

History 394 (CRN 13954, 3 credits)
Environmental History of the United States
Tuesday-Thursday 3:00-4:15
Spring Semester 2020
University Hall 219

J. L. Larson
phone: 494-4127

Office: Univ. 225
e-mail: larsonjl@purdue.edu

Objectives: This mid-level course explores the historical relationship between human societies and the environment of North America from before European colonization through the 20th century. Obviously for such a vast topic a comprehensive treatment is not possible. Instead we will sample main themes and problems using an introductory text book and some more provocative readings.

For centuries historians chronicled human history as if only human actors provided any agency in the story. For the last two generations, however, historians have begun to incorporate the natural environment as an active agent in history. The resulting interactive approach exposes remarkable insights about human culture as well as the resiliency of nature itself. Critics now write about a new era in geological time—the Anthropocene—to suggest the rise to domination of modern human societies. This class will interrogate such claims and place the issues in historical context.

Learning Outcomes: After taking this class you should . . .

- be able to recognize the important agency of the natural environment in human history
- be able to recognize sources of human attitudes toward nature at different stages of this history
- be able to recognize historical evidence and construct reasonable explanations for how and why things developed as they did.
- be able to recognize the power such historical explanations (even if partly untrue) can exercise in the present world.

Strategies: This class will require reading for every session as well as participation classroom discussions. Many of the issues are still hotly debated by scholars as well as present-day policymakers. The goal is not for me to tell you what to think but for us to explore together what to think about the issues raised.

Readings: *American Environmental History*, by Carolyn Merchant
Laid Waste! The Culture of Exploitation in Early America, John Larson
The Gentle Subversive, by Mark Hamilton Lytle
Love Canal, by Richard S. Newman

Class meetings: Each 75 minute period will focus on the reading assigned for that day. I may open the discussion with a short writing prompt to get you thinking about the subject. Each such

written response will earn 1-2 points; 2 additional points can be earned through discussion.
Total daily points possible = 96.

Exams: There are two unit exams and a final. These are in-class essay tests taken during the class hour. Unit exams count **50 points**, the **final 75**.

Grades: Your final grade will be based on your percentage of earned points out of a total of 271 according to the following scale:

93-100%	= A	73-76	= C
90-92	= A-	70-72	= C-
87-89	= B+	67-69	= D+
83-86	= B	63-66	= D
80-82	= B-	60-62	= D-
77-79	= C+	< 60%	= F

Attendance and courtesy: You are expected to attend all class sessions, and you will find it difficult to do very well in this course if you do not. You can miss two discussions without penalty, otherwise each absence will cost you 4 points. I expect you to be quiet and attentive in class and respect the rights of others to a constructive learning environment. **I will ask you to leave** if you are disturbing me or others in the room. Turn off cell phones and all such handheld devices. I do not allow laptops in class; you will do better by engaging in person.

Emergency Announcement: *In the event of a major campus emergency, course requirements, deadlines and grading percentages are subject to changes that may be necessitated by a revised semester calendar or other circumstances. Here are ways to get information about changes in this course:*

email laronjl@purdue.edu

office phone 494.4127

cell phone 765.412.9166.

Cheating / Plagiarism: Plagiarism refers to the reproduction of another's words or ideas without proper attribution. University Regulations contains further information on dishonesty. Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty are serious offenses and will be treated as such in this class. You are expected to produce your own work and to cite accurately all necessary materials. Cheating, plagiarism, and other dishonest practices will be punished as Purdue University policies allow. Any instances of academic dishonesty will likely result in a grade of F for the course and notification of the Dean of Students Office.

See https://www.purdue.edu/odos/osrr/resources/documents/responding_to_academic_dishonesty.html
Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities (OSSR).

Emergency preparedness: In the event of a major campus emergency, the above requirements, deadlines and grading policies are subject to changes that may be required by a revised semester calendar. Once the course resumes any such changes will be posted on Blackboard or can be obtained by contacting the professor via email or phone.

For further information see https://www.purdue.edu/ehps/emergency_preparedness/

Calendar of Assignments

Week 1	
Jan 14	Intro and orientation
Jan 16	Merchant, chap 1: The land and first peoples
Week 2	
Jan 21	Laid waste, intro and chap 1: Stability
Jan 23	Merchant, chap 2: New England's forests
Week 3	
Jan 28	Laid waste, chap 2: Abundance
Jan 30	Merchant, chap 3: Extractive agriculture—tobacco and cotton
Week 4	
Feb 04	Laid Waste, chap 3: Achievement
Feb 06	Colonial impact—summing up
Week 5	
Feb 11	Laid Waste, chap 4: Liberation
Feb 13	Exam I
Week 6	
Feb 18	Laid waste, chap 5: Inventory
Feb 20	Merchant, chap 4: enter the market economy
Week 7	
Feb 25	Laid waste, chap 6: Improvement
Feb 27	Merchant, chap 5: Frontier extractions continued
Week 8	
Mar 03	Laid waste, chap 7: Destiny
Mar 05	Merchant, chap 8: Indian displacement
Week 9	
Mar 10	Laid Waste, chap 8: Mastery
Mar 12	Merchant, chap 6: Urbanization and intensification
Week 10	
Mar 17	SPRING BREAK
Mar 19	SPRING BREAK
Week 11	
Mar 24	Laid Waste, chap 9: Prophecy
Mar 26	Merchant, chap 7: Conservation and preservation

Week 12	
Mar 31	Laid Waste, Epilogue
Apr 02	Exam II
Week 13	
Apr 07	Merchant, chap 9: ecology and new sensibilities
Apr 09	Lytle, prologue, chaps 1-2: Rachel Carson
Week 14	
Apr 14	Lytle, chaps 3-4, epilogue
Apr 16	Newman, part 1: Love Canal
Week 15	
Apr 21	Newman, part 2
Apr 23	Newman, part 3
Week 16	
Apr 28	Merchant, chap 10: Environmentalism and globalization
Apr 30	What to make of it all?
	FINAL EXAM