The American Environment  
Hist 341-01

Instructor: Dr. Timothy Sistrunk  
Office: 210 Trinity Hall  Office hours: MW 3:00-5:00 T 2:00-3:30 and by appointment  
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Required Reading:
Steinberg, Ted. Down to Earth, Nature’s Role in American History, 2nd ed.  
Isenberg, Andrew C. The Destruction of the Bison  
Rachel Carson. Silent Spring

Purpose and Objectives:

This course is designed to give the student an appreciation of the many ways that Americans have interacted with the natural world and the effects they have had upon it. Different conceptions of nature will also be explored as they have been applied to social, political and economic relationships over time.

To this end, the class will consist of lectures, films, slide presentations, student presentations and discussions. Our range of inquiry will be dictated, especially, by the original documents and secondary literature that we will be reading, however, throughout the course, there will be ample opportunity to explore students special interests.

Note: This course is an approved upper division theme course for theme D.

Grading:

Standard Grading scale (100-90% = A; 89-80% = B etc...)

Paper 20%, Examinations 70%, Participation 10%,  
(1000 pts. total)

Research Paper: The student will explore a topic that they have selected dealing with a narrow question about the American environment. Future K-12 instructors should select a topic treated in the California curriculum. Your topic must have the approval of the instructor (before your summary statement is submitted).

The paper project will be worth 165 pts. The paper and the abstract should be typed and double spaced. Grades will be based on the student's ability to use original sources to support an interpretation, his or her use of library materials and overall presentation (grammar, organization, spelling). A written statement defining your paper topic (worth 5 pts.) will be due in class on September 22. The paper abstract (30 pts.) will be due in class October 20. The paper itself will be due in class on December 8. Late topic statements will lose credit and papers and abstracts will lose ½ of a letter grade each day that they are not turned in after these dates.
**Participation:** Be active, alive, awake! Discuss works intelligently, bring up questions in class, and show that you have thought about the reading. Class writings, homework, presentations and discussions will also be evaluated as will overall class etiquette. **Excessive absences will harm your grade.**

**Examinations** The first exam will cover weeks 1-4; the second exam will cover weeks 5-10; the third exam will cover weeks 11-15. Multiple choice, short answer and essay selection. A study sheet will be provided.

The Department of History has identified this course as addressing the desired Student Learning Outcome of promoting students’ abilities to use and cite secondary and primary historical evidence effectively. The abstract and the paper will particularly address this goal.

*** You must have a medical excuse from the student health center or on letterhead paper from your doctor if you miss an exam for medical reasons. If something unforeseen happens make-ups will be offered at a time convenient for the instructor. There are no make-ups of make-ups.

** Any student who has a disability of any kind that might prevent the fullest expression of her or his abilities should contact me the first week of the class so that we can discuss class requirements. Likewise, any student who foresees conflicts with assignments because of religious holidays should discuss these with me the first week of class.

Schedule (Subject to Change):

| Week 1 | (August 25, 27) | Introduction, What is Environmental History
|        | *Earth, Preface, Prologue* |

| Week 2 | (September 3) | Native/ Colonial New England
|        | *Earth, Chapters 1, 2* |

| Week 3 | (September 8, 10) | Colonial Impacts
|        | *Earth, Chapter 3
| Cronon |

| Week 4 | (September 15, 17) | Commodification
|        | *Earth, Chapter 4
| Cronon |

| Week 5 | (September 22, 24) | Southern Contrasts
| **********Topic Statement due Sept. 22********** |
| **********Exam Sept. 22********** |
| *Earth, Chapter 5* |

| Week 6 | (Sept. 29, October 1) | Bison Decline
|        | *Isenberg* |

| Week 7 | (October 6, 8) | Great Central Valley |
Welcome to Upper Division Theme D: Environmental Issues

The Environmental Issues Theme aims to achieve these central goals and objectives:

- to impart an understanding of and an appreciation for the place of the human species in the global ecosystem,
- to examine the ways that the environment has influenced human behavior,
- to provide skills and information necessary to assess human environmental impacts and
- to pursue ways to maintain Earth’s life-support systems.
In order to provide unity and coherence, each course in the Environmental Issues Upper Division Theme has been designed by theme instructors in consultation with one another to employ a core set of concepts, theories, issues, pedagogical approaches and activities.

Concepts/Theories common to all theme courses:

- Interconnectivity – the ecological principle: highlighting the interrelationships that characterize the natural order and the place of humans in that order
- Unintended Consequences – the precautionary principle: caution is the best policy when altering the environment, due to the difficulty of foreseeing all the consequences of human activity
- Plurality of Worldviews – value pluralism: diverse interpretations of the relationships between humans and nature
- Disciplinary Perspectives – problems of evidence: what counts as knowledge and what counts as evidence depend on criteria that are often discipline specific

I. Issues common to all theme courses:

- Resource Use (Food, Water, Energy, Shelter)
- Human Population / Consumption
- Biodiversity Loss
- Global Warming / Climate Change

Approaches common to all theme courses:

- Common vocabulary – employing and explaining key terms across theme courses, for example, “ecological consciousness, biocentrism and anthropocentrism.”
- Spirit of Hope – A solution orientation so students emerge from theme courses with ideas and direction to address humanity’s current environmental crises
- California – Reference to the special environmental problems and opportunities presented by California’s unique social, political, economic and ecological identity
- Sustainability – Attention to the broader environmental questions raised by human development as concerns the economy, social equity, and the environmental consequences of human development

**Activities common to all theme courses:**

- Ecological Footprint – activities dealing with the impacts of various human production and consumption patterns
- Civic Engagement – projects designed to take students outside the classroom to make an impact on the community with what they have discovered in class