readings and Audio Assignment (read & listen carefully for 9/22) -  
Carolyn Merchant, *American Environmental History: An Introduction*  
(Introduction)



(The following are pdfs on Moodle)

William Cronon, "Why the past matters"

Barry Lopez, "Landscape and narrative" in *Crossing Open Ground*

C. Merchant, "What is environmental history?" in *Major Problems in American Environmental History*

Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "The power in the story" in *Silencing the Past*

Gordon Whitney, "Reconstructing the past" in *From Coastal Wilderness to Fruited Plain* (Chp. 2)

"Little War on the Prairie" – from *This American Life* (# 479, on the 1862 Dakota "war" in Minnesota)

<http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/479/little-war-on-the-prairie>

Please Review Regularly for Background on Landscapes -

Stephen Trimble, "Recognizing Nature's bequest" (pdf on Moodle)

"Landform map of U.S." by Irwin Raisz

Begin "Learning to Do Historical Research: A Primer for Environmental Historians and Others" (<http://www.williamcronon.net/researching/index.htm>)

\*Response paper/essay #1 due on 9/22 in class

9/29

### Reading the Land: Native America on the Eve of Contact and Beyond

Readings, including selections from the following texts -

Carolyn Merchant, *American Environmental History: An Introduction* (Chp. 1)

(All below are pdfs on Moodle)

R. Berkhofer, Jr., *The White Man's Indian*

Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, "Introduction: This land" & "Culture of conquest" (Chp. 2) in *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*

Peter Iverson, "Taking care of earth and sky" in A. Josephy, ed., *America in 1492*

Richard White and William Cronon, "Ecological change and Indian-white relations" (read through p. 426)

Gordon Whitney, "Preservers of the ecological balance wheel" (Chp. 5) in *From Coastal Wilderness to Fruited Plain*

Michael Witgen, "Discovery" & "Place and belonging in Native North America" (Chp. 1) in *An Infinity of Nations*

Howard Zinn, "Columbus, the Indians, and human progress" (Chp. 1) in *A People's History of the United States*

Video - "After the Mayflower" from *We Shall Remain* (please watch on Moodle)

Continue "Learning to Do Historical Research: A Primer for Environmental Historians and Others" (<http://www.williamcronon.net/researching/index.htm>)

## Environmental History through the 19th Century - Attitudes and Actions on a Changing Land

10/6 **Colonial Transformations in New England**  
Trip to Historic Deerfield and tour by Barbara Mathew

### Readings -

William Cronon, *Changes in the Land* (Parts I and II)

Margaret (Marge) Bruchac, "Earthshapers and placemakers: Algonkian Indian stories and the landscape"

Marge Bruchac, "Native land use and settlements in the northeastern woodlands"

<http://1704.deerfield.history.museum/popups/background.do?shortName=expNLand>

Chauk deed

<http://1704.deerfield.history.museum/popups/artifacts.do?shortName=chaukdeed>

Begin Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (Chps. 1-2)

\*Response paper/essay #2 due by Friday 10/9

10/11-10/13 **Fall Break!**

10/20 & 10/27 **Agriculture and the Antebellum South**  
**Slavery by Another Name**

### Readings, including selections from the following texts -

Dianne Glave and Mark Stoll, eds., *"To Love the Wind and Rain:" African Americans and Environmental History* (essay by Mart Stewart on slavery)

Carolyn Merchant, *American Environmental History: An Introduction* (Chps. 2-3)

C. Merchant, Chps. 4 and 7 on tobacco, rice, and cotton in the South, in *Major Problems in American Environmental History*

Toni Morrison, "The site of memory" in *Inventing the Truth*

Ted Steinberg, "King climate in Dixie" (Chp. 5) in *Down to Earth: Nature's Role in American History*

Norman Yetman, ed., *Voices from Slavery*

### Supplemental Handouts

"A Few Notes on Slavery in the North"

"A Few Points to Remember from Readings on Slavery & the South"

\*Place research paper description, working title, and preliminary references due on 10/20

Excerpts of videos -



"Traces of the Trade: A Story from the Deep North" ([www.tracesofthetrade.org/](http://www.tracesofthetrade.org/))  
"Slavery By Another Name"

Continue "Learning to Do Historical Research: A Primer for Environmental Historians and Others" (<http://www.williamcronon.net/researching/index.htm>)

10/27 & 11/3 ***Terra Incognita: Euro-American Expansion, Frontier Surveys & Visions***  
**The Line Between: A Border Born of Conquest**

Readings, including selections from the following texts -

C. Conway, ed., *The U.S.-Mexican War: A Binational Reader*

William Goetzmann, "Time and the heroic age of geological exploration" in  
*New Lands, New Men*

Carolyn Merchant, *American Environmental History: An Introduction* (Chp. 5 to  
p. 96 top)

Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (Chps. 3-4)

Lillian Schlissel, ed., *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey*

Howard Zinn, "We Take Nothing by Conquest, Thank God" in *A People's  
History of the United States* (Chp. 8) (condensed version on Moodle)

Supplemental Handouts

"Confronting *Terra Incognita*"

"Trails West" map and "Landform map of U.S."

Changing Mexican boundaries

Excerpts of films or videos -

"The West" or "In Search of the Oregon Trail"

"The U.S.-Mexican War (1846-1848)"

Just for fun if interested: "Rafting through the Grand Canyon"

**Imagining Nature in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries**

11/10 **Dispossessing "Wilderness": "Indian" Removals**

Readings, including selections from the following texts -

William Cronon, "The trouble with wilderness"

Carolyn Merchant, *American Environmental History: An Introduction* (Chp. 8 to  
p. 168)

C. Merchant, "Shades of darkness"

Mark Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness*

Luther Standing Bear, *Land of the Spotted Eagle*

Richard White and William Cronon, "Ecological change and Indian-white  
relations"

Other class hand-outs



Video - "In the Light of Reverence"

11/17 **Conservation, Preservation, and "Wilderness" at the Turn of the Century**

Readings, including selections from the following texts -

Mary Austin, *The Land of Little Rain*

Karl Jacoby, *Crimes against Nature* (Introduction & Epilogue)

Carolyn Merchant, *American Environmental History: An Introduction* (Chp. 7 to p. 153)

Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (Chps. 7-10)

Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*

Other class hand-outs, including samples of writings by Rebecca Harding

Davis, John Muir, George Perkins Marsh, Gifford Pinchot, John Wesley

Powell, Henry David Thoreau

Video - "The Wilderness Idea: John Muir, Gifford Pinchot, and the First Great Battle for Wilderness"

**A Different Look at the Land in the Twentieth Century**

11/24 **Environmental Transformation, Limits and the Emergence of Ecology**

Readings -

William Cronon, "A place for stories: Nature, history, and narrative"

Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (Chp. 11)

Excerpts from Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*

Carolyn Merchant, *American Environmental History: An Introduction* (Chp. 5 p. 100-109)

Films and videos -

"The Plow that Broke the Plains"

"Wild by Law: Aldo Leopold, Bob Marshall, Howard Zahniser, and the Redefinition of American Progress"

"The Dust Bowl"

12/1 **Wilderness and Conservation in Mid to Late 20th Century  
Nature Commodified, and the People?**

Readings -

John McPhee, *Encounters with the Archdruid*

Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (Chps. 12-13)

\* Short response paper/essay #3 due on 12/1

12/8 **Toxic Environments & Endangered Communities Are Nothing New**

Readings, including selections from the following texts -

Robert Bullard and others, *Toxic Wastes and Race at Twenty*

Valerie Kuletz, *Tainted Desert*

News articles that you have found!

Supplemental Handouts

"Some Historical Layers to Consider re: Inequities & "Wealth & Race Gap"

If interested fyi: Carolyn Merchant, *American Environmental History: An Introduction* (Chp. 10)

\*Complete draft of Place research paper due by 12/8 for peer review

12/15 **Informal Presentations of Seminar Projects**  
**Your Perspectives: How Is the Past in the Present?**

\*Completed Place research paper due on 12/22

Additional Course Guidelines

**Accommodations for Students with Special Needs**

You should register with AccessAbility Services, located in Wilder Hall B4

([www.mtholyoke.edu/accessability/for\\_students](http://www.mtholyoke.edu/accessability/for_students) and 413-538-2634)

Staff in the office will provide you the appropriate letter, which you should give to me.

**Events Beyond Class Hours**

Given the richness of the five college area, there will likely be talks, exhibitions, public readings, conversation, etc. that pertain to the topics covered or to the overall themes of the course. I will announce any events I learn of and I ask that you do the same. If you attend any event and want to write a response commentary, I would welcome it for extra credit, to supplement your other coursework.

## **\*\*A Few Important Events Beyond Class Hours\*\***

- LITS is hosting a traveling exhibit of "[Dust, Drought and Dreams Gone Dry](#)" in the Information Commons from September 9-October 23, 2015. The exhibition was developed by the American Library Association (ALA) in collaboration with the libraries of Oklahoma State University and Mount Holyoke College. MHC has contributed content to the national exhibit from our [Caroline Boa Henderson collection](#), in Archives and Special Collections. Henderson, MHC class of 1901, farmed a land claim in the Oklahoma Panhandle from 1907 until 1966. Her first-hand accounts of the Dust Bowl years are preserved in the archives through the letters that she wrote to friends and family members, along with other writings that she published in *Practical Farmer* and *The Atlantic Monthly*. Also on display is primary source material from the Henderson Collection in an accompanying exhibit "[Love for the Earth, Loyalty to the Land](#)." LITS will host a film screening of Ken Burns's PBS documentary and lectures by Al Werner, MHC Professor of Geology, and Hannah Holleman, Amherst Professor of Sociology. See below and the [Schedule of Events](#) for details and please go by LITS to see the exhibits! The ALA exhibition and tour are made possible by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (Exploring the Human Endeavor).

**September 15th at 6 pm:** Film screening of part one of the PBS documentary *The Dust Bowl* by Ken Burns, with framing by Hannah Holleman in the Stimson Room of Williston Library.

**September 17th at 6 pm:** Film screening of part two of the PBS documentary *The Dust Bowl* by Ken Burns in the Stimson Room of Williston Library.

**September 22nd at 7 pm:** Hannah Holleman, professor at Amherst College, presents "Dust to Dust: Lessons for Today from the First Global Ecological Crises" in the Stimson Room of Williston Library. Prof. Holleman's talk will discuss social factors and historical developments contributing to the Dust Bowl on the U.S. Southern Plains, while illustrating that this calamity was one dramatic regional manifestation of an international crisis of soil erosion by the 1930s.

**October 6th at 7 pm:** Alan Werner presents "Good to the Last Drop: Climate Change, Droughts, and Water Availability" in the Stimson Room, Williston Library. Prof. Werner's talk will focus on the science behind the Dust Bowl, climate change and global water issues.

**October 22nd at 4:30 pm:** Leslie Fields, head of Archives and Special Collections at MHC, presents "More Than Words: Caroline Henderson and the Art of Letter Writing" in the Archives and Special Collections on the bottom floor of Dwight. Caroline Boa Henderson, Class of 1901, farmed a land claim and raised a daughter in the Oklahoma Panhandle throughout the Dust Bowl years. Henderson was also an avid writer recounting both her struggles and perseverance.

### **\* 17th Annual North Quabbin Garlic and Arts Festival, Sept 26th and 27th, 2015**

Celebrate sweet [and stinkin'] sixteen – that's years of the North Quabbin Garlic and Arts Festival, September 27 and 28 in Orange Massachusetts. There's something for everyone at this fabulous family destination, held on a beautiful historic farm amidst autumn foliage. <http://garlicandarts.org/>



- **Naomi Klein**, award-winning journalist, syndicated columnist, and author of the international bestsellers *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* and *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, will give the 2015 Miller Worley Environmental Leadership Lecture on **Tuesday, September 29th, 7:30 p.m.**, Chapin Auditorium, Mary Woolley Hall
  
- **"Forty Years After: Chinua Achebe and Africa in the Global Imagination,"** Oct. 14th-15th, UMass. Scholarly conference on this pioneer author with ties to UMass; see John for details.
  
- The 2015 **Carol Hoffmann Collins Global Scholar-in-Residence** at Mount Holyoke College is **Gita Sen**, founder of DAWN (Development Alternatives for Women for a New Era) and international expert on gender equality and women's human rights. She will give a keynote lecture on **Tuesday, October 20th** (Gamble Auditorium, 7 pm) "Women's Human Rights: Promises and Pitfalls of a Globalized World." <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/global/global-scholars/gita-sen>
  
- **Marion Copeland**, "Impact of Natural History on Renaissance Art and Literature," Oct. 21st, 4 pm, UMass Renaissance Center
  
- **Dr. Coleen Fox**, Dartmouth College will deliver a lecture, "'You Kill the Dam, You are Killing a Part of Me:' The Environmental Politics of Dam Removal in New England," on **Wednesday, November 4th, 4:30 pm**, Dwight 101.
  
- Each semester **The Poetry Center** at Smith College brings in several outstanding poets. Here is this fall's lineup:
  - Thomas Lux**, Tuesday, September 22nd, 7:30 pm, Weinstein Auditorium, Wright Hall
  - Amy Uyematsu**, Thursday, October 15th, 7:30 pm, Neilson Browsing Room
  - Arda Collins**, Tuesday, October 27th, 7:30 pm, Paradise Room, Conference Center
  - Juan Felipe Herrera**, Tuesday, December 1st, 7:30 pm, Weinstein Auditorium, Wright Hall
 Go to <http://www.smith.edu/poetrycenter/wp/> & <http://www.smith.edu/poetrycenter/wp/season.pdf> for details.

