

**HISTORY/GEOGRAPHY 932**  
**TOPICS IN AMERICAN ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY:**  
**DESIGNING A COURSE ON THE MAKING OF THE AMERICAN LANDSCAPE**

**Instructor:** Bill Cronon, 443 Science Hall.

**Phone:** 265-6023; this has an answering machine, and I'll try to reply to messages as quickly as I can.

**No calls to my home phone number, please.** Your best bet for a quick reply is almost always to email me rather than phone, at [wcronon@wisc.edu](mailto:wcronon@wisc.edu).

**Office Hours:** 9:45-11:45am, Wednesday mornings, first come, first served, at 5103 Humanities, or at other times by appointment (meetings by appointment are generally in 443 Science Hall). I would prefer to see you during regular office hours, but will schedule other times if necessary. Please don't just stop by my office if you need to see me at times other than my office hours, however; email me first to make an appointment.

**Course Website:** Bill's website is at [www.williamcronon.net](http://www.williamcronon.net), and the page for this course can be found at <http://www.williamcronon.net/courses/932/>. Be sure to bookmark and keep track of this link, since the page will have links and other materials helpful for students in the course. If you happen to lose track of it, a Google search of "cronon 932" will likely yield this page as the top hit.

**Course Description**

The seminar is a one-semester introduction to some of the most interesting recent literature of American environmental history, read principally for the theories and methodologies it can offer scholars and scientists as well as its implications for contemporary environmental politics and management. The seminar assumes no previous coursework in the field, and students with a wide variety of backgrounds and disciplines are encouraged to participate. We will read a number of the most important works that have been produced in the field during the past twenty years, with an eye to exploring the different themes and methods that have shaped this body of scholarship. We will concentrate mainly on what might be called the "second and third generations" of writing in environmental history, trying to assess how the field has evolved and where it might be headed in the future, but will also review some classic texts to see how the field has changed over time. Our goal will be to evaluate these texts with a critical but sympathetic eye, trying to discover ways in which their approaches might be helpful to our own work. At the same time, we'll use this literature to think about the more general process of conceiving, conducting, and writing research about the past (whether within the disciplines of history, geography, ecology, environmental studies, natural resource management, or what have you) trying to gain as much practical wisdom as we can about how to do theses and dissertations.

As is typical of the field itself, we will be approaching environmental history from at least three different angles. First, we will ask how various human activities have historically depended on and interacted with the natural world: how have natural resources shaped the patterns of human life in different regions of the continent? Second, we will try to trace the shifting attitudes toward nature held by Americans during different periods of their nation's history: how have the human inhabitants of this continent perceived and attached meanings to the world around them, and how have those attitudes shaped their cultural and political lives? Finally, we will ask how human attitudes and activities have worked together to reshape the American landscape: how have people altered the world around them, and what have been the consequences of those alterations for natural and human communities alike?

We will approach these broad questions not through a chronological survey of all American history, but rather through an eclectic series of case studies focusing on different approaches and questions that have guided environmental historians in their work. (If you're interested in a more chronological survey of the field, you're encouraged to take or audit History/Geography/Environmental Studies 460, my environmental history lecture course, or History/Geography/Environmental Studies 469, which takes a more historical geographical approach to the same subject.) Among other topics, we will discuss the concept "nature" as it relates to this field; the risks and opportunities of using scientific research to make claims about past environmental change, and, conversely, the risks and opportunities of bringing historical perspectives to scientific scholarship; different narrative and metanarrative strategies that have organized environmental storytelling; the political history of conservation and environmentalism; the relation of environmental history to social and cultural history; and possible contributions that environmental history might make to contemporary environmental controversies and policy-making.

For all students, one of our foremost concerns will be to explore the problems and opportunities this field offers for research and teaching so that seminar participants can work in it themselves if they so choose. Finally, because environmental history has been unusually successful among academic fields in reaching sizable public audiences for its work, we will spend a fair amount of time discussing the practice of science and scholarship in the public realm, thinking about ways to communicate effectively with audiences beyond the academy.

### ***Course Reading Assignments***

Reading assignments are quite extensive, averaging 200-300 or more pages per week, but are generally not difficult and have been chosen as much as possible for their readability. Required readings are listed in the weekly outline that follows; most are articles and book excerpts.

***Note that there is an all-day class field trip scheduled on Sunday, October 29, from 8am-6pm.***

## **SYLLABUS, READINGS, AND HOMEWORK**

NB: Additional reading and writing assignments will be added after initial class discussions of how we would like to focus our work for the semester.

### **September 12: Introductory**

Organization and requirements of the course, introductions, discussion of syllabus and options regarding written work.

### **September 19: What Is Environmental History and How Should We Do It?**

Raymond Williams, "Ideas of Nature," in *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (1980; original essay 67-85).

Raymond Williams, "Nature," *Keywords*, 184-89.

*Oxford English Dictionary*, entry on "Nature."

William Cronon, "Kennebec Journey: The Paths Out of Town," in Cronon, Miles, Gitlin, *Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America's Western Past*, 28-51.

William Cronon, "Getting Ready to Do History," *Carnegie Essays on the Doctorate*, 2004.

Barbara Fields, "So You Want to Be a Historian," *Washington Post*, 11/3/1991.

Carl O. Sauer, "Foreword to Historical Geography," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 31 (March 1941), 1-24.

John Brinckerhoff Jackson, "By Way of Conclusion: How to Study the Landscape," in Jackson, *The Necessity for Ruins and Other Topics* (1980), 113-26.

Donald Worster et al., "Environmental History: A Round Table," *Journal of American History* (March 1990), 1087-1147.

Paul Sutter et al., "State of the Field: American Environmental History," *Journal of American History*, 100:1 (June 2013), 94-148.

Richard White, "American Environmental History: The Development of a New Historical Field," *Pacific Historical Review*, 54 (1985), pp. 297-335 (read for main themes).

Richard White, "Environmental History: Watching a Historical Field Mature," *Pacific Historical Review* 70:1 (Feb. 2001), 103-11.

Gregg Mitman, "In Search of Health: Landscape and Disease in American Environmental History," *Environmental History* 10:2 (April 2005), 184-210.

### **September 26: Big Stories**

Jared Diamond, "The Worst Mistake in the History of the Human Race," *Discover Magazine*, May 1987, 64-66.

Alfred W. Crosby, "Virgin Soil Epidemics as a Factor in the Aboriginal Depopulation in America," *William & Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, 33:2 (April 1976), 289-99.

William M. Denevan, "The Pristine Myth: The Landscape of the Americas in 1492," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 82:3 (1992), 369-85.

Thomas Vale, 1998. "The Myth of the Humanized Landscape: The Example from Yosemite National Park," *Natural Areas Journal*, 18:3 (1998), 231-236. (Online Library Reserve)

William Denevan, "The 'Pristine Myth' Revisited," *Geographical Review* (October 2011), 576-91. (Online Library Reserve)

Charles C. Mann, "1491," *Atlantic Monthly* (March 2002), 41-53.

Mark Fiege, "King Cotton: The Cotton Plant and Southern Slavery," *The Republic of Nature: An Environmental History of the United States* (2012), 100-38.

Alan Weisman, "Earth Without People," *Discover Magazine* (Feb 2005).

William Cronon, "A Place for Stories: Nature, History, and Narrative," *Journal of American History* 78:4 (March, 1992), 1347-1376.

**October 3: *Small Stories***

John McPhee, "Los Angeles Against the Mountains," *The Control of Nature*, (1989), 183-272.

Ann Vileisis, "Missing Stories" and "A Meal by Martha," *Kitchen Literacy* (2008), 3-29.

Michael Pollan, "Nature Abhors a Garden," in *Second Nature* (1991), 37-53.

Jennifer Price, "When Women Were Women, Men Were Men, and Birds Were Hats," *Flight Maps*, 57-110.

Mark Fiege, "The Road to Brown v. Board: An Environmental History of the Color Line," *The Republic of Nature: An Environmental History of the United States* (2012), 318-57.

Nadia Wheatley and Donna Rawlins, *My Place* (1988).

Margaret Atwood, "Death by Landscape," *Saturday Night* (July 1989), 46-53.

**Assignment:** Draft two "sound bites" summarizing two environmental historical insights from the readings you've done for since the start of the course that could be delivered out loud in no more than 30-45 seconds. In addition, compose two "tweets" of no more than 140 characters designed to call attention to each of the arguments made in your two sound bites.

**October 10: *Following a Research Project from Start to Finish: Nature's Metropolis***

William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis* (1991), read entire if possible, but otherwise concentrate on 1-259, 371-85.

William Cronon, dissertation prospectus.

Symposia discussions of *Nature's Metropolis* in *Antipode* (April 1994), 113-76 and *Annals of Iowa* 51 (Summer 1992), 480-525.

**Assignment:** Working with at least one other member of the class (larger groups are fine), bring to class next week *two* primary documents (each class member brings two) that can serve as evidence for an argument in *Nature's Metropolis*. Each person in a group should take the lead with their own search, but other members of the group should accompany and assist and discuss with each other the strategies used in these searches. Locate one of the documents using a digital search strategy to locate a primary source online; locate the other document using a search in the physical collections of the Wisconsin Historical Society. (The two documents can illustrate different arguments.) You're welcome to use the footnotes of the book as starting points for each search—though you'll learn the most from this assignment if you don't simply go find one of the documents cited by *Nature's Metropolis*. Finding a similar source would be a more valuable exercise that will teach you more about how this process works.

**October 17: *Built Environments (Guest: Anna Andrzejewski)***

Thomas Carter & Elizabeth Collins Cromley, "Introduction" and "Definitions" from *Invitation to Vernacular Architecture: A Guide to the Study of Ordinary Buildings and Landscapes* (2005).

Dell Upton, "The City as Material Culture," in Anne Elizabeth Yentsch & Mary C. Beaudry, *The Art and Mystery of Historical Archaeology: Essays in Honor of James Deetz*, 1992, 51-74.

Anna Vemer Andrzejewski, "Building Privacy and Community: Surveillance in a Postwar Suburban Development in Madison, Wisconsin," *Landscape Journal* 28 (2009): 140-55.

Anna Vemer Andrzejewski, "Rethinking Frank Lloyd Wright in the 21st Century," *Edge Effects*, August 2, 2016.

**Assignment:** Write a brief essay (500-750 words) describing and analyzing one of the documents you found last week, with the goal of helping a non-academic writer appreciate the significance of that document both on its own terms and relative to the kinds of arguments that it could be used to support in *Nature's Metropolis* (and any other interpretive context that you think might be of interest to the reader). Make the document itself and its multiple meanings the focus of your essay, at least as much as the scholarly arguments and abstractions that might be made about it. Possible questions you might wish to address (but that are not obligatory) could include the following. How did this document come into being? What was its original purpose? Is there anything interesting about its physical form? Are there features of the document that a modern reader might

misunderstand because we no longer appreciate its original context? Conversely, are there things about it that leap out at us that might have been so taken-for-granted by people at the time of its creation that they wouldn't even have noticed them? How should we understand its historical significance today? (IMPORTANT: Please email your essay in Word format to members of the seminar by 6pm on Monday, October 16, and plan to have read your classmates' essays before we meet the next morning.)

### **October 24: Reading the Landscape**

- Peruse the "How to Read a Landscape" web page on the "Learning Historical Research" website at <http://www.williamcronon.net/researching/>, as well as CHE's "Reading an Urban Landscape": <http://nelson.wisc.edu/che/events/place-based-workshops/2009/project/index.php>; also peruse Forest Hill Cemetery website as possible model: <http://foresthill.williamcronon.net>
- Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, 6-19, 127-9, 137-41, 237-95. (If you're using another edition, read the essays entitled "Good Oak," "Red Legs Kicking," "Thinking Like a Mountain," and Part IV of the Book, "The Upshot.")
- D. W. Meinig, ed., *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays* (1979), 1-48 (includes "Introduction," 1-7; Peirce F. Lewis, "Axioms for Reading the Landscape: Some Guides to the American Scene," 11-32; and D. W. Meinig, "The Beholding Eye: Ten Versions of the Same Scene," 33-48). (Library E-reserves)
- Eric Sloane, *Our Vanishing Landscape* (New York: 1955), 27-35.
- Grady Clay, "Breaks," in *Close-Up: How to Read the American City* (1973), 38-52. (Library E-reserves)
- David B. Williams, "America's Building Stone: Indiana Limestone," *Stories in Stone: Travels Through Urban Geology* (2009), 112-32. (Library E-reserves)
- Dale F. Ritter, "The Geological Perception of Landscape," in George F. Thompson, ed., *Landscape in America* (1995), 61-72. (Library E-reserves)
- May Theilgaard Watts, *Reading the Landscape of America* (New York, 1957, 1975), 96-147, 174-201.
- Leonard Charles, Jim Dodge, Lynn Milliman, Victoria Stockley, "Where You At?—A Bioregional Quiz," in *Home! A Bioregional Reader* (1990), 29-30.
- Virginia & Lee McAlester, "Looking at American Houses: Style," *A Field Guide to American Houses* (1984), 4-16.
- Kate Ascher, "Water," *The Works: Anatomy of a City* (2005), 151-69.
- Betty Flanders Thomson, "Man on the Land: A Thumbnail History," *The Shaping of the Heartland: The Landscape of the Middle West* (1977), 223-50.
- Jerry Apps, *The Wisconsin Traveler's Companion* (Madison: Wisconsin Trails, 1997); browse.

### **October 29: Special Mandatory All-Day Saturday Field Trip**

#### **October 31: History in the Wild**

- Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (1967, 4<sup>th</sup> ed, 2001), 161-237.
- David Stradling, ed., *Conservation in the Progressive Era: Classic Texts*, "Part 5: Conservation, Preservation, and Hetch Hetchy" (2004), 85-101.
- Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, 127-9, 137-41. (If you're using another edition, read the essays entitled "Red Legs Kicking" and "Thinking Like a Mountain").
- Howard Zahniser, "Wilderness Forever" in David Brower, ed., *Wilderness: America's Living Heritage* (1961), 155-62.
- An Act to Establish a National Wilderness Preservation System (1964). (skim)
- Paul Sutter, *Driven Wild: How the Fight Against Automobiles Launched the Modern Wilderness Movement* (2002), 3-53, 239-63.
- William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness" in Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (1995), 69-90.

William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness," *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, 8/13/1995, 42-43.

Special issue of *Environmental History* critiquing "Trouble with Wilderness," January 1996, 7-55.

Special issue of *Wild Earth* critiquing "Trouble with Wilderness," Winter 1996-97, 36-66.

Thomas R. Dunlap, *Faith in Nature: Environmentalism as Religious Quest* (2004), 86-94.

James Morton Turner, *The Promise of Wilderness: American Environmental Politics Since 1964* (2012), 1-42, 297-329, 375-406.

### ***November 7: A Class Act Called Conservation***

Karl Jacoby, *Crimes against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves, and the Hidden History of American Conservation* (2001).

Karl Jacoby, Ph.D. prospectus.

Richard White, "Are You an Environmentalist, or Do You Work for a Living?": Work and Nature," in William Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (1995), 171-85.

**Assignment:** Write a first-person blog post for *Edge Effects* of no more than 800 words narrating something you experienced during the field trip last week and use the narrated experience to make offer an important insight about the environmental history of the place or process or way of knowing you've described. Feel free to include images if you're so inclined. (IMPORTANT: Please email your essay in Word format to members of the seminar by 6pm on Monday, November 6, and plan to have read your classmates' essays before we meet the next morning.)

### ***November 14: Workscapes***

Thomas Andrews, *Killing for Coal: America's Deadliest Labor War* (2008).

Caleb Crain, "There Was Blood: The Ludlow Massacre Revisited" (book review), *New Yorker*, January 19, 2009.

Thomas Andrews, "How 9-11 Shaped Writing a Book About King Coal," *History News Network*, 1/12/2009.

Gunther Peck, "The Nature of Labor: Fault Lines and Common Ground in Environmental and Labor History," *Environmental History* 11 (April 2006), 212-38.

Richard White, "Are You an Environmentalist, or Do You Work for a Living?": Work and Nature," in Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (1995), 171-85.

### ***November 21: Places of Sickness and Health***

Gregg Mitman, *Breathing Space: How Allergies Shape Our Lives and Landscapes* (2007).

Gregg Mitman, "In Search of Health: Landscape and Disease in American Environmental History," *Environmental History* 10:2 (April 2005), 184-210.

### ***November 28: Out of the Whirlwind***

Collection of web resources about Hurricanes Katrina and others.

In-class viewing of film clips about Hurricane Katrina.

**Assignment:** Rough drafts of final paper due in class today. Bring three printed copies of your draft to seminar today to share with your three close critical readers, and email a Word file of your draft to the class list so that everyone who wishes to do so can read over what you've written.

***December 5: The Far-Flung Nature We Eat***

Nancy Shoemaker, "Whale Meat in American History," *Environmental History* 10 (April 2005), 269-94.

John Soluri, "Accounting for Taste: Export Bananas, Mass Markets, and Panama Disease," *Environmental History* 7:3 (July 2002), 386-410.

Kathryn Morse, *The Nature of Gold: An Environmental History of the Klondike Gold Rush* (2003), 138-65.

Rosanna Mentzer Morrison, "Guess Who's Turning 100? Tracking a Century of American Eating," *Amber Waves*, March 2010, 12-19.

Robert N. Chester III and Nicolaas Mink, et al., "Having Our Cake and Eating It Too: Food's Place in Environmental History, A Forum," *Environmental History* 14 (April 2009): 309-344.

Sara M. Gregg, "Cultivating an Agro-Environmental History," in Douglas Cazaux Sackman, *A Companion to American Environmental History*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, 425-41. (skim)

Douglas Cazaux Sackman, "Food," in Douglas Cazaux Sackman, *A Companion to American Environmental History*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, 529-50. (skim)

**Assignment:** Criticisms of rough drafts due by class today.

***December 12: The Future of the Environmental Past***

Adam Rome, "What Really Matters in History? Environmental Perspectives on Modern America," *Environmental History* 7:2 (April 2002), 303-18.

Adam Rome, ed., "What's Next for Environmental History?" *Environmental History* 10:1 (January 2005), 30-109.

Mark Fiege, "Paths That Beckon," *The Republic of Nature: An Environmental History of the United States* (2012), 403-29.

Paul Sabin, "'The Ultimate Environmental Dilemma': Making a Place for Historians in the Climate Change and Energy Debates," *Environmental History* 15:1 (2010), 76-93.

Review the pieces in Paul Sutter et al., "State of the Field: American Environmental History," *Journal of American History*, 100:1 (June 2013), 94-148.

**Assignment:** Final draft of essay due in class today.