

History 291

Politics of the American Environment: Conquest to Climate Change

Spring 2020 MWF 9:05-9:55

Format: Remote/Synchronous on Zoom

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"office hours": I'm quite available! please email to schedule a phone call or Zoom

Course Description:

This course surveys how Americans perceived, developed, and governed the country's natural and ecological resources from its beginning to the present. Beginning with an examination of settler-indigenous relations, the first part of the course examines the processes of colonial conquest, slavery, territorial expansion, the development of constitutional structures, and the formation of the first legal and administrative frameworks for land and water. Moving into the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it explores the environmental and political challenges posed by industrial pollution, unhealthy workplaces, and urban growth, and covers the reasons for the establishment of the first national parks and forests. The twentieth century witnessed the maturation of federal mechanisms for the full utilization and conservation of rivers, agricultural and range land, fisheries, and forests, as well as the birth of a lusty environmental movement, informed by ecological science, that challenged such developmental assumptions and reoriented federal pollution policy in the 1960s and 1970s. In the final stretch, the course covers the key political and policy developments of this modern "environmental era," the new entry points for lawsuits and citizen advocacy, as well as debates over wilderness, pesticides, endangered species, energy, food and farm activism, toxic inequality and environmental justice, and the profoundly partisan divisions provoked by climate change.

This course is reading intensive! Please do not enroll if you are averse to reading and considering long selections of scholarly writing.

Hub Outcomes:

History 291 fulfills the following Hub units: **Social Inquiry I** and **The Individual in Community**. The learning outcomes for these Hub areas are:

- Students will identify and apply major concepts used in the social sciences to explain individual and collective human behavior including, for example, the workings of social groups, institutions, networks, and the role of the individual in them.
- Students will analyze at least one of the dimensions of experience--historical, racial, socio-economic, political, gender, linguistic, religious, or cultural--that inform their own worldviews and beliefs as well as those of other individuals and societies.

- Students will participate respectfully in different communities such as campus, citywide, national, and international groups, and recognize and reflect on the issues relevant to those communities.

You will meet these outcomes by:

- Analyzing how the mechanisms of environmental governance evolved alongside the historical development of American political and social institutions at local, state, and national levels--topics include legislative, executive, and judicial authority; constitutional change and interpretation; the law and politics of administration; interest groups and non-governmental actors; and the shifting political influence of the resource and environmental sciences.
- Understanding how debates over resource distribution and environmental hazards have shaped American politics and government from the country's start to its present, and how the rewards and risks of environmental management have fallen unequally along lines of socio-economic class, race, and gender. Students will grasp how the political frameworks, institutional arrangements, legal strategies, and cultural assumptions of the past have shaped present problems, structured present choices, and formed their own environmental values. They will know at which points in history Americans have addressed declining resources and environmental deterioration, and why not every problem has provoked a policy response.
- Conducting a semester-long "Environmental Presence Project," in which students will select a contemporary environmental issue--from the Boston area, or from another American location (preferably their own home town or region, if they are from the U.S., but this is not required). This "issue" can include any conflict or initiative, involve any campus or institution or neighborhood, and involve any natural or built environment. In stacked stages, students will describe the issue; evaluate media and internet coverage; identify participant and stakeholder positions; design or select informative maps of the site or issue; conduct phone or email interviews with selected participants; compare the controversy's relationship to past environmental beliefs and politics; suggest how future historians would analyze the issue; and reflect on their own presence as an individual observer of contemporary debates--an observer with a developing set of historical skills and a set of personal environmental values.

Required Books:

The assigned books are available at the BU Barnes & Noble, and you are welcome to search for copies elsewhere. **Please plan ahead to make sure you have access to the books; you cannot count on the library.** Students will find the additional assigned readings, lecture outlines, and assignments posted to Blackboard Learn. **This book list does not represent the full range of course readings. Please browse the meeting calendar for the complete selection of readings.**

William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (Hill and Wang, 2003)

Jim Downs, *Sick From Freedom: African-American Illness and Suffering During the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Oxford, 2012)

Andrew G. Kirk, *Doom Towns: The People and Landscapes of Atomic Testing* (Oxford, 2017)

James Turner and Andrew Isenberg, *The Republican Reversal: Conservatives and the Environment from Nixon to Trump* (Harvard, 2018)

Course Requirement	Due Date	% Final Grade
Attendance		Attendance is required for all lectures marked Required . Several class meetings are discussions and these are marked Optional . See statement below for accessing Zoom recordings of required classes. You must ask for permission to miss a required class and explain your reasons.
Reading Guide Questions	Before any class meeting with reading due. When assigned, answers are due over email before class begins. You can have 2 zeroes (two free passes) before it affects your grade.	25% Please note: Reading Questions are still due even if a course meeting is marked Optional.
Take-Home Midterm Exam (will cover material presented in Zoom lectures and the assigned books and readings)	Mar 22	25%
Environmental Presence Project (EPP)	Proposal Feb 19 Summary Mar 12 Maps Mar 29 Interview Report Apr 16 Reflections Essay Apr 28 Class Presentations April Final Project May 4	25% (components graded separately and averaged together)
Take-Home Final Exam (will cover material presented in Zoom lectures and the assigned books and readings)	May 7	25%

Please note: Students must receive a passing grade (C- or above) on each course component to receive a passing grade in the course.

Class Recording and Availability:

Unless a class is marked as **Optional**, students are expected to attend **Required** synchronous Zoom sessions at the class meeting time. These will be a combination of lecture and discussion. Required Zoom sessions will be recorded for the benefit of registered students who are unable to attend remotely due to time zone differences, illness, or other special circumstances. Recorded sessions will be made available to registered students only via their password-protected Blackboard account. Students may not share such sessions with anyone not registered in the course and may certainly not repost them in a public platform.

Late Assignments:

Please contact me well in advance of an assignment's due date if you think that you will have difficulty meeting a particular deadline. **All papers and assignments submitted late without advance permission will automatically be marked down 1/3 a letter grade per day.**

Communication:

I will communicate with the class using email. Please check your BU email account regularly.

Plagiarism Policy/ Academic Integrity:

In order to become critical thinkers and writers, you must complete all stages of your work yourself: taking the words of others, or presenting the ideas of others as your own, not only prohibits you from learning, but also violates the CAS Academic Conduct Code:

<https://www.bu.edu/academics/policies/academic-conduct-code/>

This Code applies to all class assignments, from all the components of the Environmental Presence Project to your midterm and final exams. The minimum penalty for such offenses is to fail the assignment; the more common penalty is to fail the course. Please contact me if you have any questions about plagiarism. We will review proper citation techniques throughout the semester.

Disability:

If you are a student requiring accommodations for a disability, please let me know as soon as possible. The Office of Disability Services can assist you and may be contacted at 617-353-3658.

Lecture Schedule and Reading Assignments:

The reading assignments should be completed on the day they are listed. Readings marked with an asterisk (*) are available on Blackboard Learn.

Jan 25	Required	Introductions and Course Logistics
Jan 27	Required	Environment and Conquest I READING QUESTIONS DUE BEFORE CLASS: <i>Changes in the Land</i> , Preface and chapter 1
Jan 29	Required	Environment and Conquest II READING QUESTIONS DUE BEFORE CLASS: <i>Changes in the Land</i> , chapters 2 & 3

Feb 1	Required	Slavery READING QUESTIONS DUE BEFORE CLASS: <i>Changes in the Land</i> , chapters 4 & 5
Feb 3	Required	Revolution, Ideology, and Continental Expansion READING QUESTIONS DUE BEFORE CLASS: <i>Changes in the Land</i> , chapters 6 & 7
Feb 5	Optional	Discussion of <i>Changes in the Land</i> READING QUESTIONS DUE BEFORE CLASS: <i>Changes in the Land</i> , chapter 8 Guidelines for the EPP Proposal Distributed

- Feb 8 **Required** Constitutional Framework
 READING QUESTIONS DUE BEFORE CLASS:
 * Catherine McNeur, Excerpts from *Taming Manhattan: Environmental Battles in the Antebellum City*
- Feb 10 **Required** Early Industry
 READING QUESTIONS DUE BEFORE CLASS:
Sick From Freedom, Introduction and chapters 1 & 2
- Feb 12 **Optional** Discussion of *Taming Manhattan* and *Sick From Freedom*
 READING QUESTIONS DUE BEFORE CLASS:
Sick From Freedom, chapters 3 & 4

- Feb 16 **Required** Embracing the Wild
 READING QUESTIONS DUE BEFORE CLASS:
Sick From Freedom, chapters 5 & 6, Conclusion & Epilogue
- Feb 17 **No Class** Work on EPP Proposal
 NO READING
- Feb 19 **Optional** Share EPP Topics and Discussion of *Sick From Freedom*
 NO READING
EPP Proposal Due by 4pm

- Feb 22 **Required** Whither the West? Part I
 READING QUESTIONS DUE BEFORE CLASS:
 * Karl Jacoby, Excerpt #1 from *Crimes Against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves, and the Hidden History of American Conservation*
- Feb 24 **Required** Whither the West? Part II
 READING QUESTIONS DUE BEFORE CLASS:
 * Karl Jacoby, Excerpt #2 from *Crimes Against Nature*
- Feb 26 **Optional** Discussion of *Crimes Against Nature*
 READING QUESTIONS DUE BEFORE CLASS:
 *Richard Andrews, "Progressivism: Conservation in the Public Interest,"
 from *Managing the Environment, Managing Ourselves*
Guidelines for the EPP Summary Assignment Distributed

- Mar 1 **Required** Conservation and Preservation
 READING QUESTIONS DUE BEFORE CLASS:
 * Theodore Roosevelt, "Address" (1908)
 * Gifford Pinchot, excerpt from *The Fight for Conservation* (1910)
 * John Muir, "Hetch Hetchy Valley" (1912)
- Mar 3 **Required** Governing Nature, Nurturing Government
 READING QUESTIONS DUE BEFORE CLASS:
 * Karl Jacoby, Excerpt #3 from *Crimes Against Nature*

Mar 5 **Optional** Discussion of Conservation and Preservation
 READING QUESTIONS DUE BEFORE CLASS:
 * Karl Jacoby, Excerpt #4 from *Crimes Against Nature*:

Mar 8 **Required** Watering the West
 NO READING: Work on EPP
 Mar 10 **Required** Cleaning Up the City
 NO READING: Work on EPP
 Mar 12 **Optional** Share EPP progress with class
 NO READING
EPP Summary Due by 4pm
Take-Home Midterm Distributed

Mar 15 **Required** Progressives and Pollution
 READING QUESTIONS DUE BEFORE CLASS:
 * Harold Platt, "Jane Addams and the Ward Boss Revisited"
 Mar 17 **Required** Hazards of the Job
 READING QUESTIONS DUE BEFORE CLASS:
 * Gerald Markowitz and David Rosner, Excerpt #1 from *Deceit and Denial*:
The Deadly Politics of Industrial Pollution
 Mar 19 **No Class** Work on Midterm
 READING QUESTIONS DUE BEFORE CLASS:
 * Gerald Markowitz and David Rosner, Excerpt #2 from *Deceit and Denial*

Mar 22 **Required** The New Deal
 NO READING
Take-Home Midterm Due by 4pm
Guidelines for the EPP Maps and Interview Report Distributed
 Mar 24 **Required** *The Plow That Broke the Plains*
 FILM RESPONSE DUE AFTER CLASS MEETS
 Mar 26 **Required** World War II/Atomic Age
 READING QUESTIONS DUE BEFORE CLASS:
Doom Towns, Introduction and chapters 1 & 2 of "The Graphic History"; be sure to refer to the "Cast of Characters" (xxxix-xlii)

Mar 29 **Required** From Conservation to Environment
 READING QUESTIONS DUE BEFORE CLASS:
Doom Towns, chapters 3-6 of "The Graphic History"
EPP Maps due by 4pm

Mar 31 **No class: BU-Mandated "Wellness Day"**

Apr 2 **Required** Pesticides and Politics
 READING QUESTIONS DUE BEFORE CLASS:
Doom Towns, chapters 7-9 of "The Graphic History"

Apr 5 **Required** The Sixties
 READING QUESTIONS DUE BEFORE CLASS:
 * Christopher Sellers, Excerpts from *Crabgrass Crucible: Suburban Nature and the Rise of Environmentalism in Twentieth-Century America*

Apr 7 **Required** Nationalizing Environmental Policy
 READING QUESTIONS DUE BEFORE CLASS:
 * Finis Dunaway, Excerpts from *Seeing Green: The Use and Abuse of American Environmental Images*

Apr 9 **Required** NEPA and Citizen Suits
 READING QUESTIONS DUE BEFORE CLASS:
 * Jennifer Thomson, Excerpts from *The Wild and the Toxic: American Environmentalism and the Politics of Health*
Guidelines for the EPP Reflections Essay Distributed

Apr 12 **Required** Population Politics
 READING QUESTIONS DUE BEFORE CLASS
The Republican Reversal, Introduction and chapter 1

Apr 14 **Required** Acting for Endangered Species
 READING QUESTIONS DUE BEFORE CLASS
The Republican Reversal, chapter 2

Guidelines for EPP Class Presentations and Final Projects Distributed

Apr 16 **Required** Oil, Coal, and Energy Since the 1970s
 READING QUESTIONS DUE BEFORE CLASS
The Republican Reversal, chapter 3
EPP Interview Report Due by 4pm

Apr 21 **Required** Environmental Justice
 READING QUESTIONS DUE BEFORE CLASS
The Republican Reversal, chapter 4 and conclusion

Apr 23 **Required** Class Presentations of EPP

Apr 26 **Required** Class Presentations of EPP
Take-Home Final Distributed

Apr 28 **Required** Class Presentations of EPP
EPP Reflections Essay Due by 4pm

Tues May 4: EPP Final Project Due by 4pm

Thurs Dec 17: Take-Home Final Due by 4pm