

ENVI 229 | HIST 264  
Spring 2020

## Environmental History

Time: Tuesday / Thursday 9:55 - 11:10 am  
Class Location: Center for Envi Studies Room 104  
Instructor: Professor Laura Martin  
Office: Environmental Center Room 217  
Office Hours: Arrange via email  
Email: LJM4@williams.edu



*Postcard, c. 1901, Williamstown Historical Museum Digitized Collections*

## Course Description

This course is an introduction to Environmental History: the study of how people have shaped environments, how environments have shaped human histories, and how cultural change and material change are intertwined. As such, it challenges traditional divides between the humanities and the sciences. Taking U.S. environmental history as our focus, we will strive to understand the historical roots of contemporary environmental problems, such as species extinction, pollution, and climate change. We will take field trips to learn to read landscapes for their histories and to examine how past environments are represented in museum exhibits, digital projects, and physical landscapes. And we will develop original arguments and essays based on archival research. It is imperative that we understand this history if we are to make informed and ethical environmental decisions at the local, national, and global scale.

## Course Organization

This class meets twice per week for 75 minutes. Class time will include facilitated discussions, in-class assignments, and field trips. Please note that one field trip falls outside of regular class time: we will drive to Mystic Seaport on the night of 5/01 and return the night of 5/02. These activities are required to pass the course, so please check your schedule now and resolve any conflicts.

Readings listed on the schedule below must be completed before each class meeting. Come prepared to talk about each reading in detail, hard copy in hand.

Please dedicate one notebook in which to keep reading, class, and fieldtrip notes. You may be called upon to speak from these notes.

## Office Hours

To sign up to visit office hours, please email me. Come to office hours with questions about readings, lectures, the environmental studies program, or just to chat.

## Required Texts

The required books, listed below, are available at the Williams bookstore and online. The course reader is available for pick-up from the Center for Environmental Studies.

- William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (Hill and Wang, 2003 [1983]).
- Tom Wessels, *Forest Forensics: A Field Guide to Reading the Forested Landscape* (Countryman Press, 2010).
- Lisa Brooks, *The Common Pot: The Recovery of Native Space in the Northeast* (University of Minnesota Press, 2008).
- Andrew Lipman, *The Saltwater Frontier: Indians and the Contest for the American Coast* (Yale University Press, 2015).
- Bathsheba Demuth, *Floating Coast: An Environmental History of the Bering Strait* (Norton, 2019).
- Edmund Russell, *Evolutionary History: Uniting History and Biology to Understand Life on Earth* (Cambridge University Press, 2011).
- Sunil Amrith, *Unruly Waters: How Rains, Rivers, Coasts, and Seas Have Shaped Asia's History* (Basic Books, 2018).

## Assignments

The relative weight of assignments is summarized below. Students must complete all course assignments in order to pass the course. Each component of your final score is briefly described in this syllabus and more detailed guidelines will be distributed in class.

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>Percent of final grade</u>
Participation	20%
Response papers	5% each (30% total)
Workshop 1	5%
Workshop 2	5%
Annotated Bibliography	5%
Final Paper	30%
Reflection Paper	5%

### Participation

Attendance is required. Absences or habitual lateness will decrease your final grade. You cannot pass this class if you miss more than 3 class meetings.

Participation encompasses in-class writing assignments and active, regular contributions to class discussions. Class discussions are a collaborative process. Participation that falls within the “A” range shows me that you are keeping up with the work, thinking through the issues that each set of texts raises, and able to pose questions that take our conversation in new and worthwhile directions. It also shows your willingness to listen, to consider other students’ points of view, and to respond to them respectfully.

### Response Papers

Over the semester you are required to write 6 response papers (approx. 500 words each). Response papers serve four important functions. Besides preparing you well for in-class discussion, they are an occasion to practice active reading: reading in which you ask questions as you read and put yourself into conversation with the author. They also help me gauge how well you comprehend the material. Finally, a response paper begins to formulate the questions that a longer analytical essay might address.

These papers are due in hard copy at the end of the class period to which they refer and they will not be accepted late. Further instructions will be distributed in class.

## Research Project

During the semester, you will develop and execute an independent research project. Each student will work directly with primary and secondary sources. In-class workshops and an annotated bibliography accomplish preparatory work for the project. Further instructions for each step of the research process will be distributed in class.

## Reflection Paper

At the end of the semester you will write a final reflection paper. It should contain a thoughtful and detailed examination of your final project and your class participation.

The letter should address the following questions:

- How did your understanding of environmental history change throughout the semester?
- What are the strengths of your final project? If you had more time to work on it, what would you improve? What questions are you left with?
- How did your final project contribute to your understanding of the course?
- How does your final project contribute to the field of environmental history?
- What topics in environmental history might you be interested in exploring in the future?

Your self-evaluation has two audiences. I will of course read it carefully; but you are, yourself, an important audience. This is your chance to reflect on how the texts, our discussions, and your research have affected your thinking.

## **Policies**

### Learning Community

In this course we will discuss issues regarding personal and communal identity, including race, ethnicity, class, gender, and religion. It is essential that we all – and at all times – cultivate mutual respect. We will listen to one another generously. We will also speak with total respect for our listeners. When we exchange ideas in this way, disagreement will become a welcome and valuable part of our conversations and our debates will be lively, provocative, and relevant. The classroom is a place for vigorous, thoughtful, and respectful debate. If at any time you feel limited in your ability to express your ideas openly, please let me know immediately.

### Late Work

Late written assignments will receive no credit. This includes reading response sheets. If a medical, family, or other emergency occurs that may prevent you from completing an assignment on time, please talk with me about the circumstances as soon as you can, and we will discuss resources for helping you to complete your work on time. I will grant deadline extensions only in cases of extreme emergency, which are determined at my discretion.

### Grades

The course grading system coincides with the Williams College system of grades, where A=excellent; B=good; C=fair; D=passing; and E=failing. Note that the grades I assign represent my evaluation of the work you turn in. They in no way indicate my opinion of you as a person or the views you hold and share.

### Honor Code

Please re-acquaint yourself with the college Honor Code (<http://sites.williams.edu/honor-system/>). Williams takes charges of cheating and plagiarism very seriously, and either can result in your dismissal. Cheating is taking advantage of the work of others. Plagiarism is representing the work of others as your own without giving appropriate credit. If you are uncertain how the Honor Code applies to your work in this course—or if you are unsure how to distinguish between legitimate collaboration with your colleagues and academic dishonesty—please ask me.

### Electronics

Unless you make special arrangements with me at the beginning of the semester, laptops are not allowed in class. Cell phones must be in airplane mode (not vibrate) and put away.

## **Resources**

Students with disabilities of any kind who may need accommodations for this course are encouraged to contact Dr. GL Wallace (Director of Accessible Education) at 413-597-4672.

Students experiencing mental or physical health challenges that are significantly affecting their academic work or well-being are encouraged to contact me and to speak with a dean so we can help you find the right resources. The deans can be reached at 413-597-4171.

As a Williams student, you can use the free tutoring services provided by the Peer Academic Support network. Step-by-step instructions for scheduling tutoring sessions are on the Peer Tutoring Program webpage (<http://academic-resources.williams.edu/peer-tutor-program/>).

The Writing Workshop (<http://writing-programs.williams.edu/writing-workshop/>) is available to all students free of charge. Drop in sessions are located in the foyer of Stetson-Sawyer library. You can also schedule hour-long appointments through the online scheduler. The Writing Workshop also offers a Writing Partner service to support students who may need more attention and guidance than can be provided within a regular Writing Workshop session.

Hale Polebaum-Freeman is the library liaison for environmental studies and is also available to provide guidance. They can be reached at [hop1@williams.edu](mailto:hop1@williams.edu).

## Course Schedule

Date	Topic	Readings	Assignments Due
WEDS 2/05	Introduction		
TUES 2/11	What is Environmental History?	<input type="checkbox"/> William Cronon, “A Place for Stories: Nature, History, and Narrative,” <i>The Journal of American History</i> 78 (1992): 1347-1376.  <input type="checkbox"/> Sunil Amrith, “The Shape of Modern Asia” and “Rivers Divided, Rivers Dammed,” in <i>Unruly Waters: How Rains, Rivers, Coasts, and Seas Have Shaped Asia’s History</i> (Basic Books, 2018), p. 1-16, 175-228.	<input type="checkbox"/> Response Paper
THURS 2/13	Exploring the Field	<input type="checkbox"/> Tom Wessels, <i>Forest Forensics: A Field Guide to Reading the Forested Landscape</i> (Countryman Press, 2010).  FIELD TRIP: Hopkins Forest	
TUES 2/18	Archives	<input type="checkbox"/> “Why Do Research?” and “Interpreting Primary Sources” – excerpts from Wayne Booth <i>et al.</i> , <i>The Craft of Research</i> (University of Chicago Press, 2008) & William Cronon <i>et al.</i> , <i>Learning to Do Historical Research</i> (online, 2008).  FIELD TRIP: Meet at Williams Special Collections, Sawyer Library	
THURS 2/20	Changes in the Land	<input type="checkbox"/> William Cronon, <i>Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England</i> (Hill and Wang, 2003 [1983]): xv-81.	<input type="checkbox"/> Response Paper

TUES 2/25	Native Space	<input type="checkbox"/> Lisa Brooks, "Alnôbawôgan, Wlôgan, Awikhigan: Entering Native Space," in <i>The Common Pot: The Recovery of Native Space in the Northeast</i> (University of Minnesota Press, 2008): 1-50.	<input type="checkbox"/> Response Paper
THURS 2/27	Primary Sources		Workshop 1: Primary Sources
TUES 3/03	Agricultural Connections	<input type="checkbox"/> Judith Carney, "Landscapes of Technology Transfer: Rice Cultivation and African Continuities," <i>Technology and Culture</i> 37 (1996) 5-20.  <input type="checkbox"/> Edward Melillo, "The First Green Revolution: Debt Peonage and the Making of the Nitrogen Fertilizer Trade, 1840-1930," <i>American Historical Review</i> 117 (2012): 1028-1060.	<input type="checkbox"/> Response Paper
THURS 3/05	Industrializing Water	<input type="checkbox"/> Theodore Steinberg, "Control of Water," in <i>Nature Incorporated: Industrialization and the Waters of New England</i> (Cambridge University Press, 1991 [2004]): 50-76.  <input type="checkbox"/> Michael Rawson, "Constructing Water," in <i>Eden on the Charles: The Making of Boston</i> (Harvard University Press, 2010): 75-128.	<input type="checkbox"/> Response Paper
TUES 3/10	Energy Transitions	<input type="checkbox"/> Chris Jones, "A Landscape of Energy Abundance: Anthracite Coal Canals and the Roots of American Fossil Fuel Dependence, 1820-1860," <i>Environmental History</i> 15 (2010): 449-484.  <input type="checkbox"/> Brian Black, "Oil for Living: Petroleum and American Conspicuous Consumption,"	<input type="checkbox"/> Response Paper

		<i>Journal of American History</i> 99 (2012): 40-50.	
THURS 3/12	Energy Transitions	<input type="checkbox"/> Timothy Mitchell, “Carbon Democracy,” <i>Economy and Society</i> 38 (2009): 399-432.	<input type="checkbox"/> Response Paper
TUES 3/17	Making Global Environments	<input type="checkbox"/> Megan Black, “Prospecting the World: Landsat and the Search for Minerals in Space Age Globalization,” <i>Journal of American History</i> 106 (2019): 97-120.	<input type="checkbox"/> Response Paper
THURS 3/19	NO CLASS		
TUES 3/24	NO CLASS		
THURS 3/26	NO CLASS		
TUES 3/31	NO CLASS		
THURS 4/02	NO CLASS		
TUES 4/07	Comparative Histories	<input type="checkbox"/> Bathsheba Demuth, <i>Floating Coast: An Environmental History of the Bering Strait</i> (Norton, 2019).	<input type="checkbox"/> Response Paper
THURS 4/09	NO CLASS	<input type="checkbox"/> “Assembling an Argument” and “Constructing Historical Narrative” – excerpts from Wayne Booth <i>et al.</i> , <i>The Craft of Research: Third Edition</i> (University of Chicago Press, 2008) &	

		<p>William Cronon <i>et al.</i>, <i>Learning to Do Historical Research</i> (online, 2008).</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> “Developing Research Questions” and “Identifying Secondary Sources” – excerpts from Wayne Booth <i>et al.</i>, <i>The Craft of Research: Third Edition</i> (University of Chicago Press, 2008) &amp; William Cronon <i>et al.</i>, <i>Learning to Do Historical Research: A Primer for Environmental Historians and Others</i> (online, 2008).</p>	
TUES 4/14	Research	Workshop 2: Critical Reading	
THURS 4/16	Evolutionary History	<input type="checkbox"/> Edmund Russell, <i>Evolutionary History: Uniting History and Biology to Understand Life on Earth</i> (Cambridge University Press, 2011).	<input type="checkbox"/> Response Paper
TUES 4/21	Networks	<input type="checkbox"/> Sean Kheraj, “The Great Epizootic of 1872-73: Networks of Animal Disease in North American Urban Environments,” <i>Environmental History</i> 23 (2018): 495-521.	<input type="checkbox"/> Response Paper
THURS 4/23	Networks	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Ingrid Burrington, “How Railroad History Shaped Internet History,” <i>The Atlantic</i>, 4 November 2015.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Shannon Mattern, “Extract and Preserve: Underground Repositories for a Posthuman Future?” <i>New Geographies</i> 09 (2017).</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Christopher Jones, “Building More Just Energy Infrastructure: Lessons from the Past,” <i>Science as Culture</i> 22 (2013): 157-163.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> Response Paper

TUES 4/28		FIELD TRIP: North Adams	
THURS 4/30	Maritime History	<input type="checkbox"/> Andrew Lipman, <i>The Saltwater Frontier: Indians and the Contest for the American Coast</i> (Yale University Press, 2015): ix-124.	<input type="checkbox"/> Response Paper
FRI 5/01 - SAT 5/02		FIELD TRIP: Williams Mystic	
TUES 5/05	Legacies of Pollution	<input type="checkbox"/> Hugh Gorman, "Brownfields in Historical Context," <i>Environmental Practice</i> 5 (2003): 21-24.  <input type="checkbox"/> Elizabeth Pillsbury, "All at Last Returns to the Sea: Land Use and Water Quality on Southern New England's Shore," in Blake Harrison and Richard Judd (eds.), <i>A Landscape History of New England</i> (MIT Press, 2011): 181-196.	<input type="checkbox"/> Response Paper
THURS 5/07	Legacies of Pollution	<input type="checkbox"/> Rebecca Altman, "Time Bombing the Future," <i>Aeon</i> , 2 January 2019  <input type="checkbox"/> Kate Brown, <i>Manual for Survival: A Chernobyl Guide to the Future</i> (W.W. Norton, 2019): 1-27.	<input type="checkbox"/> Response Paper
TUES 5/12	The Anthropocene	<input type="checkbox"/> Julianne Warren, "Huia Echoes," and Josh Wodak, "Artificial Coral Reef," in Mitman <i>et al.</i> , eds., <i>Future Remains: A Cabinet of Curiosities for the Anthropocene</i> (U Chicago Press, 2018).	
THURS 5/14	Reflections		

SAT 5/23			Final Paper Due
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