

History / Geography / Environmental Studies 460

AMERICAN ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY

LECTURER: Bill Cronon, 5103 Humanities (also 443 Science Hall).

SECTION LEADERS: Rachel Boothby, Bill Cronon, Carly Griffith, Ben Kasten.

Bill's Phone: 265-6023. This has an answering machine on which you can leave messages if I'm not in. No calls to my home or cell numbers, please. A much better way to contact me is via email at wcronon@wisc.edu, but please do this sparingly; I often receive more than 100 emails per day and it's all I can do (and sometimes quite a lot more!) to keep up with them all. If you don't hear back from me in a timely way, please just resend your email—and try to forgive me for frequently getting swamped with the heavy volume of messages I receive! Please don't send me texts on my cell or via Facebook.

Bill's Website: Bill's website is at www.williamcronon.net, and the page for this course can be found at <http://www.williamcronon.net/courses/460.htm>. Be sure to bookmark and keep track of this link, since the page has many handouts and other materials helpful for students in the course (I will keep adding new content to it throughout the semester). If you happen to lose track of it, a Google search of "Cronon 460" should yield this page as the top hit.

Office Hours: 9:45-11:45am Wednesdays, 5103 Humanities, first come first served. I would prefer to see you during regular hours, but will try to meet with you at other times if necessary. Please don't just stop by my office if you need to see me at times other than my office hours, however; email me first and make an appointment. I generally meet with students for appointments in 443 Science Hall.

TA Contacts: Email is the best way to get in touch with your section leader if you need to contact them. Rachel Boothby's email address is boothby@wisc.edu; Carly Griffith's is cgriffith5@wisc.edu; and Ben Kasten's is bkasten@wisc.edu. All will circulate office hours and locations at the first section meeting of the semester.

LECTURES will be held on Mondays and Wednesdays, from 2:30-3:45pm, in 2650 Humanities.

INTRODUCTION

Environmental history studies the changing relationships between human beings and the natural world through time—probably a very different approach to history from what you studied in high school. Despite being numbered at the 400-level, this course is intended as an introduction to this exciting and still relatively unfamiliar field of scholarship, with no prerequisites. It assumes little or no background knowledge of American history, geography, or environmental studies, and offers a general survey that can be valuable for students interested in any of these fields, from entry-level undergraduates through advanced graduate students. Although the course is intended to be challenging, it is also meant to be fun: any student willing to attend lectures, do the readings, and work hard should be able to enjoy and do well in it. Our central premise throughout will be that much of the familiar terrain of American history looks very different when seen in environmental context, and that one can learn a great deal about history, geography, and the environment by studying them together. All too often, historians study the human past without attending to nature. All too often, scientists study nature without attending to human history. We will try to discover the value of integrating these different perspectives, and argue that the humanistic perspectives of historians and geographers are essential if one hopes to understand contemporary environmental issues.

We will be approaching American environmental history from at least three different angles. First, we will ask how various past human activities have depended on and interacted with the natural world: how have natural phenomena and resources shaped patterns of human life in different regions of the continent? Second, we will trace the shifting attitudes toward nature held by different Americans during various periods of their nation's history: how have the human inhabitants of this continent perceived and attached meanings to the world around them, and how have those attitudes shaped their cultural and political lives? Finally, we will ask how human attitudes and activities have worked together to reshape the American landscape: how have people altered the world around them, and what have been the consequences of those alterations for natural and human communities alike? At the same time, we will be tracing the evolution of environmental politics in the United States, so that the course is also a history of conservation and environmentalism in our nation's political life down to the present.

A NOTE ON THE READINGS

This syllabus provides a detailed outline of what we'll be covering in the course, and we strongly advise you to refer to it often as you plan your studying. Readings are moderately extensive, but they are generally not difficult; they have been chosen as much as possible to be fun and thought-provoking as well as informative. All required texts are available at the University Bookstore, and can also be ordered online. They are as follows (with call numbers):

William Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, GF 504 N45 C76 2003 (any edition OK)

Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, QH81 L56 1966 (any edition OK)

David Stradling, *Conservation in the Progressive Era: Classic Texts*, QH76 C6545 2004

Donald Worster, *Dust Bowl*, F786 W87 (any edition OK)

I have kept down the number of required textbooks quite significantly in recent years in an effort to reduce costs for students. All required textbooks are available on reserve in Helen C. White library. You needn't purchase all of them, and you should feel free to read library copies or share books with classmates if you prefer. Other readings are available as course handouts or on electronic reserve either via your My UW page or on my personal website. *Please be sure you know how to access e-reserve readings and find my website by the end of the first week of classes.*

COURSE GRADING

The midterm exam counts for 25% of your grade, and the final exam for 25%; the first paper counts for 5%; the final paper for 25%; and section participation for the remaining 20%. Please note in particular that we take section participation very seriously in this course. Learning how to *talk* intelligently and enthusiastically about significant subjects is actually one of the most important skills you can learn in college, and this course is a great place to work on that skill. We'll be dealing with interesting readings about historical subjects that have important implications for our present and future, so it shouldn't be hard for you to come to section with questions and comments you'd like to share with other members of the group. Try to make a special effort to get to know not just your section leader, but the other students in your section. We promise this will not only make the course more enjoyable, but will add a lot to what you learn as well.

EXAMINATIONS

There will be two exams, a midterm and a final, both held during the regular class meeting time.

WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

FIRST PAPER: (2 double-spaced pages; 3-4 pages for Honors undergrads and graduate students):

This brief initial writing assignment is due at the beginning of lecture on Monday, October 2. In it, you'll be asked to use Francis Higginson's list telling Massachusetts Bay colonists in 1630 of "What to Bring" when migrating to New England to illustrate and analyze one or more key arguments from *Changes in the Land*. Pick one item (or one group of items as you define that group) to explicate the ways in which North American environments were transformed by European colonists in the 17th and 18th centuries.

THE FINAL PAPER (5-6 double-spaced pages; 7-10 pages for Honors undergrads and graduate students, not counting illustrations): This is due at the beginning of lecture on Monday, November 20, and is intended to give you an opportunity actually to *do* environmental history yourself as a way of synthesizing what you've learned from the entire course. Our premise for this assignment is that students in our class have been asked to serve as program consultants to the staff of the new (alas, fictional) Smithsonian Museum of American Environmental History in Washington, DC. Choose a single important organism or tool or technology, or a single set of relationships or processes or environmental transformations, that deserves to be analyzed and interpreted in this new museum, and write an illustrated interpretive essay that could serve as an exhibit in the museum. Your essay should consist of 5-6 pages of double-spaced text (7-10 pages for grads and Honors undergrads) and at least 3 images. (You're welcome to use more images if you're so inclined; again, images don't count against your total number of pages.) You should provide citations for all facts, images, and quotations you include to support the interpretations in your essay, using *Chicago Manual of Style* citation format to document your sources:

<https://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/DocChicago.html>

IMPORTANT: BEWARE OF PLAGIARISM!

It is very important for you to keep track of, acknowledge, and be respectful of the sources you use in writing your final paper. The Web has made it so easy for students to copy and paste information they find online that it may be tempting for you simply to paste some of this material into what we write. Don't EVER do this. Plagiarism is a very serious ethical infraction—pretending that someone else's work is your own—and will get you into serious trouble if it's discovered. To learn more about plagiarism and how to avoid it, consult the following online resources:

UW-Madison Writing Center: <http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/QuotingSources.html>

Yale Writing Center: <http://writing.yalecollege.yale.edu/advice-students/using-sources/understanding-and-avoiding-plagiarism>

THE HISTORY LAB

The History Department's "History Lab" is an invaluable resource center where experts (Ph.D. students) will assist you with your papers. No matter what your stage in the writing process—choosing a topic, conducting research, composing a thesis, outlining your argument, revising your drafts—the History Lab staff is here, along with your professors and teaching assistants, to help you sharpen your skills and become a more successful writer. Sign up for a one-on-one consultation online: <https://history.wisc.edu/undergraduate-program/the-history-lab/>

You're also strongly encouraged to use UW-Madison's wonderful Writing Center for help with your papers: <https://writing.wisc.edu>

IMPORTANT: LAPTOP AND CELLPHONE POLICY

Because the majority of lectures take place in a darkened room with PowerPoint presentations, because bright laptop screens are distracting to other students in this environment, and because the temptation to multitask has become so enormous now that wireless connections to the Internet are available in most lecture halls, ***the use of laptop computers, tablets, cell phones, or other screen-based devices is NOT permitted during lectures or discussion sections.*** If you have a medical reason for needing to use a laptop or other screen-based device that has been authorized by the McBurney Center, please let us know so we can discuss strategies for your use of these devices that will be minimally disruptive to other students.

MCBURNEY STUDENTS:

If you are a McBurney student who needs any special accommodations for the course, please make sure your section leader is aware of your situation as early in the semester as possible, and well in advance of any examinations for which accommodations will be required.

WEEKLY OUTLINE OF LECTURES AND ASSIGNMENTS

IMPORTANT: In the following outline, lecture topics are arranged into thematic "weeks" that do NOT correspond to ordinary calendar weeks, so don't be confused about this. Most "weeks" consist of a Wednesday lecture, the following Monday lecture, and the following Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday sections; this way, all discussion sections will be assured of having heard the same lectures and done the same readings by the time they meet. Occasionally, one of these thematic "weeks" may involve a number of lectures less than or more than two. The parenthetical number after each week's title is the approximate number of pages of reading assigned for that week.

Week 1: GETTING STARTED WITH ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY: HUMAN HOMES ON THE LAND (23)

6 Sept: Ghost Landscapes: Getting Started with Environmental History

11 Sept: The World That Coyote and Raven Made

SECTION, 12-14 Sept: Introductory

ASSIGNMENT: If you'd like, you can reread Bill's opening lecture, the original version of which is a published essay: William Cronon, "Kennecott Journey: The Paths Out of Town," in William Cronon, George Miles, and Jay Gitlin, eds., *Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America's Western Past* (1992), 28-51, also available on Bill's website as a link under "Other Resources" on our course webpage. It's probably best to do this **after** the lecture.

Week 2: INVASIONS AND TRANSFORMATIONS (111)

13 Sept: Migration, Disease, and Death

18 Sept: Selling Animals

SECTION, 19-21 Sept: Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, xi-107

WEEK 3: NEW CREATURES, NEW CONNECTIONS (77)

20 Sept: Co-Invasion: Some Larger Creatures

25 Sept: A World of Fields and Fences

SECTION, 26-28 Sept: Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, 108-185 (of 20th anniversary edition, including Afterword). (If you buy a used copy of the first edition of the book, the new Afterword is available in our Online Library Reserve.)

WEEK 4: THE COUNTRY AND THE CITY: ON THE GROUND AND IN THE MIND (10)

27 Sept: Mountain Gloom, Mountain Glory: Sublime and Picturesque

2 Oct: The Flow of the River: Industrial and Urban Revolutions

SECTION, 3-4 Oct: Romanticism handout (available as PDF download from course web page)

WRITING: FIRST PAPER DUE AT START OF LECTURE ON MONDAY, OCTOBER 2.

WEEK 5: LANDSCAPES OF LIFE AND DEATH (0)

4 Oct: The Machine in the Garden: Agricultural Revolutions

9 Oct: Hunters and Hunted

SECTION, 10-12 Oct: Come prepared with questions and insights to review for the mid-term exam.

WEEK 6: MID-TERM (0)

11 Oct: Even the Oceans Fail

12 Oct: EVENING REVIEW SESSION FOR MIDTERM EXAM, 7:00-8:30pm

16 Oct: MID-TERM EXAM

SECTION, 17-19 Oct: Discuss and brainstorm about final paper.

Study the "Learning Historical Research" website at www.williamcronon.net/researching/ in the next couple weeks.

NB: During the next couple weeks, the staff of the Wisconsin Historical Society will offer tours of their collections, which will be absolutely invaluable for your final paper. *Be sure to take one of these tours if you possibly can.*

Tours will begin on the ground floor of the Historical Society, across State Street from the Humanities Building at 816 State St, as follows:

Wednesday, 18 Oct, 4:00-5:00pm

Thursday, 19 Oct, 4:00-5:00pm

Monday, 23 Oct, 4:00-5:00pm

Tuesday, 24 Oct, 9:00-10:00am

Wednesday, 25 Oct, 4:00-5:00pm

WEEK 7: PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATION (116)

18 Oct: The Conservation Vision

23 Oct: Child in the Garden

SECTION, 24-26 Oct: Stradling, *Conservation in the Progressive Era: Classic Texts*, vii-106. (read entire book)

If you're interested, explore Library of Congress's American Memory website on the early history of conservation:

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/amrvhtml/conshome.html>.

WEEK 8: SEEING LIKE A STATE (168)

25 Oct: Planning Against Disaster

30 Oct: Strategic Resources and the Population Bomb

SECTION, 31 Oct - 2 Nov: Worster, *Dust Bowl*, 3-97, 182-254 (skim remainder if you have time).

WEEK 9: WILDERNESS AND THE LAND ETHIC (78)

1 Nov: Public Parks and Pleasuring Grounds

6 Nov: Wilderness and the Land Ethic

SECTION, 7-9 Nov: Leopold, *Sand County Almanac*, 6-19, 127-9, 137-41, 237-95. (If you're using another edition, read essays entitled "Good Oak," "Red Legs Kicking," "Thinking Like a Mountain," and Part IV, "The Upshot").

WEEK 10: RACHEL CARSON AND A NEW ENVIRONMENTALISM (3)

8 Nov: The Fallout of Silent Spring

13 Nov: In-class screenings of Silent Spring documentaries

SECTION, 14-16 Nov: Carson, "A Fable for Tomorrow" (Library E-reserves)

(Discuss documentary and oral excerpt from Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* this week; reading is light so you can be researching and writing your final paper.)

WEEK 11: TOWARDS EARTH DAY (0)

15 Nov: Environmentalism Triumphant?

20 Nov: Back to Nature

SECTION: No sections this week because of Thanksgiving holiday.

WRITING: FINAL PAPER DUE AT START OF LECTURE ON MONDAY, NOVEMBER 20.

WEEK 12: UNCERTAIN FUTURES

22 Nov: Regulation to the Rescue

23 Nov: Thanksgiving

27 Nov: Energy Crises

SECTION, 28-30 Nov: Students will give oral reports on the most important findings from their final papers.

WEEK 13: BACKLASH (0)

29 Nov: Toxic Injustice

4 Dec: Environmental Backlash

SECTION, 5-7 Dec: Looking back, summing up, and preparing for the final exam.

WEEK 14: DILEMMAS THAT DO NOT GO AWAY (0)

6 Dec: People Who Live in Glass Houses: Climate Change

11 Dec: That Which We Tame

11 Dec: EVENING REVIEW SESSION FOR FINAL EXAM, 7:00-8:30pm

13 Dec: FINAL EXAM