

HIS 334 Environmental History of the United States

Fall 2013: M, W 3:30-4:45, Bryan 121

All the facts in natural history taken by themselves, have no value, but are barren like a single sex. But marry it to human history, and it is full of life.

-Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nature, 1836



Prof. Greg O'Brien

Office: MHRA 2110 / Phone: 334-3988 / Email: wgobrien@uncg.edu

Office Hours: Monday & Wednesday 1:00-3:00 and/or by appointment

Course Objective

In this course you will examine the interaction of humans and nature in American history from the colonial period to today. The approach will be roughly chronological, with emphasis on selected issues, events, and persons. The course will consider three large themes: 1. The way that Americans (of different types) have thought about nature and the relationship between people and nature. 2. The history of the human impact on nature and of nature's impact on people in the area now known as the United States. 3. The roles of government, industrialization, pollution, resource management, and the modern environmental movement in shaping the way that Americans interact with the environment.

Course Requirements

Students are required to attend class, read four core books, and complete all assignments. Graded assignments include quizzes on readings, a midterm and final exam, participation in class discussions, and extended written essays as described below. ALL assignments must be completed or you will not pass the course. The class only meets twice a week, so failure to attend class will automatically decrease your course grade. Generally, Mondays will be reserved for lectures and on Wednesdays I may lecture, show a film, discuss readings for that week, and possibly give a quiz on that week's readings (be prepared by keeping up with the readings!).

Required Books

Ted Steinberg, *Down to Earth: Nature's Role In American History* (3rd edition, 2013)

Timothy Silver, *Mount Mitchell & the Black Mountains: An Environmental History of the Highest Peaks in Eastern America* (2003)

Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (any edition)

Edward Abbey, *Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness* (any edition)

Writing Assignments

Paper Assignment #1

Using the Timothy Silver, *Mount Mitchell & the Black Mountains* as an example, write about some specific place--either located in or around Greensboro or somewhere else that you know well from your home or travels--and write a brief essay discussing your interpretation of its environmental history, using materials we've studied in the class so far. Because this is a brief paper (7-10 double-spaced typed pages), you'll need to think carefully about the aspects of the place you wish to explore in your essay: it is far better to discuss a few aspects well than many aspects superficially. Write a description or tell a story that will explain to the reader how this place came to have the shape and qualities it has today. How has your area changed over time and why? Have the changes been solely human induced or did other factors (a natural disaster, for example) play a role? What have been the impacts of this change? Remember, this is not a typical history research paper (though you're welcome to do additional background reading if you so choose). You should think of it as an exercise in historical and environmental interpretation, asking you to read a small patch of landscape as a historical document of past environmental change. The paper should be 7-10 pages, double-spaced, normal-size font (12 point), one-inch margins all around and include a title page (and bibliography if you use outside

sources). This is an individual not a group effort; the writing must be your own. Paper due date: October 21

Paper Assignment #2

After reading Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* & Edward Abbey, *Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness* you will write a 7-10 page paper comparing and contrasting the ideas of these two major thinkers in 20th century American environmental thought. What ideas and approaches do they have in common? In what ways did their ideas about defining nature and the human role within it differ? Which writer more inspires you and why (be specific)? The paper needs to be double-spaced, normal-size font (12 point), and one-inch margins all around. This is an individual not a group effort; the writing must be your own.

Paper due date: December 2

NOTE: plagiarism (to take the ideas, writings, etc. of another and present them as your own) is strictly forbidden and will be punished to the fullest extent possible, including failure of the course and/or expulsion from the university. Please review UNCG's policy on plagiarism:

<http://sa.uncg.edu/handbook/academic-integrity-policy/> and how to avoid plagiarism:

<http://library.uncg.edu/tutorials/index.aspx?m=8>

Grading Summary

Paper #1	25%
Paper #2	25%
Quiz on <i>Mount Mitchell</i>	10%
Mid-term Exam	20%
Final Exam	<u>20%</u>
	100%

Letter grades assigned as follows:

97-100	A+
93-96	A
90-92	A-
87-89	B+
83-86	B
80-82	B-
77-79	C+
73-76	C
70-72	C-
67-69	D+
63-66	D
60-62	D-
<60	F

Schedule

- Week 1
8/19-8/21 What is Environmental History?
Reading: *Down to Earth* pp. ix-7
- Week 2
8/26-8/28 American Indian Ecology
Reading: *Down to Earth* Chapter 1: pp. 11-21
*Start reading *Mount Mitchell* chapter 1: pp. 1-35
Video: America Before Columbus (first half)
- 9/2 No Class: Labor Day**
- Week 3
9/4 Columbian Exchange: New Animals, Plants, and Diseases
Reading: *Down to Earth* pp. 22-33
Mount Mitchell chapter 2: pp. 37-75
- Week 4
9/9 Colonial America and Nature
Reading: *Down to Earth* pp. 33-54
Mount Mitchell chapter 3: 77-119
Video: America Before Columbus (second half)
- 9/11 No class – American Society for Ethnohistory Conference**
- Week 5
9/16 Colonial America and Nature continued . . .
9/18 Industrialization and Plantation in 19th Century America
Reading: *Down to Earth* Chapter 4: pp. 57-71
Mount Mitchell chapter 4: pp. 121-154
- Week 6
9/23-9/25 Disease & Other Scourges in Southern Environmental History
Reading: *Down to Earth* Chapters 5-7: pp. 72-115
Mount Mitchell chapter 5: pp. 154-208
Discussion: How did nature impact the Civil War?
- Week 7
9/30 The Developing American West
Reading: *Down to Earth* Chapter 8: pp. 116-135
Mount Mitchell chapter 6 & Conclusion: pp. 209-269
- 10/2 Natural Disasters in U.S. History
- Week 8
10/7 Invasive Species and the Death of the Chestnut Forests
Reading: Review *Down to Earth* pp. 110-113 &
Review *Mount Mitchell* pp. 154-162
- 10/7 Quiz on *Mount Mitchell***

10/9	Mid-term Exam
10/14	No Class: Fall Break
Week 8 10/16	The Development of the Conservation Movement Reading: <i>Down to Earth</i> Chapter 9: pp. 136-142
Week 9 10/21-10/23	The Conservation Movement vs. Wilderness Preservation Reading: <i>Down to Earth</i> Chapter 9: pp. 142-154
10/21	Paper Assignment #1 Due
Week 10 10/28-10/30	The Urban Environment: Chicago as an Example Reading: <i>Down to Earth</i> Chapters 10 & 11: pp. 155-186
Week 11 11/4-11/6	Wilderness Protection & Toxic Pollution after WWII Reading: <i>Down to Earth</i> Chapters 12 & 13: pp. 187-224 Start Reading Leopold, <i>A Sand County Almanac</i> & Abbey, <i>Desert Solitaire</i>
Week 12 11/11-11/13	The Post-WWII Environmental Movement Reading: <i>Down to Earth</i> Chapter 14: 225-239 Leopold, <i>A Sand County Almanac</i> & Abbey, <i>Desert Solitaire</i> Video: Rachel Carson's Silent Spring
Week 13 11/18-11/20	Environmental Racism & Environmental Justice Reading: <i>Down to Earth</i> Chapter 15: pp.240-260 Leopold, <i>A Sand County Almanac</i> & Abbey, <i>Desert Solitaire</i>
Week 14 11/25	Backlash Against the Environmental Movement Reading: <i>Down to Earth</i> Chapter pp. 260-283 Leopold, <i>A Sand County Almanac</i> & Abbey, <i>Desert Solitaire</i>
11/27	No Class: Thanksgiving
12/2	Paper Assignment #2 Due
Week 15 12/2	Modern Problems & Potential Solutions Reading: <i>Down to Earth</i> pp. 283-300
Final Exam	Friday, December 6 @3:30