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History 145: Water in American History

Spring 2003
Tuesdays, 1-2:50
Lewis Center 104

This course offers an introduction to the field of environmental history through a focus on the role of water in the history of the United States. We will examine issues of water power, water rights, water emergencies and water imagery, investigating the history and meanings of water in the United States, and identifying and critiquing the varied ways in which environmental historians and other writers have grappled with the story of this critical resource.

Course Requirements:

Reading:

The following books are available at the Oberlin College Bookstore, and are on reserve at Mudd Library:

- Gerard Koepfel, *Water for Gotham: A History* (2000)
Theodore Steinberg, *Nature Incorporated: Industrialization and the Waters of New England* (1991)
Donald Worster, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West* (1985)
Mark Fiege, *Irrigated Eden: The Making of an Agricultural Landscape in the American West* (1999)
Erik Larsen, *Isaac's Storm: A Man, A Time, and the Deadliest Hurricane in History* (1999)
John Barry, *Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and How it Changed America* (1997)
Richard White, *Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River* (1995)
William Storey, *Writing History: A Guide for Students* (1996)

In addition, a number of shorter readings are available both on reserve at the library and on electronic reserve (ERES): <http://eres.cc.oberlin.edu>, and I may occasionally distribute articles and book selections to supplement this list.

Course Requirements:

The primary objectives of this class are to master a significant body of literature in environmental history, to learn to think critically and creatively about the history of water in the United States, and to develop the reading, writing and discussion skills that are critical to historical inquiry. To meet these goals, this course emphasizes readings, discussions, and frequent writing assignments.

Attendance at every class meeting is required, as are careful and thoughtful preparation for class discussions. In a seminar class like this one, it is of critical importance for every seminar member not only to contribute thoughtfully to our conversations about the readings, but also to work consciously to facilitate a successful large group discussion. To that end, every seminar member will lead discussion twice during the term.

To prepare for each meeting, each student will prepare a 1-2 page working paper on the week's reading. These papers should identify the authors' major arguments, critique the authors' approaches, and draw out comparisons to other course materials. The papers should also include a list of discussion questions for the week.

The working papers, which will be an important part of the written work this class, and which will help structure our weekly discussions, are at due at the beginning of each class. These papers will not be individually graded, but will be considered as part of your discussion grade for the class, which accounts for 40% of your final grade. Late working papers will not be accepted, and missing working papers will bring your discussion grade down. Sometimes, I will collect the working papers and critique them; at other times, you will critique your own and your classmates' work.

In addition to the working papers, you will each prepare a research paper or other creative work on a topic related to our course themes. This work will account for 40% of your final grade: 5% from a formal proposal, 5% from an in-class presentation, and 30% from the final project. Guidelines for the project will be distributed during the second week of class, and project presentations will be scheduled then.

Due dates should be taken seriously. However, unlike working papers, the proposal and the final project will be accepted late, albeit with significant penalties. Papers will lose one-third of a letter grade for every 24-hour period they are late. That means, for example, that a paper that normally would have earned a B+ would earn a B if it were turned in during class instead of at noon. It is not possible to pass the class without turning in both the proposal and the project.

All papers should be submitted in hard copy, and should be double-spaced, with one-inch margins, and in a twelve-point font. Page limits should be taken seriously, especially for the working papers, which should never require more than one piece of paper. In addition, you must use computers responsibly. Please remember that computers are always crashing; be sure to have enough time and enough back-ups that you can meet deadlines.

In addition, there will be a take-home essay exam, worth 20 percent of your final grade. It will be distributed on the last day of class, and will be due at the scheduled exam time, which is 2 pm on Thursday, May 15.

To summarize, the course will be graded as follows:

Course participation, including weekly working papers:	40%
Project proposal:	5%
Project presentation:	5%
Project:	30%
Final Exam	20%

Schedule of Classes and Assignments:

Week One

Tuesday, February 4

Introductions

Week Two

Tuesday, February 11

Water for the Cities

Reading:

Koeppel, *Water for Gotham*

Storey, *Writing History*, 1-57

Week Three

Tuesday, February 18

Water and Property

Reading:

Steinberg, *Nature Incorporated*

Week Four

Tuesday, February 25

Water and Federal Control

Reading:

Worster, *Rivers of Empire*

Week Five

Tuesday, March 4

Local Water

Guest Lecture

Project proposal due

Week Six

Tuesday, March 11

Water and Agriculture

Reading:

Fiege, *Irrigated Eden*

Week Seven

Tuesday, March 18

Film: Cadillac Desert

Reading:

Storey, *Writing History*, 1-57

Week Eight

Tuesday, March 25

Spring Recess: No Class

Week Nine

Tuesday, April 1

Water and Weather

Reading:

Larsen, *Isaac's Storm*

Week Ten

Tuesday, April 8

Flood Waters

Reading:

Barry, *Rising Tide*

Week Eleven

Tuesday, April 15

Water Power

Reading:

White, *Organic Machine*

Week Twelve

Tuesday, April 22

Project Presentations

Week Thirteen

Tuesday, April 29

Project Presentations

Week Fourteen

Tuesday, May 6

Final Projects Due

Conclusions, and distribution of take-home exam

May 15: Final Exam is due at my office by 2 pm