

**HIST 427: US Environmental History**  
**Fall 2010 • Jackson Hall 107**  
**3:30 - 4:45 pm (Tuesday and Thursday)**

Professor: Dr. Daniel Kerr

Office: Jackson 206

Office Hours: Th 11:00 – 12:20 am, Tu & Th 1:30 – 3:20 pm

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**Course Description**

In the last quarter of a century a growing number of historians have developed the field of environmental history. As the field has emerged, these historians have dramatically challenged the established models of political and social history, rethought key turning points in the past, and introduced new topics that have previously been overlooked. At its core, environmental history introduces nature – plants and animals, climate and weather, soil and water – as a central aspect of its analysis. This class will examine the role nature plays in North America's history from the breakup of Pangaea to the rise of the American lawn. We will look into familiar topics – the industrial revolution, slavery, the Civil War, and consumerism – and those less well known – fences, manure, flush toilets, feed-lots, fast-food, oil and garbage. We will explore a complex series of relationships – how natural forces shape history, how humankind affects nature, and then how those ecological changes reciprocally affect human life once again.

**Objectives**

This course is designed to achieve four major objectives. Content: students will be familiar with the major events, themes, and issues in US environmental history. Chronology: student will understand the importance of change and continuity over time, including the importance of cause and effect in history. Analysis: students will understand the methods employed by historians in collecting and analyzing evidence. Synthesis: as the culmination of the critical thinking process, students will be able to produce written and oral synthesis of evidence with a thesis and conclusion based on a responsible use of that evidence.

**Requirements**

***Classroom Participation: (30%)***

1. Discussion (20%): This course is a seminar and will be structured around student led discussions. Students will be expected to come to each class having read the material assigned for the day and prepared to analyze it. In class, we will first develop a complex understanding of the author's argument, then address the implications of this argument towards our larger understanding of history and the world around us, and finally evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of this

argument. Informed participation can include summarizing core aspects of the argument, drawing attention to key passages in the text, asking for points of clarification, presenting questions and conclusions about the larger implications of the reading, and offering critiques of the author's argument. You may also choose to summarize or refocus the classroom discussion. **Informed participation not only demands you speak, but that you actively listen to the issues that your classmates raise.** Uninformed speaking coupled with an inability to listen to your classmates will be graded just as harshly as if you choose not to speak at all. If you have problems speaking or listening in class, meet with Dr. Kerr as soon as possible to strategize about how you can effectively participate in discussions.

2. Presentation (10%): At the beginning of each class, three students will present the day's reading for discussion. One student will present the primary thesis of the reading (the main argument) in one to three sentences. Another student will provide an outline of the author's argument, and the third student will ask a motivated question. Separate outlines and thesis statements will be necessary for different chapters and readings assigned for the day. A motivated question must take us beyond the author/s' arguments and push us to consider the larger issues that are raised by the reading material; the question should have no simple answers and help foster classroom debate. The question will be preceded by a two or three sentence introduction that indicates how the question is related to the reading.

Students will sign up to do each of these three tasks at least once throughout the semester. The individual presenting the motivated question will be responsible for combining into one 10 pt font, double sided, two columned, landscaped document the day's (1) thesis statements, (2) outlines, and (3) motivated question. Copies should be provided for each of the class participants.

### ***Quizzes: (20%)***

Periodic short answer and multiple choice quizzes will be administered to ensure students come to class prepared. Quizzes will cover all the material addressed since the last quiz was administered. No make-up quizzes will be offered for students who miss class. If you have an excused absence, other arrangements will be made for you.

### ***Oral History: (25%)***

Each student will conduct and transcribe an approximately one hour-long interview with someone that can expand our understanding of environmental history. The interview should, if possible, be related to the topic of your final paper. By September 16th, students will submit an oral history proposal that will indicate the type of person they will seek to interview, what they hope to learn from this individual, and how they intend to identify and approach this person. Dr. Kerr will be available ahead of time to work with you on this proposal. Prior to conducting the interview, students will submit a three-page interview guide (no later than October 7<sup>th</sup>). Once this guide is approved, students will digitally record a one-hour interview, gather release forms from the interviewee, transcribe this interview, and prepare a cover page and summary for the transcript. The transcription will take about eight hours and the final transcript will be around 15 to 20 pages long. Copies of the recording and transcript must be given to your interviewees. Release forms, transcription guidelines, templates and other resources will be made available on the course

website. If the topic addresses regional issues, you may be invited to submit your interview and transcript to be archived in the Carrier Library Special Collections department. All materials must be turned in no later than December 7<sup>th</sup> at the beginning of class.

### ***Final Paper: (25%)***

Each student will be required to complete a fifteen to twenty page environmental history paper based on original research. Preferably you will choose a topic of regional interest, however, with Dr. Kerr's approval you may write about any topic related to the field. By September 28<sup>th</sup> you will produce a research proposal that covers the key questions you seek to address in your final paper, indicates why these questions are pertinent to the field of environmental history and includes a bibliography of the primary and secondary sources you intend to use for your paper. Students will meet individually with Dr. Kerr to discuss their proposal. By November 4<sup>th</sup>, students will submit a draft of their paper for review on the Discussion Board on Blackboard. You will be responsible for reviewing one student's paper by November 11<sup>th</sup>. Final papers are due on the Discussion Board by Tuesday, December 14<sup>th</sup> at noon.

### **Grading Policy**

(A) means genuinely outstanding, mastery of the subject, near flawless exposition, and incisive interpretation. (B) means well above average achievements in mastery of the subject, exposition, and interpretation throughout the course. (C) means comprehension of the basic concepts, competent exposition, and interpretation. The grade of C indicates that the student has learned the subject at an appropriate university level. (D) means unsatisfactory but still barely passing. (F) means failure. These grades are earned by the student and reflect student performance.

### **Plagiarism and the Honor Code**

Academic integrity is part of the James Madison University Honor Code. This means students may not give or receive help during examinations. A student must do all the work on a paper bearing his/her name. JMU defines plagiarism as "the deliberate copying, writing or presenting as one's own the information, ideas or phrasing of another person without proper acknowledgment of the true source." In the following cases, such a misleading impression is given:

1. Failure to give credit in a footnote for ideas, statements of fact, or conclusions derived from another writer.
2. Failure to use quotation marks when quoting directly from another writer, whether an entire sentence or only a phrase is quoted. In addition, all quotations must always be footnoted.
3. Close and extended paraphrase of another writer even if credit is given in a footnote.
4. Footnoting directly to a source that is quoted or cited by another author but that has not been examined by the writer of the paper, unless proper credit is given in a footnote.

Plagiarism need not be deliberate; it may be committed unintentionally through carelessness or ignorance. Since accidental plagiarism in a paper is indistinguishable from deliberate dishonesty, a student must be alert to avoid the sort of carelessness or ignorance that may leave him or her open to a charge of having plagiarized another's work. Students who are suspected of violating the Honor

Code will receive a failing grade and be brought before the Honor Board. For further information see: <http://www.jmu.edu/honor/>

### **Required Readings, Blackboard and Course Webpage**

#### ***Blackboard***

This course will have a Blackboard Page. The page will include a discussion board and access to the supplementary readings. You will also submit assignments on Blackboard. Instructions for logging on are located at: <https://blackboard.jmu.edu>

#### ***Available at the Bookstore***

Ted Steinberg, *Down to Earth: Nature's Role in American History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.  
 William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England*  
 Steven Stoll, *Larding the Lean Earth*  
 Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness*  
 Adam Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside*

#### ***Supplementary Readings***

All other readings are available on Blackboard: <https://blackboard.jmu.edu/>

#### ***Course Webpage***

<http://people.jmu.edu/kerrdx/EHIST>

### **Registration and First-Week Attendance Policy**

#### ***JMU Course Registration Policy***

Students are responsible for registering for classes and for verifying their class schedules on e-campus. Late course additions will not be permitted. The deadline for adding and dropping a fall semester class without instructor and academic unit head signature is Tuesday, September 7, 2010. Between September 8, 2010 and Thursday, September 16, 2010, instructor and academic unit head signatures will be required to add a class. The deadline to withdraw from a semester long class with a "W" grade is Thursday, October 28, 2010.

#### ***College of Arts and Letters First-Week Attendance Policy***

At the instructor's discretion, any student registered for a class in the College of Arts and Letters who does not attend the first two (2) scheduled meetings of the class (or does not attend the first scheduled meeting of a class that meets once a week) may be administratively dropped from the class. Students dropped for non-attendance will be notified via e-mail by the Associate Dean of the College. Students who fail to attend the first two meetings of a class for which they are registered but who do not receive an e-mail notification have not been administratively dropped by their instructor. Unless those students drop the course on their own, they will receive a grade at

the end of the semester. All students are responsible for verifying the accuracy of their schedules and changes made in their schedule via e-mail and through the web.

**Please Note:** This class will be conducted under the aegis of the AAUP 1940 statement of Academic Freedom, the essence and spirit of which is affirmed in the current JMU Faculty Handbook. The syllabus is subject to amendment or change at the discretion of the professor.

### Course Map

(BB) = Reading posted on Black Board

#### **August 31: Introduction**

#### *What is Environmental History?*

**September 2:** Steinberg, ix-xii, Worster, “Transformations of the Earth” (BB) & White, “Environmental History” (BB)

#### *Part I: Rocks, Fire and Soil*

**September 7:** Steinberg, pp. 3-54

**September 9:** Cronon, pp. 3-53

**September 14:** Cronon, pp. 54-107

**September 16:** Submit Oral History Proposal  
Cronon, pp. 108-170

**September 21:** Carney (skim for argument—BB) & Steinberg, pp. 71-115

**September 23:** Stull, pp. 3-66

**September 28:** Submit Research Paper Proposal  
Stull, pp. 69-120

**September 30:** Stull, pp. 120-169

**October 5:** Stull, pp. 173-226

**October 7:** Submit Interview Guide by this Date  
Oral History Workshop

#### *Part II: Commodities and Nature*

**October 12:** Steinberg, pp. 57-71 & William Cronon, “Annihilating Space-Meat” (BB)

**October 14:** Steinberg, pp. 116-135 & Donald Worster, “What Holds the Earth Together” (BB)

**October 19:** Steinberg, pp. 155-202

**\*\*\*October 20\*\*\* Movie Night: *Food Inc.* (Harr 1261 at 8pm)**

**October 21:** Pollan, “The Farm” (BB)

***Part III: The History of Wilderness***

**October 26:** Steinberg, pp. 136-154, Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness” (BB) & Lewis, “American Wilderness” (BB)

**October 28: Research Day – No Class**

**November 2:** Spence, pp. 3-39

**November 4: Submit Draft of Research Paper**  
Spence, pp. 41-100

**November 9:** Spence, pp. 101-139

***Part IV: Highways, Suburbs and the Environment***

**November 11: Comment on Classmate’s Draft**  
Steinberg, 202-268

**November 16:** Rome, pp. 1-64

**November 18:** Rome, pp. 65-128

**November 23 & 25: Thanksgiving – Class Does Not Meet**

**November 30:** Rome, pp. 128-188

**December 2:** Rome, pp. 189-253

**December 7: Deadline for All Oral History Materials**  
Rome, pp. 255-270 & Davis, “The Case for Letting Malibu Burn” (BB)

**\*\*\*December 8\*\*\* Movie Night: *Inconvenient Truth* (Harr 1261 at 8pm)**

**December 9:** Steinberg, 269-295

**Final Paper Due: Tuesday, December 14th, 12:00 Noon on Discussion Board (BB)**