

## American Environmental History

HY212/EV273

Fall 2018 Block 2

Palmer 223 9:15-12:00

Professor Amy Kohout

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Palmer 215C; 719-389-6525 (office)

Office hours: Tuesday and Thursday, 2:00-3:30 PM and by appointment

### Course description

A survey of American history from the perspective of the environment, beginning with the biological and cultural invasion of the New World in 1492 and ending with current environmental problems and their historical roots. Topics include Native American vs. Euro-American views of nature, the impact of changing economic systems on the environment, and the impact of the landscape on various American cultures.

### Course rationale

Environmental history, in its broadest sense, is the study of the relationships between people and the world around them. These relationships can be intimate (the preparation of passenger pigeon pie for dinner, for example), or much larger in scale (big dams, nuclear weapons testing). In this course, we'll consider environmental interactions large and small as we trace the changing ways Americans have shaped—and thought about—the places where they live and work. In addition to exploring the history of national parks, preservation, conservation, and wilderness, we'll pay special attention to the relationship between the United States and the rest of the world; after all, neither natural resources nor notions of nature stay put. Environmental history can also help us think through the different ways that people interact with each other, especially when natural resources are involved, so we'll also explore debates over what nature is, who it is for, and how it should be used—from the colonial period to the present. We'll read widely this block; our course texts explore subjects ranging from Native and settler ecology in colonial New England to stuffed birds in high fashion in late nineteenth-century New York to anti-nuclear activism at the Nevada Test Site in the 1980s and post-apocalyptic fiction set in (future) Colorado.

### Learning outcomes

This course is designed to introduce you to key concepts in environmental history, and to support you as you develop the skills historians use to make sense of the past. Your work for this course should demonstrate that you can:

- (a) explain what environmental history is, as well as what it can help us to understand
- (b) read, distill, and analyze a range of primary and secondary source material
- (c) articulate key questions and course themes, making connections across texts and discussions
- (d) craft arguments about American environmental history and support them with evidence, in your writing and in conversation

### Required texts (please acquire hard copies)

William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (1983)

Peter Heller, *The Dog Stars* (2012)

Jennifer Price, *Flight Maps: Adventures with Nature in Modern America* (1999)

Rebecca Solnit, *Savage Dreams: A Journey Into the Landscape Wars of the American West* (1994 or 2014 edition fine)

These texts are available at the Colorado College Store. They are also on reserve at Tutt Library. All other assigned readings will be made available to you on Canvas; **please print\* them out (double-sided, if you can) and bring them to class on the day we are scheduled to discuss them.**

\*Yes, I'm asking you to print out materials for a class on environmental history; this might seem strange, or at least a little hypocritical. But in lots of ways, this block is about making things that are hard to see more visible. And it's complicated to determine whether reading digital or print materials has a greater impact on your carbon footprint. (Factors include time spent reading, the specific emissions of the electricity you're using, the materials and energy used to produce our various devices, etc.) I'd like to encourage you to consider powering down (or putting to sleep) your technology and giving analog reading a try.

### **A note on participation**

This course is designed to introduce you to—and immerse you in—the work historians do, and as such, it is organized around discussions of primary and secondary source material. Sometimes I'll lecture, sometimes we'll work in small groups, and sometimes we'll have conversations as a whole class. I expect that you will show up each day prepared to jump into these conversations. We'll talk more about how to read like a historian, and how to prepare for an analytical discussion—these are skills we will be practicing a lot this block—but I want to highlight here that regular, thoughtful (and vocal) participation is necessary to do well in this course.

### **Assignments**

4 short writing assignments (on average, 2 pages each)

Paper 1 (5-6 pages)

Paper 2 (5-6 pages)

Final exam take-home essay, cumulative (5-6 pages)

### **Guidelines for submission of written work**

Unless otherwise specified, you will submit writing assignments to Canvas 45 minutes before class starts on the day they are due. The work you turn in for this class should be double-spaced (except when directed otherwise), in 12 pt Times New Roman font, with 1-inch margins. Put your name, the course number, and the date at the top of the first page. Everything you hand in is pledged work; please indicate this on your assignments with HCU (meaning Honor Code Upheld). When citing ideas and/or texts that are not your own, please use a standard citation format (Chicago or MLA).

Also, **remember to proofread!**

### **Grading\***

Participation (including discussion, informal writing assignments and class activities) 20%

Short writing assignments (4) 20%

Paper 1 (5-6 pages) 20%

Paper 2 (5-6 pages) 20%

Take-home final exam 20%

**\*Note: you must complete ALL assignments in order to pass this course.**

### **Grading scale**

For a full explanation of Colorado College policies on credit and grades, see the Academic Policies section of the Colorado College Catalog of Courses. I use the same grade schedule to calculate final grades in my courses: A = 4.0; A- = 3.7; B+ = 3.3; B = 3.0; B- = 2.7; C+ = 2.3; C = 2.0; C- = 1.7; D+ = 1.3; D = 1.0; and NC = 0.0.

Please also review the college's statement on what these letters and numbers mean:

A – Excellent work that reflects superior understanding and insight, creativity, or skill.

B – Good work that reflects a high level of understanding and insight, creativity, or skill.

C – Adequate work that indicates readiness to continue study in the field.

D – Marginal work, only minimally adequate, raising serious question about readiness to continue in the field.

S – Work that falls in the range of A to C–.

CR – Work equivalent to a D+ or D.

NC – Failing work, clearly inadequate, and unworthy of credit.

### **Policy on absences and lateness**

Because discussion is central to the study and practice of history, attendance is critically important. As such, unexcused absences will impact your grade in this class: for each unexcused absence, your final grade will be lowered by 1/3 of a letter. If you do miss a class meeting, you are responsible for finding out what you missed and making up the work so that you are prepared for the next class meeting. Please be on time; lateness will also affect your grade. If you need to miss class due to illness, emergency, athletics, religious observance, etc., please email me or talk with me as soon as you can. More than three unexcused absences will result in a failing grade in the course.

### **Late work**

I will accept late work; however, it is in your best interest to submit work on time, as late assignments will be penalized 2/3 of a letter grade for each day they are late, and one full increment for assignments graded check plus, check, check minus. So, a B+ paper turned in up to 24 hours after the deadline would earn a B-; a B+ paper submitted 2 days late would earn a C, etc. **If you know you are going to be late with an assignment, talk to me as soon as you can. I very rarely grant extensions on late work on or after the due date.** Also, please note that the short writing assignments are often directly related to the plan for class discussion on the date they are due. Completing the assignment is often a critical part of preparing for that day's activities.

### **Colorado College policies**

I respect and adhere to Colorado College policies and regulations pertaining to the observation of religious holidays, assistance available to students with disabilities, plagiarism and academic integrity, sexual harassment, and racial or ethnic discrimination. Students are advised to familiarize themselves with these policies and encouraged to discuss any questions or concerns they may have with me.

### **Inclusion and diversity in the classroom**

We are going to talk about hard things this block—the history of American environments is, in many ways, a history of destruction. (But it isn't only this!) To understand this history, as well as how our historical narratives have developed, we're going to need a discussion space that is equal parts rigorous and generous – to the scholars we'll read, and to each member of our discussions.

I am committed to fostering a classroom community that is productive for all participants, and to do that, I'm going to need your help. We'll talk together about what this looks like, but here, as we begin, I want to highlight how important it is that we appreciate and respect that a diversity of identities, backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives only enriches the work we will do together. After all, the discipline of history is built on using a range of source material to construct arguments about the past. Which actors and perspectives we look for—and which voices we find in the historical record—help to shape the arguments we make and the stories we tell.

### **Accommodations for students with disabilities and learning differences**

Full accommodations are the legal right of students with all kinds of disabilities, whether learning differences or physical disabilities. I am happy to provide these accommodations. If you experience a disability and are requesting accommodations for this course, please speak with me privately as soon as possible so we can discuss how best to put accommodations in place. If you have not already done so, please connect with Accessibility Resources (Armstrong 211, 719-227-8285), the office responsible for coordinating accommodations and services for students with disabilities.

### **Academic honesty**

It is expected that you will abide by the Colorado College Honor Code. Please be sure to familiarize yourself with the Honor Code, and, in particular, the policy on plagiarism. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism or proper citation, please ask! (And of course, we'll review what this means in the context of the work we'll be doing together this block.)

### **A note on technology**

The technological developments of the last few decades have transformed the ways that historians research and write history. Digital photography in the archive, electronic access to scholarly journals and digitized materials, new software to help with organizing sources and ideas—there are so many reasons why I'm thrilled to be a historian in the digital age. I imagine that we will all use digital tools to complete the work we'll do together this block, but I ask that we do our best to focus on each other instead of our screens when engaged in group conversation. One way to make this easier is to bring hard copies of the assigned readings to class – that way, you can mark key passages and make notes in the margins ahead of time!

You are welcome to use whatever method of note-taking works best for you during class, though I expect that any screens you have out/on are being used **ONLY** for active engagement with the course, and not for multi-tasking, as this hinders not only your learning, but also the learning of those around you. We all share responsibility for creating and maintaining an equitable and generous learning environment and community.

Additionally, I invite you to participate in a completely voluntary experiment related to cell phone use in the classroom. The folks at Innovation built a cell-phone holding rack for one of my colleagues last block, and she has now loaned it to me. The idea is that those who opt in will commit to not using our cell phones in the classroom during breaks. We can use our phones if we need to; we'll just agree to use them in the hallway so that we preserve our classroom space as a space of connection and community. Given that we are focused on the relationships between people and their environments this block, this seems like an experiment that could be relevant to our coursework!

### **When you have reached this part of the syllabus, please do two things:**

- (1) Confirm that you can access the Canvas site for this course. If all works, great. If you do not have access, note this in the email you send me when you complete the next step, and I can manually add you to the site.
- (2) Send me an email! (My contact information is on page one of the syllabus.) Introduce yourself, indicate your preferred name and pronouns, and let me know if you need me to manually add you to the Canvas site. Please also review the dates for our class field trip and add this to your calendars/work schedules.

Finally, welcome! I'm really looking forward to our block together!

**Course calendar** (subject to change)

**Please come to class ready to discuss the readings listed for each day. Writing assignments, unless otherwise noted, are due to Canvas by 8:30 AM on the day they appear on the calendar.**

Readings with (C) next to them on this calendar can be found on Canvas.

Please also note that we have an afternoon field trip on Monday, 10/1.

## **Week 1: Worldviews, Resources, Landscapes**

### **Monday, 9/24 Introductions, Expectations, and Environmental History Narratives**

[11:15 First Monday, Vincent Hutchings, Professor of Political Science, University of Michigan  
["Understanding the 2018 Election"](#)]

### **Tuesday, 9/25 Deep Time, Periodization, and Problematizing "Contact"**

Read: Dana Luciano, "The Inhuman Anthropocene," *Avidly/LA Review of Books*, 22 March 2015 (C); Jamaica Kincaid, "In History," *Callaloo* Vol. 24, No. 2 (2001), pp. 620-626 (C); Charles C. Mann, "Introduction: Holmberg's Mistake," *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus* (2011), pp. 3-31(C). And you might want to start reading Cronon; we're discussing **the whole book** on Wednesday.

Write: Bring annotated copies of the readings and notes for discussion to class. If you'd like a structure for this, feel free to use the Reading Notes handout I've posted on Canvas under Files. (Note: **this is a daily, recurring assignment**. Whether or not you use the handout, I expect that you come to each class meeting prepared with notes and annotations. This is how we get ready for generative, analytical conversations!)

### **Wednesday, 9/26 The "New" World and Competing Worldviews**

Read: William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England*, ALL (skip foreword/afterword).

Write: **Short Writing Assignment (SWA) #1: précis of Cronon (due 8:30 am to Canvas)**

### **Thursday, 9/27 Agriculture and Industrialization in the Early Republic, North, South, West**

Read: Steven Stoll, excerpt from the first chapter of *Larding the Lean Earth: Soil and Society in Nineteenth-Century America* (2002), pp. 13-31 (C); Walter Johnson, "The Carceral Landscape," in *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (2013), pp. 209-243 (C); excerpt from Cecilia Tsu, "Independent of the Unskilled Chinaman: Race, Labor, and Family Farming," *Garden of the World: Asian Immigrants and the Making of Agriculture in California's Santa Clara Valley* (2013), pp. 15-28 (C).

### **Friday, 9/28 The Pastoral and the Sublime: American Nature in American Art**

Read: Roderick Nash, "The Romantic Wilderness" and "The American Wilderness," pp. 44-83, in *Wilderness and the American Mind* (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1967) (C); and Martha Sandweiss, "Introduction: Picture Stories: Photography and the Nineteenth-Century West," in *Print the Legend: Photography and the American West* (2004) pp. 1-14 (C).

Write: **SWA #2: image analysis**

In class: Image workshop.

## **Week 2: Parks, Preservation, and Passenger Pigeons**

### **Monday, 10/1 Workscapes**

Read: Megan Kate Nelson, "Battle Logs" in *Ruin Nation: Destruction and the American Civil War* (2012), pp. 104-159 (C); Thomas Andrews, "Dying with Their Boots On," in *Killing for Coal: America's Deadliest Labor War* (2008), 122-156 (C); short excerpts by John Muir and Gifford Pinchot (C).

Note: Megan Kate Nelson will be spending the day with us! She'll be in class to talk with us about "Battle Logs," and she'll be joining our afternoon excursion to Red Rock Canyon Open Space.

**1:00 PM Afternoon field trip to Red Rock Canyon Open Space (details TBA; back by 4).**

### **Tuesday, 10/2 Parks, Preservation, and Conservation**

Read: Mark Spence, "Yosemite Indians and the National Park Ideal, 1916-1969," *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (1999), pp. 115-132, (C) and Louis Warren, "The Killing of Seely Houk," *The Hunter's Game: Poachers and Conservationists in Twentieth-Century America* (1997), pp. 21-47 (C)

Write: **SWA #3: RRCOS assignment**

**Paper #1 prompt distributed**

### **Wednesday, 10/3 From the Country to the City or, Birds (Animals to Think With)**

Read: Jennifer Price, "Missed Connections: The Passenger Pigeon Extinction" and "When Women Were Women, Men Were Men, and Birds Were Hats," in *Flight Maps: Adventures with Nature in Modern America* (1999), pp. 1-109.

**Thursday, 10/4 NO CLASS TODAY; WORK ON PAPER #1.**

**Paper #1 due to Canvas by 4:00 PM**

### **Friday, 10/5 Conservation and Preservation, 1916-1956**

Read: William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness" (1994), pp. 1-24 (C); Interview with Carolyn Finney and Rue Mapp, *Boom Fall* 2014 Vol. 4 No. 3 (C); Rahawa Haile, "Going it Alone" *Outside Online*, April 11, 2017, <https://www.outsideonline.com/2170266/solo-hiking-appalachian-trail-queer-black-woman>;

In class: Monument Creek walk and discussion

## **Week 3: Justice, Power, Activism**

### **Monday, 10/8 Testing and the Technological Sublime (9:00-10:30 OR 10:30-12:00)**

Read: Rebecca Solnit, *Savage Dreams: A Journey Into the Landscape Wars of the American West*, Part 1, pp. 1-212 (no need to read preface)

Write: **SWA #4: Solnit response**

**Prompt for Paper #2 distributed**

## **Tuesday, 10/9 Nuclear America**

Read: Solnit, *Savage Dreams*, Part 2, pp. 215-389

## **Wednesday, 10/10 Ecology, Mainstream Environmentalism, Earth Day**

Note: you have extra-light reading for today and lighter reading tomorrow and Thursday because I am imagining that you will be spending much of this week working on Paper #2, due Friday afternoon.

Read: Rachel Carson, excerpt from *Silent Spring* (1962) (C); The Wilderness Act of 1964 (C); First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, "The Principles of Environmental Justice" (1991) (C)

Write: map/outline/planning document for Paper 2. Bring to class.

## **Thursday, 10/11 Slow Violence and Environmental Justice**

Read: Mary E. Mendoza, "Treacherous Terrain: Racial Exclusion and Environmental Control at the U.S.-Mexico Border," *Environmental History* 23 (2018): pp. 117–126 (C) **AND one of the following (assigned in class Wednesday):** Gregg Mitman, "Choking Cities" from *Breathing Space: How Allergies Shape our Lives and Our Landscapes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 130-166 (C) OR Elizabeth Hoover, "Environmental Justice, Political Ecology, and the Three Bodies of a Mohawk Community," in *The River is in Us: Fighting Toxics in a Mohawk Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), pp. 1-28 (C).

**7 PM, South Hall Commons:** Andrew Norman Lecture, Dr. Juanita Sundberg, "Cat Fights on the Río & Diabolic Caminos in the Desert: The nature of boundary enforcement in the US-Mexico borderlands"

## **Friday, 10/12 Globalization, Commodification, and Sustainability**

Read: Jennifer Price, "Looking for Nature at the Mall: A Field Guide to the Nature Company" in *Flight Maps: Adventures with Nature in Modern America*, pp.167-206.

In class: possible visit from Ian Johnson, Director of Sustainability

## **Paper #2 due to Canvas by 5:00 PM**

## **Week 4: The Future — or, Fiction, Uncertainty, Hope?**

### **Monday, 10/15 Post-Apocalyptic Colorado (9:00-10:30 OR 10:30-12:00)**

Read: Peter Heller, *The Dog Stars* (ALL)

**Take-home final exam distributed; start working on this!**

### **Tuesday, 10/16 Returning to the Present and Revisiting Environmental Narratives, or, Now What?**

Read: Nathaniel Rich, "The Decade We Almost Stopped Climate Change," *The New York Times*, August 1, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/08/01/magazine/climate-change-losing-earth.html> (read online – there are some multimedia components to this piece) and responses to Rich: Alyssa Battistoni, "How Not to Talk About Climate Change," *Jacobin*, August 3, 2018, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2018/08/new-york-times-losing-earth-response-climate-change/>; Robinson Meyer, "The Problem With *The New York Times'* Big Story on Climate Change," *The Atlantic*, August 1, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2018/08/nyt-mag-nathaniel-rich-climate-change/566525/>

### **Wednesday, 10/17 NO CLASS.**

**FINAL EXAM DUE TO CANVAS WEDNESDAY AT 12 PM.**