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Spring Office Hours:  
Tue: 10-11am; 2-4 pm  
and by appointment

### Course Overview

This course will introduce students to some of the central issues and debates in American environmental history, a relatively new field of scholarship that emerged in the 1970s. We will explore the oft-neglected role of the natural world in shaping human history. While scholars of ancient or "pre-modern" societies have always been attentive to the impact of climate, geography, disease, and natural resources, these issues seem to virtually disappear from historical accounts of

analysis in which you identify the essential components of an argument and explore how they relate to one another, and to the larger issues of the course. By sharing our different questions, perspectives and insights, we all have an opportunity to develop a better understanding of the complex issues of the past. ~~So~~ let you to parti

Class participation accounts for 25% of your overall grade and I take this evaluation seriously. I will record a participation grade for each and every class session, and you will be able to follow your grade online throughout the semester so that you are fully aware of where you stand in this respect. I will also give short-class writing exercises on occasion that will count towards your participation grade (allowing students who might not get a chance to raise their hand every class to demonstrate their knowledge and engagement with the reading). Feel free to come by my office hours or schedule an appointment early in the semester if you have questions or concerns about participation.

Two Short Papers (3-5 pages) due Feb. 14<sup>th</sup> and May 2<sup>nd</sup>





### Week 4 The Market Revolution: Putting Nature to Work

Mon (Feb 15): The World of Commodities

Reading Due: Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, ch. 4.

William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York, 1991), excerpts (P)

**First Paper due Monday, February 14<sup>th</sup> at 6:00pm**  
submitted electronically through p

Wed Feb 17): The Frontier & the American West

Reading Due: Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," *Report of the American Historical Association* (1894), excerpts (P).

Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, ch. 8.

Donald Worster, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and Growth of the American West* (Oxford, 1985), excerpts (P)

Fri Feb 19): Another Look at King Cotton

Reading Due: Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, ch. 5 & 7.

Edmund Russell, *Evolutionary History: Uniting History and Biology to Understand Life on Earth* (Cambridge, 2011), ch. 9 (P)

### Week 5 Call of the Wild: The Politics of Nature in Antebellum America

Mon (Feb 22): Romanticism & the Embrace of Nature

Reading Due: Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*

Henry David Thoreau, "Walking in the Atlantic Mountains" (1862), 24 (P).

Wed (Feb 24): Landscape Paintings and the Hudson River School

Reading Due: Thomas Cole, "Essay on American Scenery," *American Magazine* (January, 1836), 12- (P).

Image Gallery of Nineteenth Century Paintings (P).

Michael Heiman, "Production Confronts Consumption: Landscape Perception and Social Conflict in the Hudson Valley" (P).

Fri (Feb 26<sup>th</sup>): The Cultural Battles over Nature, Work, and Class  
 Reading Due: Paul E. Johnson, *Sam Patch: The Famous (New York, 2003), ix xiii, 4177 (P).*

### Week6 The Environment, Health, and Western Expansion

Mon (Feb 29<sup>th</sup>): Reconstructing a Forgotten Worldview  
 Reading Due: Conevery Bolton Valencius, *The Health of the Country: How American Settlers Understood Themselves and the World (New York, 2002), 184.*

Wed (Mar 2<sup>nd</sup>): The Geography of Health  
 Reading Due: Valencius, *The Health of the Country, 158.*

Fri (Mar 4<sup>th</sup>): The Malleability of Land & People  
 Reading Due: Valencius, *The Health of the Country, 158.*

### Week7-Week8 Making the Corn Belt: The Environmental History of Iowa

These two weeks, we focus on the environmental history of Iowa in the nineteenth century—particularly the rapid transformation of our local area into one of the most intensively farmed sections of the country. Just a few decades ago, the tallgrass prairie was replaced by some of the nation's most productive farms (in fact, Iowa was America's leading agricultural producer until the 1920s, when it was finally overtaken by California). We will spend week 7 reading about the ecology and history of the region while also learning how to use an array of primary sources, land records, and maps. There will also be some introduction to the uses of GIS and other digital technologies from the staff of DASIL (the Data Analysis and Social Inquiry Lab), which is currently building a database of records and maps pertaining to the environmental history of this area.

Each student will be responsible for developing their own focused research project that will be pursued during the week before Fall Break (i.e. week 8). This project will culminate in a short paper of 5-pages, that will be due the first Friday when we return from break (April 8<sup>th</sup>). Further guidelines and instructions will be distributed in class (and on my pb)

**Spring Break: March 21<sup>st</sup> through April 1<sup>st</sup>**

Week 9 The Rise of Conservatism & Progressive Reform

Mon (Apr 4<sup>th</sup>): The Conservation Movement Reform or Rationalization?

Reading Due: Steinberg, Down to Earth 94-100 / TT1 12 (in) 8



Fri (Apr 22<sup>nd</sup>): The Moveable Feast  
 Reading Due: Steinberg, Down to Earth 1112.

**Week 12 The "Dirty Thirties" and the New Deal**

Mon (Apr 25<sup>th</sup>): The Menace of Erosion  
 Reading Due: H.H. Bennett, "Facing the Erosion Problem," (P).  
 Group A: The Plow that Broke the Plains documentary film (P).  
 Group B: The River documentary film (P).

Wed (Apr 27<sup>th</sup>): A New Environmental Consciousness  
 Reading Due: Archibald MacLeish, Land of the Free (P).  
 Online Gallery of FSA & WPA images (P).

Fri (Apr 29<sup>th</sup>): The Promise of Planning  
 Reading Due: Report of the National Resources Planning Board, excerpts  
 Stuart Chase, The New Deal (R)

Week 14 TBA

Final Project: Due Thursday May 19<sup>th</sup> (5:00pm)  
Submitted electronically through web