

ES 250: Interpreting the US Environment

Professor Joel Winkelman

TR, 10:30–11:45am SC G041

Contact information

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KJ 137, x4984

Office Hours: TR, 3:45–4:45; W, 3:00–4:30pm; and by appointment.

Required Books

Cronon, *Changes in the Land* (978-0809016341)

Sheriff, *Artificial River* (978-0809016051)

Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams* (978-0674045552)

Worster, *Dust Bowl* (978-0195174885)

Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* (978-0060913076)

Solnit, *Infinite City* (978-0520262508)

Learning Outcomes

This course explores conceptions of the American environment beginning with the colonial encounter, moving through the development and exhaustion of the Western landscape, and ending in the chaotic environs of the postmodern city. Readings include primary documents, academic histories, novels, and journalistic accounts of the American environment. Upon completion of this course, you will be able to: (1) Describe and explain four major interpretations of the U.S. environment; (2) Identify concrete social, political, and economic practices that these interpretations have enabled; (3) Evaluate the effects of these practices on the environment itself; (4) Formulate your own interpretation of the environment you inhabit.¹

Expectations and assignments

Expectations.

To successfully achieve the course's learning outcomes, you must prepare reading assignments as listed on the syllabus. Preparing reading assignments comprises reading the assigned text; reflecting on its concepts, methods, and style; and forming an opinionated evaluation of the assignment that you would feel comfortable sharing with the group. We refer to the texts regularly in class, so you should

¹ For methodology on developing and achieving learning objectives, see Sarah L. Ash and Patti H. Clayton, "Generating, Deepening, and Documenting Learning," *Journal of Applied Learning in Higher Education* Vol. 1, Fall 2009, pp. 25–48; and Allison Rank and Heather Pool, "Writing Better Writing Assignments" *PS: Political Science and Politics* Vol. 47, July 2014, pp. 675–681.

bring with you a physical copy of the reading assignment, and a pen or pencil.

So that all students have an opportunity to achieve the course's learning outcomes, you should comport yourself respectfully. Be aware of other students' needs, temperaments, and opinions, which might be different from your own. Support one another in pursuing the course learning outcomes despite your differences.

Recent research has indicated that classroom laptop users retain less information from class sessions.² Thus, in order to support our learning outcome, laptops, tablets, and other mobile devices are not permitted.

² For a good review of relevant studies, see <http://bit.ly/Ubk0X2>.

For this course, no late work will be accepted nor extensions given. I will provide reasonable accommodation for student athletes and students with documented disabilities.

Assignments.

Journal— The primary assignment for this course is a semester-long journal. It will be graded four times, and will constitute **70%** of your overall grade. See the appendix for more details.

Exams— There will be a midterm and a cumulative final exam, consisting of short answer and identification questions. The midterm exam will constitute **10%** of your grade, the final exam **20%**.

Schedule

August 28: No class (APSA annual meeting)

Part 1: Eden

September 2: Gary Snyder, "Good, Wild, Sacred" (PDF) [19pp].

September 4: Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, chs. 2–3 [35pp].

September 9: Krech, *The Ecological Indian*, Introduction [26pp].

September 11: Cronon, *Changes*, chs. 4–5 [54pp].

September 16: Cronon, *Changes*, ch. 7 [32pp].

September 16: **First Journal Check**

Part 2: Rivers

September 18: Thoreau, "Concord River" & "Saturday" (PDF) [42pp].

September 23: Sheriff, *The Artificial River*, chs. 1–2 [43pp].

September 25: Sheriff, *Artificial River*, chs. 3–4 [57pp].

September 30: Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, chs. 1 & 3 [52pp].

October 2: Johnson, *River*, chs. 6–7 [50pp].

October 7: Johnson, *River*, ch. 8 [35pp].
 October 9: Johnson, *River*, ch. 11 [30pp].
 October 9: **Second Journal Check**
 October 14: **Midterm Exam**

Part 3: Plains

October 15–20: Watch Terrence Malick, *Badlands* (1973) [94min].
 October 21: Discuss Terrence Malick, *Badlands* (1973).
 October 23: Andrews, *Killing for Coal* ch. 1 (PDF) [29pp].
 October 28: Andrews, *Killing*, ch. 2 (PDF) [36pp].
 October 30: Worster, *Dust Bowl*, chs. 1–2 [34pp].
 November 4: Worster, *Dust Bowl*, chs. 4–5 [34pp].
 November 6: Worster, *Dust Bowl*, chs. 11 & 13 [29pp].
 November 6: **Third Journal Check**

Part 4: Cities

November 11: James, “On Some Mental Effects of the Earthquake” (PDF) [8pp].
 November 13: Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*, chs. 1–2 [30pp].
 November 18: Pynchon, *Crying*, chs. 3–4 [48pp].
 November 20: Pynchon, *Crying*, chs. 5–6 [72pp].
 December 2: Solnit, *Infinite City*, Introduction & Maps 3–4 [23pp].
 December 4: Solnit, *Infinite City*, Maps 7, 9 & 12 [23pp].
 December 9: Solnit, *Infinite City*, Maps 15, 18 & 21 [19pp].
 December 9: **Fourth Journal Check**

Conclusion

December 11: Wrap-up & review
 December 17: **Final Exam**, 7pm.