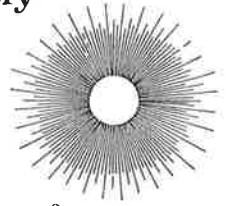


Mount Holyoke College, Fall 2019

## Environmental Studies 317: Perspectives on American Environmental History



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Class Hours: Thursday 1:30 - 4:20 pm

Office Hours: Mondays 1:30 - 2:30 pm, Wednesdays 10:30 am - 12:30 pm, most Thursdays after class, & by appointment (arranged by e-mail or in person)

### Course Description

How have human activities such as migration, colonization, land and resource use depended on 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.

### Learning Goals

The seminar takes interdisciplinary approaches to the study of environmental history and historical landscapes. As such, we will draw from the work of historians, geographers, historical ecologists, geologists, anthropologists, and practitioners of other fields. Over the semester you will gain a broader sense of human-environment relationships over time. You will reflect on some of the inconvenient truths as well as iconic narratives of the nation’s environmental past. You will also add to your proficiency in historical research methods and analytic writing. And, finally, you will understand more clearly how this “history” is far from past and how it touches you.

### Text and Other Materials

Class handouts and readings on Moodle

Mark Fiege, *The Republic of Nature: An Environmental History of the United States*

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

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

Most readings are pdfs and Word files on the Moodle course site. The primary text is available for purchase at the Odyssey Bookshop, and it is also on reserve as an e-book and at the library. Other multimedia will be made available on the Moodle site.

### Course Requirements

For this 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. Class attendance each week and active, informed 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, two short essays (4-7 pages each) and one longer research paper (12 or more text pages) *must be submitted* on the due dates indicated.

**Evaluations** will be determined in the following manner:

Class attendance each week & informed participation (including weekly discussions, oral presentations, and debates)	25%
Weekly reading (& audio/video) commentaries	25%
Two short essays (4 - 7 pages each)	10% each
Research paper (at least 12 pages of text)	20%
Peer review of colleague's draft paper	10%

### **Expectations and Policies**

Class meetings will consist mostly of dialogue and discussion based on the readings and any audio-video materials. It is important for us to grapple with histories that have shaped the lives of people past to present. We will at times read and talk about difficult, controversial matters that may elicit strong opinions and feelings. Listening carefully and respecting the perspectives of others are central to our work all semester, whether in the whole seminar or in smaller groups. Themes of justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion will be prominent in the topics we consider as well as in how we come together to consider them.

Laptops used for note-taking, for reading the texts discussed, and for occasional in-class research can be part of respectful participation. But texting, e-mailing, tweeting, checking other social media, or doing other web-surfing are distracting and rude, undermining our collective endeavor. Please don't. And please turn your cell phones off in class.

Anyone in need of official accessibility accommodations has the right to have them met and kept confidential. Please contact and register with AccessAbility Services (<https://www.mtholyoke.edu/accessibility>, 413-538-2634) as soon as possible. If you are eligible, staff in the office will provide you with the appropriate letter (outlining necessary accommodations) to give to your teachers early in the semester. If you have any questions, please feel welcome to speak with me.

Written assignments should be typed in 12-point font, double-spaced, with one-inch margins. Please include your name and page numbers.

### **Reading (& Audio/Video) Commentaries**

Please post on Moodle, by 1 pm before each class in question, a two- to three-page response to the week's readings and/or AV material. Please have a copy in class, too, for your own use. Your commentaries should include (but need not be limited to) the following elements: 1) responses to questions or prompts on the week's reading guide; 2) a summary of key points of the readings/AV material and your thoughts on how they relate to each other; 3) a reflection on how the assigned materials explore and narrate the past; and 4) at least one

insight, question, or reaction that you had. Don't just condense or restate the readings. Analyze, compare, and reflect instead. Also, if you question or disagree with any of the material, that's fine! I urge you to question and to include your thoughts in the commentary.

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 1 pm on the day we consider the topic in class. They will be graded on a scale of 10 points.

### Late Essays

Please turn in a hard copy of the two essays in class on the specified due dates. Unless arrangements have been made before each date due, late essays will receive a half grade reduction for each 24-hour period after the due date (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.

### Policy on Sources and Citations

In your writing, you must cite all sources fully—whether you quote word-for-word, paraphrase, or rely more generally on ideas from another source or use material we have all read. This responsibility extends to both printed and online sources. There are many acceptable citation formats: at a minimum, a citation should include the author, title of the work, and place and date of publication. My concern is not so much plagiarism as the need to take part in a mature discourse about ideas, acknowledging sources that shape your thoughts and contributing to that ongoing conversation. It is, I think, an intellectual question, beyond a concern with potential dishonesty. For a detailed discussion of such matters, see <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/lits/ris/Plagiarism>. Failure to use sources appropriately is a violation of the college Honor Code and will be punished.

### Class Field Trip – Historic Deerfield (Thursday, September 19th)

Deerfield is an ideal place to consider the collision of Indigenous v. European colonial lifeways in the Northeast. Historic Deerfield staff members Barbara Mathews (Public Historian) and Claire Carlson (Education Program Coordinator) will welcome us to this colonial village, which was first established by English colonists on Pocumtuck homeland 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 before 12:30 pm or return to campus after 4:45 pm in order to accommodate your schedules as best possible. We will plan in class.

### Schedule of Topics

9/5 & 9/12    **Introduction - Understanding an Environmental Past**  
**Introducing North American Landscapes**  
**Defining Environmental History - What Is It? Why Do It?**



Reading Assignment (read carefully for 9/12) -

Mark Fiege, from *The Republic of Nature* (Foreword by William Cronon and "Land of Lincoln")

(The following are pdfs on Moodle)

William Cronon, "Why the past matters"

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

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

Audio Assignment (please listen carefully for 9/12) - "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 begin to review for background on landscapes -

Stephen Trimble, "Recognizing nature's bequest"

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



Begin "Learning to Do Historical Research: A Primer for Environmental

Historians and Others" (<http://www.williamcronon.net/researching/index.htm>)

If you want more to read, skim these supplemental chapters -

Carolyn Merchant, "What is environmental history" (Not required)

Gordon Whitney, "Reconstructing the past" in *From Coastal Wilderness to Fruited Plain* (Chp. 2) (Not required)

\*Commentary due by 1 pm on 9/12 (see explanation above). This first one can be just two pages in length.

\*Essay #1 due on 9/12 in class

9/19

**Indigenous Northeast and Colonial New England**

**Trip to Historic Deerfield** (tour by Barbara Mathews & Claire Carlson)

Readings, including selections from the following texts -

Lisa Brooks, *The Common Pot: The Recovery of Native Space in the Northeast*

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

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

Michael Witgen, "Discovery" in *An Infinity of Nations*

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

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

Review series of Native Northeast maps from Lisa Brooks's *The Common Pot*:  
<https://lbrooks.people.amherst.edu/thecommonpot/>

Continue "Learning to Do Historical Research: A Primer for Environmental

Historians and Others" (<http://www.williamcronon.net/researching/index.htm>)

\*Begin commentary for 9/26 (No commentary is due on 9/19)

9/26

**Coming into Conflict: Indigenous Northeast and Colonial New England  
Trip to Historic Deerfield and tour by Barbara Mathew**

Readings -

Margaret (Marge) Bruchac, "Revisiting Pocumtuck History in Deerfield"  
William Cronon, *Changes in the Land* (Finish Parts I and II)  
Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, "Introduction: This land" & "Culture of conquest"  
(Chp. 2) in *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*  
Mark Fiege, *The Republic of Nature* (Chp. 1 "Satan in the Land")  
Begin Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (Chps. 1-2)

If interested in more, please skim Margaret Ellen Newell "Introduction: The  
Problem of Indian Slavery in Early America" in *Brethren By Nature: New  
England Indians, Colonists, and the Origins of American Slavery* (Not required)

\*Commentary due by 6 pm on 9/26

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

10/3

**Agriculture and the Antebellum South**

Readings, including selections from the following texts -

Mark Fiege, *The Republic of Nature* (Chp. 3 "King Cotton")  
Dianne Glave and Mark Stoll, "African American environmental history: An  
introduction" in *"To Love the Wind and Rain": African Americans and  
Environmental History*  
Mart Stewart, "Slavery and the Origins of African American  
Environmentalism" in Dianne Glave and Mark Stoll, eds., *"To Love the  
Wind and Rain": African Americans and Environmental History*  
Kimberly Smith, "Strange Rendings of Nature" (Chp. 1) in *African American  
Environmental Thought*

Other supplemental handouts

Watch video - "Traces of the Trade: A Story from the Deep North" (on Moodle)

\*Commentary due by 1 pm on 10/3

10/10

**Environmental History in the Eyes of the Enslaved  
Land for Some . . . But Not for Others**

Readings from last week and selections from the following texts -  
Toni Morrison, "The site of memory" in William Zinsser, ed., *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*  
Selections from Norman Yetman, ed., *Voices from Slavery*  
Documents on Reconstruction

If you still want more to read, please review Mark Fiege, *The Republic of Nature* (Chp. 5 "The Nature of Gettysburg") (Not required)

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

**\*There is NO commentary due on 10/10**

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

Excerpts of video shown in class - "Slavery By Another Name"

10/12-10/15 **Fall Break!**



10/17 **No Class – Work on Projects**

10/24 ***Terra Incognita: Euro-American Expansion, Frontier Surveys & Visions***

Readings, including selections from the following texts -  
Excerpts from *The Journals of Lewis and Clark*  
Mark Fiege, *The Republic of Nature* (Chp. 6 "Iron Horses")  
William Goetzmann, "Time and the heroic age of geological exploration" in *New Lands, New Men*  
Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (Chps. 3-4)  
Lillian Schlissel, ed., *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey*  
G. Malcolm Lewis, "Maps, Mapmaking, and Map Use by Native North Americans," Chapter 4, Book 3, *History of Cartography* series. (This is a long piece just fyi, so please skim and focus on themes/types of maps that interest you.)

Take a look at the Lewis and Clark Expedition Maps (ca. 1803-1810):  
<http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/digitalibrary/lewis.html> and  
<http://www.edgate.com/lewisandclark/>

Supplemental Handouts

Thomas Jefferson letter on how to obtain "Indian" land (1803)  
"Confronting *Terra Incognita*"

"Trails West" map and "Landform map of U.S."  
Homestead Act documents

Excerpts of films or videos shown in class - "The West" or "In Search of the Oregon Trail"

\*Commentary due by 1 pm on 10/24

**See on your own just for fun if interested:** "Rafting through the Grand Canyon" (on Moodle)

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

#### **10/31 Dispossessing "Wilderness": "Indian" Removals**

Readings, including selections from the following texts -

William Cronon, "The trouble with wilderness"

Carolyn 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 handouts

Excerpt of video shown in class - "In the Light of Reverence"

\*Commentary due by 1 pm on 10/31

#### **11/7 Conservation, Preservation, and "Wilderness" at the Turn of the Century**

Readings, including selections from the following texts -

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

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, Mary Austin, John Muir, George Perkins Marsh, Gifford Pinchot,

John Wesley Powell, Henry David Thoreau

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

\*Commentary due by 1 pm on 11/7

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

11/14 **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*

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"

\*Commentary (the last one!) due by 1 pm on 11/14

11/21 **Toxic Environments & Endangered Communities Are Nothing New  
Your Perspectives: How Is the Past in the Present?**

Readings, including selections from the following texts -

Mark Fiege, *The Republic of Nature* (Chp. 8 "The Road to Brown v. Board")

Dorceta Taylor, *Toxic Communities: Environmental Racism, Industrial Pollution,  
and Residential Mobility*

Eileen McGurty, "From NIMBY to Civil Rights: The Origins of the  
Environmental Justice Movement" in P. Sutter and C. Manganiello, eds.,  
*Environmental History and the American South*

Pieces that you have found!

Supplemental Handouts

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

\*Essay #2 due on 11/21 in class

\*Complete draft of research paper due for peer review by date you choose

\*There are NO commentaries due on 11/21 and 12/5

11/27-12/1 **Thanksgiving Break**

12/5 **Presentations of Seminar Projects**

\*Completed research paper due no later than five pm on 12/17 in my box or in Moodle  
folder