

Kathryn Morse
Introduction to Environmental History
Middlebury College
Spring 2004
Topics: North America, United States

Prof. Kathryn Morse

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Office Hours: Mon. 2-4, Tues. 2-4, and by appointment.

Morse web page: <http://www.middlebury.edu/~kmorse>

Course web page: <http://segue.middlebury.edu/sites/hist0222a-s04>

Details of this syllabus may change. Please check web version for updates.

Lectures: Mon/Fri 12:30-1:20, BIH 219

Discussion X, Wed. 12:30-1:20, BIH 338

Discussion Y, Wed. 1:30-2:20, BIH 338

Discussion Z, Wed. 2:35-3:25, BIH 338

Course Description and Goals: This is a one-semester lecture and discussion course. Its first goal is to introduce students to the major themes, events, scholars, and ways of thinking that together make up American Environmental History as an academic field. Environmental History is the study of the ways in which humans have interacted with, shaped, and been shaped by their physical environments in the past. It takes as a central premise that nature, too, has a history, one profoundly shaped by human beings, and that the record of the human past is incomplete without some account of the role the physical world has played in human events. The second course goal is for students to develop critical reading, writing, and thinking skills with regard to the interactions between humans and their physical environment in the American past. We will follow a chronological set of events, places, and landscapes from the Euro-American conquest and settlement of the part of North America that became the United States, through American industrialization, the U.S. conservation and environmental movements, and on into the place of nature and environmentalism in post-WWII American culture.

Within those broad topics, we will focus on the idea of landscape as a hybrid of nature and culture, the place in which human beings interact with nature to shape their physical surroundings. Our study of American landscapes will range far and wide, from Alaska to Vermont, from pre-contact Native American villages to 1990s suburban backyards. Another goal of the course is to enable students to

apply the knowledge and skills of environmental historians to their own analysis of the landscapes around them, to read the historical interactions of nature and culture embodied in the world they encounter every day.

Course Requirements:

I. Students must attend lectures and discussion sections, and complete assigned readings according to the weekly schedule. Your grade for discussion sections participation and leadership will be determined by my overall sense of your preparation for discussion, and your active participation in the conversation. Students must also complete all assigned work in the course.

II. Four in-class quizzes. These will be very brief, 5-10 minute quizzes, announced at least one class-session ahead of time, covering only one lecture or reading at the most, or analysis of a slide or image in class.

III. A 4-5 pp. essay on William Cronon's Changes in the Land, due by 5 p.m. Friday Feb. 20, at the end of Week 2 (topic below in schedule for Week 2).

IV. A Take-Home Mid-Term Exam, to be handed out Monday March 29th, and due Friday April 2 by 5 p.m.

V. TWO (2) brief conferences with Prof. Morse, in office hours or by appointment at another time or place, to discuss your topic and research for the final paper.

VI. A final 10 pp. paper focused on an analysis of any landscape of any kind chosen by the student, using the methods and ideas learned throughout the semester. Paper due date: Tues. May 11, 5 pm., turned in at Munroe 301 (history office) or 305 (my office).

VII. A Final Examination, self-scheduled, taken at any of the times designated during exam period in May. Details available on the college web page under Exam Schedules.

The Fine Print: While this syllabus is not likely to change too much, I may make adjustments as the semester proceeds. Any changes will be posted on the course web-page. I will announce changes in class on a week-to-week basis, well in advance of any due-dates or exam dates. However, if you are not in class to hear such announcements, it is your responsibility to find out about such changes or additions.

Grades: There is no single, precise formula for the determination of grades. Final grades will be based on a number of factors: numeric grades on quizzes, tests, and papers, participation in weekly discussion sections, and improvement over the course of the semester. However, the following criteria for the course, and for written papers, apply broadly:

A grade in the "A" range in the course represents a level of achievement and excellence well beyond expectations on graded and classroom work. "A" work contains a

certain “wow” factor—a level of surprise at the high level of performance in the work. This indicates an impressive mastery of the material combined with analytic sophistication. In discussion, it represents outstanding participation in and leadership of discussions, including the ability not only to answer questions but to raise original questions and participate in debates. On papers and tests, it represents perfection (or near-perfection) in arguments, the presentation of detailed factual evidence, and, for papers, in grammar and the mechanics of writing.

An “A” paper is focused on, and organized around, a well-defined thesis. The historical argument is logical and supported by sufficient and appropriate evidence. There is a balance between argument and evidence. The writer avoids over-simplification and over-generalization, and presents some of the complexities of the subject in an original and insightful argument.

The prose is polished and precise. The relation between the parts of the essay is clear and the transitions are fluid. The writer seeks the best word or phrase to express ideas, and efficiently uses a variety of sentence types and lengths. There are no serious errors in grammar, spelling, or statements of fact.

A grade in the “B” range in the course represents fine work that fully meets all expectations in the course. “B” work on tests, quizzes, and papers shows mastery of the material, and strong and consistent analysis. It represents frequent participation in class discussions, and the ability to engage others students in debate.

A “B-range” paper is generally focused on a clearly-stated thesis, but the focus may wander. Evidence that is too detailed, or inappropriate, or not contextualized may detract from the focus. The writer’s interpretation is reasonably clear and well-ordered, but could use additional support or development.

The writing is generally good but may be imprecise at times. Some of the transitions may be rough. The writer makes effective use of simple constructions with some variety in sentence type and length. There may be awkward sentences and word choices, constructions in the passive voice, and errors in grammar, spelling, or small statements of fact.

A grade in the “C” range for the course represents complete and solid work in the class. All work is turned in, but may not fully address the assigned questions, or may address them in a comparatively unsophisticated or simplistic way. In discussion section, “C” work indicates lack of preparation, and infrequent participation in discussions.

A “C”-range paper addresses the assigned question and demonstrates an understanding of the sources, but is not consistently focused; it may lack a thesis, or state the thesis only in the final paragraph. The interpretation may be overly generalized or simplified or vague. There is an imbalance between argument and evidence. Attention may be given to one portion of the reading at the expense of the whole. The writer does not demonstrate sufficient awareness of the complexities of the subject and may tend toward the self-evident.

The writer’s meaning may be obscured by imprecise use of language. Order is imposed on the essay, but the relation between parts is not consistently clear.

Transitions may be awkward. There is carelessness in presentation demonstrated by errors in grammar, spelling, or statements of fact.

A grade in the “D” range represents work that is completed and turned in, but does not entirely meet basic expectations for the course. In discussion section, this indicates consistent lack of preparation and participation, and most likely problems with attendance.

A “D” essay does not present or adequately develop a thesis, or it does not address the question. The interpretation is vague and insufficiently supported by the evidence. There is a lack or an excess of direct quotation. The writing is imprecise and the essay is poorly organized. There are significant errors in grammar, spelling, or facts.

A grade below “D” represents a failure to turn in all work for the course, or the presentation of work that fails to meet basic requirements. A grade below “D” on a paper or test indicates that the work did answer the question assigned, or did not support its argument with evidence. If it does answer the question and provide evidence, it may suffer from serious weaknesses in grammar, spelling, and style.

Late Papers:

Both assigned papers have clear deadlines, and late papers will be marked down 1/3 of a grade per day (B+ to B). Weekends count as one day.

Citation of Sources: In your written work (formal essays), when referring to sources (primary or secondary) on which you have drawn, you should provide a complete citation including author, title, publisher, place and date of publication and page numbers. Any standard format is permissible, as long as it is consistent. Good reference works for citation include The Chicago Manual of Style, Kate Turabian’s A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations, and the MLA Handbook. There is also information posted on the Middlebury College Library Web Page about citation, for quick reference.

You may use either footnotes or endnotes.

For citations from assigned texts in our course, feel free to use an abbreviated format, parenthetical citations, within the body of the text. For example, when citing a passage or idea from an author, you may put the author’s last name and page number in parentheses at the end, INSIDE the period that ends the sentence (Morse, 1). If you cite more than one source from the same author, include a brief title of the work as well. All papers which use parenthetical citations should also include a list of Works Cited at the end of the paper, with a full bibliographic entry for each of the works cited within the paper.

Plagiarism: All students are responsible for reading and heeding the statement on plagiarism as written in the Middlebury College Handbook. Suspected cases of plagiarism will result in a conference me, and, if unresolved at that point, the situation will be referred to the Secretary of the College. If you are unsure what constitutes plagiarism you may re-read the Handbook or another printed source, consult a reference librarian or ask me.

Honor Code: The Honor Code is in effect for all quizzes, tests, and papers in this course. Please state and sign the honor code on all work.

Intercollegiate Athletics: If you are a member of a team whose schedule will require you to miss class, either lecture or discussion section, it is **your responsibility** to inform me of your schedule, what work you will miss, and how and when you intend to make up that work. I do not regularly check sports schedules or know team departure times, so it is your job to present me with that information, well in advance of the absence itself.

If at all possible, I would like to know at the beginning of the semester, exactly when you will be gone, so as to head off any complications well in advance.

Texts: The following books are available for purchase in the bookstore (and many other places, including web-based book-sellers). They will be on reserve in Starr library through the end of the semester. In addition, there will be a number of articles either on e-reserve or accessible through the world wide web.

William Cronon, Changes in the Land

Charles Rosenberg, The Cholera Years

Michael Pollan, The Botany of Desire

Jennifer Price, Flight Maps

Karl Jacoby, Crimes Against Nature (also available as an electronic book, see library)

Duane Lockard, Coal: A Memoir and Critique

Andrew Hurley, Environmental Inequalities

Mike Davis, The Ecology of Fear

Schedule of Classes and Assignments

Week 1: Feb. 9-13

Mon: Lecture #1: What is Environmental History?

Wed: Reading Assignment: **William Cronon, Changes in the Land, Preface and Chapters 1-4.**

Questions to think about as you read:

Based on this first reading, what is environmental history?

How did European perceptions of New England Indians shape their actions toward Indians, and toward land and resources?

What is capital, and how did it shape the environmental history of colonial New England?

ALSO: Sometime this week or weekend, before next Monday (before Feb. 16th), find a good spot or route from which to observe the Vermont landscape which surrounds us. Take a notebook or piece of paper, and write down everything you see in this landscape, whatever your vantage point. What do you see in terms of objects, seasons, boundaries, patterns? What do you not see? What is absent from this landscape?

Hang onto your notes for use next week in your first paper.

Options for a good view of our landscape:

On foot: Trek on over to Bicentennial Hall, and take in the views from the Great Hall, and from windows on the upper floors, looking in as many directions as possible.

By car (if you have access): There are several very local drives which provide wonderful views of the Champlain Valley.

1) Head out Weybridge St. to the top of Weybridge Hill, turn left on James Rd., then left again on Rte. 125 (College St.) to return to campus. Pick a few spots along the way to stop and look out over the landscape. The top of Weybridge Hill (by the church and Monument Farms dairy) offers amazing views to the North and West.

2) This one is a bit longer. In town, from Washington St. (Shaw's supermarket), head out Washington St. extension (straight through the five-way intersection) all the way to Munger St., then left on Munger St. to River Road, and then River Road back to Rte. 7. Turn left back to town.

3) For those in search of adventures on skis or snowshoes, there are of course even more options, around campus (esp. on the Trail Around Middlebury) and up at Breadloaf and the SnowBowl...email or ask me for directions.

Friday: Lecture #2: The Columbian Exchange

Week 2: Feb. 16-20.

Mon. Lecture #3: Landscapes of Profit

Wed. Discussion Reading Assignment: William Cronon, Changes in the Land, Chapters 5-end.

Friday: Lecture #4: Cultivating the New World: Plants

Friday by 5 p.m in the box/envelope outside my door, Munroe 305: Short Paper (4-5 pp.) based on all of Cronon, and your observations of the Vermont landscape.

Paper Topic: Given what you have learned from of New England's environmental history from Changes in the Land, and using your notes on observations of the landscape around us here in Middlebury, pick the 3 elements/objects/patterns from your notes and observations which you find most interesting or compelling.

What historical transformations and ideas do they symbolize? What do they tell us about the environmental history of our landscape?

Week 3: Feb. 23-27

Mon: Lecture #5: The Health of the Country

Wed: Discussion: Reading Assignment: Michael Pollan, The Botany of Desire, Introduction and part I (apples); and Price, Flight Maps, Introduction and ch. 1, “Missed Connections” (pigeons).

Questions to think about as you read:

1. What meanings did early American settlers give to apples? to pigeons?
2. According to Pollan’s arguments, apples have clearly done something right. Did pigeons do something wrong? What? Why or why not?
3. We live in a landscape full of apples, yet absent pigeons. Why? What are the historical explanations offered here?
4. How does this landscape reflect human desires? How do we see desire written in our landscapes?
5. Is desire nature or culture?
6. How did markets shape what happened to pigeons? to apples?
7. Are markets and desires the same? Why or why not?
8. Which is a more “American” story: apples or pigeons? why?

Friday: No Class, Winter Carnival

Week 4: Mar. 1-5

Mon: Lecture #6: Landscapes of Industrialization

Wed: Discussion Reading Assignment: Charles Rosenberg, The Cholera Years, Introduction, Part 1 (1832), and Part 3 (1866).

Questions to think about as you read:

1. In 1832: What was cholera? Who got it and why? What were the solutions to the problem of cholera, for individuals, the city, and the nation? What were the connections between human beings, their health, and the environment?
2. In 1866: Same questions. How do your answers differ between 1832 and 1866?
3. How did human beings figure out what caused cholera? How did this change their understanding of their environment, and of disease?
4. What laws of nature (or divine laws) did Americans deem to be at work in the 19th century? How did those laws of nature relate to the actual physical environment?
5. What role did class, race, and ethnicity play in shaping human health and connections to the environment during the cholera epidemics?

What roles did immigrants play in the Rosenberg book, and how are these groups connected to or with the natural environment?

Fri: Lecture #7: Chicago: Nature's Metropolis, the Logic of Capital, and the Environmental History of the Hot Dog

Week 5: Mar. 8-12: FIRST CONFERENCES on FINAL PAPERS

Mon: Lecture #8: Olmsted's Nature: The City and the Pastoral

Wed: Discussion Reading Assignment: Michael Pollan, The Botany of Desire, part II: Tulips; Jennifer Price, Flight Maps, ch. 2: When Women were Women and Birds Were Hats

Questions to think about as you read:

1. Did bird hats have an evolutionary purpose?
2. Does beauty have a purpose? How is such a purpose gendered?
3. Are there essential, biological standards of beauty for all human beings across time?
4. How do human beings' conceptions of beauty shape their use of parts of the natural world, like plants and birds?
5. What do the respective stories of tulips and bird-hats reveal of human desires and the ways in which they reshape nature?
6. How did markets shape human interactions with nature in these two readings?
7. How were definitions of gender (conceptions of womanhood and manhood) reflected in these two stories?

Fri: Lecture #9: Back to Nature

Week 6: Mar. 15-19: FIRST CONFERENCES on FINAL PAPERS

Mon: Lecture #10: Landscapes of Conservation, Landscapes of Science and Efficiency

Wed: Discussion Reading Assignment: Jacoby, Crimes Against Nature **All Read:** Introduction, Part I (Adirondacks); AND Epilogue. Then pick **Either Part II (Yellowstone) or Part III (Grand Canyon).**

Questions to think about as you read:

1. Why were these parks created? What were their purposes?
2. Based on this reading, how would you define conservation? What role does power play in that definition?
3. How did conservationists decide which social groups could control nature? How do we make those decisions?
4. How did class differences shape the history of Americans' connections to nature?
5. Where do we see class differences reflected in the conservation movement?

6. What about race? How are racial differences reflected in the history of the Adirondacks? Yellowstone? the Grand Canyon?
7. Can there be such a thing as an “inhabited wilderness” in which humans live and work? If so, which groups, and under what conditions, could live and work in wild places?

Friday: Lecture #11: Wilderness and National Parks + Film: The Wilderness Idea (Pinchot, Muir, and Hetch Hetchy)

SPRING BREAK

Week 7: March 29-April 2

Mon: Discussion of Paper Research; Take-Home Mid-Term Exam Handed Out; Due Friday April 2 by 5 p.m.

Wed: No Discussion Sections.

Friday: No Lecture: Take-Home Mid-term due by 5 p.m.

Week 8: Apr. 5-9

Mon: Lecture # 12: Landscapes of Consumption: The Model T

Wed: Discussion Section Reading: Duane Lockard, Coal: A Memoir and Critique .

1. This book reads more like a work of labor history than environmental history. What connections can you draw between a history of work and the physical environment? Where is nature in this history? How are human beings connected to nature? How is labor a set of connections to nature?

2. How is the coal mining landscape--the landscape of Lockard's childhood and youth--a landscape of desire? What does it tell us about American society and its desires?

3. How does the logic of capital operate in the history of coal mining?

4. How are human bodies shaped by coal mining? How is the nature of the body connected to the nature of coal?

5. Is a coal mine a natural environment? Why or why not?

Fri: Lecture #13: "Are You an Environmentalist Or Do You Work For a Living?": Work and Home as Environments and Progressive Era Reform

Week 9: Apr. 12-16.

Mon: Lecture #14: The Dust Bowl

Wed: Discussion Section Assignment: Great Plains Committee, The Future of the Great Plains (1936); on e-reserve: search under Morse or HI 222; our password is: 2232km

also: FDR's Fireside Chat on Drought Conditions (at <http://newdeal.feri.org/chat/chat08.htm>; and **the Dorothea Lange and Arthur Rothstein photos found here:**

<http://segue.middlebury.edu/sites/hist0222x-s04>

Questions to think about as you read and study:

1. Looking at the three images in The Future of the Great Plains (The Great Plains of the Past, Present, and Future), what stories are embedded in these images? What narratives can you draw? What do these narratives tell us about attitudes toward nature? toward history?
2. What caused the dust bowl, according to the Great Plains Committee?
3. According to the report, what does the government need to do, and what do farmers need to do, to fix the Great Plains in the wake of this disaster? What methods does the Committee suggest?
4. What do the Committee's explanations of the causes and remedies of the Dust Bowl reveal of their attitudes toward nature, toward the basic narrative of American settlement, and toward agriculture as a human practice?
5. What assumptions about nature and history and the American nation are embedded in this report? In FDR's fireside chat? In these photographs? Why do these images have such power?

Fri: Lecture #15: New Deal Conservation and Western Rivers

Week 10: Apr. 19-23. SECOND CONFERENCES on FINAL PAPERS

Mon: Lecture #16: Landscapes of War

Wed: Discussion Readings: Everyone reads:

1) Edmund Russell, “‘Speaking of Annihilation’: Mobilizing for War Against Human and Insect Enemies,” Journal of American History 82: 4 (March 1996). Available electronically through JSTOR: Stable URL: <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0021-8723%28199603%2982%3A4%3C1505%3A%22OAMFW%3E2.0.CO%3B2-5>

2) Michael Pollan, The Botany of Desire, Part IV: The Potato; and Conclusion.

THEN: Pick Either of the following two:

1) Michael Pollan, The Botany of Desire, Part III: Cannabis OR:

2) Jennifer Price, Flight Maps, chapter 3: A Brief Natural History of the Pink Flamingo

Questions to think about as you read:

1. What are the connections between chemical weapons, DDT, and genetically engineered Monsanto potatoes?
2. Edmund Russell notes that “people have long seen one of the most important ways they change the environment—agriculture—as the opposite of war.” How does Russell’s research and argument challenge this idea?
3. What might Pollan have to say about that? Based on his writings, particularly about potatoes, would Pollan see linkages between warfare and agriculture? Or not? How might they be linked?

4. What do the development and use of high-technology weapons and high-technology agricultural products reveal of human attitudes toward and connections to the natural environment in the early and mid-20th century? What metaphors governed these attitudes?
5. Both Russell and Pollan argue that metaphors are very important (see Pollan, 191, and all of Russell). How have metaphors for agricultural technologies changed over time?
6. Monsanto: Good or Evil?
7. What do writings on (either) pink flamingos or cannabis reveal of post-WWII baby boomers connections to nature? How were they useful in defining the “real” and the “unreal” for that generation?

Fri: Lecture #17: Landscapes of Environmentalism

Week 11: Apr. 26-30. SECOND CONFERENCES on FINAL PAPERS

Mon: Lecture #18: Landscapes of Environmentalism II

Wed. Discussion Assignment: Andrew Hurley, Environmental Inequalities.

Questions to think about as you read:

1. What is environmentalism?
2. How did race and class shape environmental activism, and environmental change, in Gary?
3. How did power work in this history? How can we connect power and nature in environmental history?
4. How do civil rights and social justice issues interact with nature? What “environmental rights” do human beings have, if any? How would you define and protect these rights?

Fri: Lecture #19: Earth Day and Environmental Revolution

Week 12: May 3-7.

Mon: Lecture #20: Toxic Landscapes and Inequality: Pollution and Justice

Wed. : Discussion Assignment: Mike Davis, Ecology of Fear; chapters TBA; discussion questions TBA

Friday: Lecture #21: Final Lecture

Final Paper Due: By 5 p.m., Tuesday May 11, at MNR 301, in my mailbox, or at my office, MNR 305.

Final Exam: Self-Scheduled during Exam Period