

HIST 5397: American Environmental History

University of Texas at Tyler

Monday: 6:00-8:45 pm

Room: CAS 257

Fall 2023

Instructor: Prof. Matt Stith

Email: mstith@uttyler.edu

Office: CAS 127

Office Hours: Monday, 1:00-4:00pm; Or by appointment.

Course Description:

A little over half of the course will center on how historians have interpreted American environmental history with special attention to the field's interpretive growth from the 1970s to present. The remainder of the semester will be devoted to researching, writing, and talking about an American environmental history topic of your choice -or- crafting a detailed teaching portfolio.

Important Note:

I encourage you to meet with me regularly to discuss or clarify discussion or reading—or to talk about the historical profession in general. My job (and satisfaction) is as much to work with students on an individual basis as it is to lecture and facilitate discussion. Please keep this in mind throughout the semester.

Required Reading:

- Barbara J. Fields, "So you want to be a historian?" *Washington Post*, November 3, 1991. [[On Canvas](#)]
- William Cronon, "Why the Past Matters," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 18, No. 1 (Autumn 2000): 2-13. [[On Canvas](#)]
- Linda Nash, "The Agency of Nature or the Nature of Agency?" *Environmental History* 10, No. 1 (January 2005): 67-69. [[On Canvas](#)]
- Alfred W. Crosby, Jr. *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492*, 30th Anniv. Ed. (1973; Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003) [[Free eBook](#)]
- William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England*, 20th Anniv. Ed. (1983; New York: Hill and Wang, 2003) [[On 2-hour reserve in LIB](#)]
- Dan Flores, *Wild New World: The Epic Story of Animals and People in America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2022)
- Judith Carney, *In the Shadow of Slavery: Africa's Botanical Legacy in the Atlantic World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011) [[Free eBook](#)]
- Megan Kate Nelson, *Saving Yellowstone: Exploration and Preservation in Reconstruction America* (New York: Scribner, 2022) [[Free eBook](#)]
- Donald Worster, *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s*, 25th Anniv. Ed. (1979; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) [[Free eBook and 2-hour reserve in LIB](#)]
- Nancy C. Unger, *Beyond Nature's Housekeepers: American Women in Environmental History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012) [[Free eBook](#)]
- Aldo Leopold, *Sand County Almanac: And Sketches Here and There* (1949; New York: Oxford University Press, 2020) [[Free eBook](#)]

Recommended Reading:

- Ted Steinberg, *Down to Earth: Nature's Role in American History*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018) [[Older edition on 2-hour reserve in LIB](#)]

Reviews:

Please write a brief review (550-750 words) of each book in which you craft a clear, thoughtful, and persuasive analysis that engages the book's arguments, evidence, and persuasiveness. Each review is worth 50 points.

Research Paper -OR- Teaching Portfolio

You have the following options:

- 1) Research and write a 5,000+ word (exclusive of footnotes) primary source-based research paper about a topic¹ of your choice within the confines of American environmental history pending instructor approval).
- 2) Create a teaching portfolio focused on American environmental history in which you include an annotated bibliography (20+ sources), a detailed syllabus, *two* outlined lectures (4+ bullet-point pages each) with citations and PowerPoint designed for a 55-minute class, and a brief essay (600-1,000 words) in which you explain in narrative form your course's goals and relevance.
- 3) Do neither and lose 100 points. ;)

Presentation:

Please prepare and deliver a presentation based on your research paper or teaching portfolio. It should last 30-40 minutes. Research presentations should clearly identify the paper's argument(s), where it fits into the historiographical framework, three or so primary-source based stories you use as evidence, and a discussion for how you might adapt this for a future conference presentation and/or article-length publication. For teaching portfolio lectures, the content must be suited for a junior/senior level college course *and* include a historiographical discussion at the end. Please also discuss how you might incorporate elements of your lecture (and portfolio as a whole) into future courses you teach in high school or college. Presentations are worth 100 points and will be graded for content and clarity. Audio/Visual tools in addition to handouts/outlines are highly encouraged.

Attendance and Participation:

Active and informed participation is mandatory. Poor, scurrilous, hostile, or no discussion (outside formal presentations) will result in the loss of a letter grade. Remember **especially in academia**: Thoughtful, brilliant, and successful people admit ignorance and yearn for understanding while supporting and championing their fellow scholars; pretentious, egotistical, and unsuccessful people denigrate other scholars and declare understanding to conceal their small minds and smaller self-esteem. Be the former. Five percent will be subtracted from your *final* grade for each unexcused absence. One simply cannot miss graduate classes.

Point Breakdown:

Presentation:	100	Grade Scale:	
Reviews: (8x12.5pts)	100	350-315:	A
Research Paper/Portfolio:	100	314-280:	B
<u>Attendance/Participation:</u>	<u>50</u>	279-245:	C
Total:	350		

Academic Honesty:

Cheating of any kind, including plagiarism *and* any AI/ChatGPT usage, will result in immediate failure of the class and possibly further action from the University of Texas at Tyler. Plagiarism, put simply, is using another's work as your own without proper citation or usage. This includes everything from copying and pasting from the Internet to failing to cite an idea from another source that you put in your own words. I strongly recommend reviewing the university policy for cheating and academic dishonesty at the following website:

<http://www.uttyler.edu/judicialaffairs/>

¹ Pending instructor approval.

Course Schedule

- **Week 1 (8/21)**
 - o Class Introduction
 - o Read Fields, Cronon (article), and Nash
- **Week 2 (8/28)**
 - o State of the Field; Researching and Writing American History; Crafting Proposals, Structuring Papers; Being a Professional Historian; Careers in History and Other Things
 - o Talk about Fields, Cronon (article), and Nash
 - o Start Reading Crosby
- **Week 3 (9/4) Labor Day—No Class**
 - o Crosby Review Due, 11:59pm on Tuesday, 9/5
 - o Start Reading Cronon (book)
- **Week 4 (9/11)**
 - o Discuss Crosby AND Cronon
 - o Turn-in Cronon Review (11:59pm)
 - o Start Reading Flores
- **Week 5 (9/18)**
 - o Discuss Flores
 - o Research Proposal Due (11:59pm on Tuesday, Sept. 20, on Canvas)
 - o Start Reading Carney
- **Week 6 (9/25)**
 - o Discuss Carney
 - o Start Reading Nelson
- **Week 7 (10/2)**
 - o Discuss Nelson
 - o Start Reading Worster
- **Week 8 (10/9)**
 - o Discuss Worster
 - o Start Reading Unger
- **Week 9 (10/16)**
 - o Discuss Unger
 - o Start Reading Leopold
- **Week 10 (10/23)**
 - o Discuss Leopold and Nature and Philosophy and etc.
- **Weeks 11-13 (10/30; 11/6; 11/13)**
 - o We will meet and discuss research papers, teaching portfolios, and listen to lectures.
- **Week 13 (11/20) THANKSGIVING**
- **Week 14 (11/27)**
 - o We will meet and discuss research papers + teaching portfolios, and we'll listen to lectures.
- **Final Research Paper/Portfolio Due by 11:59pm on Thursday, Dec. 7, on Canvas.**