

HIS 334 Environmental History of the United States



Prof. Greg O'Brien

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Office: MHRA 2110

Phone: 334-3988

Email: wgobrien@uncg.edu

Office Hours: Monday & Wednesday 10:00-12:00 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 in the area now known as the United States. 3. Industrialization, pollution, resource management, and the modern environmental movement.

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 and participation in class discussions is a key component of your course grade (see below), so failure to attend class will automatically decrease your course grade.

Required Books

Louis S. Warren, ed., *American Environmental History*

Timothy Silver, *A New Face on the Countryside: Indians, Colonists, and Slaves in South Atlantic Forests, 1500-1800*

Stephen Yafa, *Cotton: The Biography of a Revolutionary Fiber*

Richard White, *The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River*

Writing Assignments

Paper Assignment #1

Two short papers: each paper is based on readings that you will complete from Louis S. Warren, ed., *American Environmental History*. For the first paper choose a chapter from 1 to 6, read the documents and essays thoroughly. Using all of these readings in that chapter, analyze the topic that chapter covers. Tell me not only a little about what each source says, but also about general themes and lines of interpretation. Do the documents support the interpretations of the essays? Are there possible alternative interpretations? For the second paper, complete the same sort of assignment on one chapter of your choosing from chapters 7-13. Each paper should be 5-7 pages in length, double-spaced, typed, normal-size font (12 point), and one-inch margins all around. This is an individual effort; the writing must be your own. The papers are due on the day that we discuss that particular chapter – see the schedule below.

Paper Assignment #2

Local Environmental History (borrowed with appreciation from Dr. William Cronon)

Choose 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 (around 5 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. Remember, this is not a 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.

Class Discussions

One of the most important requirements for this course is a careful reading of the assignments and thoughtful participation in class discussion. Pay close attention to the schedule of readings listed below and be ready to discuss them in class. The assigned reading must be done before coming to class. When you read, take notes and write down questions. Become an active reader, imagine you are looking at the same evidence and having a conversation with the author about it. Then share your ideas and questions in class. Generally, our Wednesday meetings will always be devoted to discussion of readings and other material for that week (or films), whereas Mondays will be used for lectures.

Grading Summary

Two papers from *American Environmental History*

(10% each) =	20%
Local environmental history paper	10%
Quiz on <i>New Face on the Countryside</i>	5%
Quiz on <i>Cotton</i>	5%
Mid-term Exam	20%
Final Exam	20%
Class Discussion	<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

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://library.uncg.edu/depts/ref/tutorial/integrate/plagdef.asp>

Schedule

- Week 1
1/20 What is Environmental History?
Reading: *American Environmental History*, pp. 1-3 & *New Face on the Countryside*, 1-6
- Week 2
1/25-1/27 Native American Ecology and European Contact
Reading: *American Environmental History*, ch. 1 & *New Face on the Countryside*, 7-66
- 1/27 **Extra Credit Opportunity** (see Blackboard for instructions): Senator and former presidential candidate George McGovern will participate in a panel discussion following the premiere screening of *Hungry for Green: Feeding the World Sustainably*, written and directed by UNCG professor Matt Barr and narrated by McGovern on Wednesday, January 27, 2010 at 7pm in EUC Auditorium.
- Week 3
2/1-2/3 Columbian Exchange: New Animals, Plants, and Diseases
Reading: *American Environmental History*, ch. 2 & *New Face on the Countryside*, 67-138
Film: *The Columbian Exchange*
- Week 4
2/8-2/10 Colonial America and Nature
Reading: *American Environmental History*, ch. 3 & *New Face on the Countryside*, 139-end
- 2/10 **Quiz on *New Face on the Countryside***
- Week 5
2/15-2/17 Forest and Plantation in 19th Century America
Reading: *American Environmental History*, ch. 4 & *Cotton*, 1-90
- Week 6
2/22-2/24 Urban Nature and Urban Reforms
Reading: *American Environmental History*, ch. 5 & *Cotton*, 91-146
Film: *Chicago: City of the Century*, part 1
- Week 7
3/1 Disappearing Bison and New Markets
Reading: *American Environmental History*, ch. 6
- 3/3 **Mid-term Exam**

3/8-3/12	Spring Break – no class
Week 9 3/15-3/17	The Conservation Movement Reading: <i>American Environmental History</i> , ch. 7 & Cotton, 147-201 Film: <i>The Civilian Conservation Corps</i>
Week 10 3/22-3/24	Wilderness Preservation Reading: <i>American Environmental History</i> , ch. 8 & Cotton, 202-269
Week 11 3/29-3/31	Toxic Pollution after WWII Reading: <i>American Environmental History</i> , ch. 9 & Cotton, 270-304 Film: <i>Rachel Carson's Silent Spring</i>
Week 12 4/5-4/7	The Post-WWII Environmental Movement Reading: <i>American Environmental History</i> , ch. 10 & Cotton, 305-end
4/7	Quiz on Cotton
Week 13 4/12-4/14	Environmental Racism & Environmental Justice Reading: <i>American Environmental History</i> , ch. 11 & <i>The Organic Machine</i> , ix-29 Film: <i>Fenceline: A Company Town Divided</i>
Week 14 4/19-4/21	Backlash Against the Environmental Movement Reading: <i>American Environmental History</i> , ch. 12 & <i>The Organic Machine</i> , 30-88
Week 15 4/26-4/28	Modern Problems & Potential Solutions Reading: <i>American Environmental History</i> , ch. 13 & <i>The Organic Machine</i> , 89-end Film: <i>Alternative Energy Sources</i>
5/3	Last Day of Class – wrap up
5/3	Local environmental history paper due
Final Exam	Wednesday, May 12 @12:00 noon