

Environmental Studies 900
HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL METHODS IN ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH
(The “CHE Methods Seminar”)
Tuesday, 5:30-8:00 pm, 202 Bradley Memorial

INSTRUCTOR: Gregg Mitman, 1415 Medical Sciences Center.

Class Meetings: We will meet Tuesday evenings from 5:30-8:00pm in 202-204 Bradley Memorial, 1225 Linden Drive. You should generally plan to eat beforehand or after. Class sessions will typically be divided into two blocks, with a break occurring sometime between 6:30-7:00pm, and with different faculty guests joining us for either or both of the two blocks.

Office Hours: Tuesdays, 10-12, or by appointment. To make an appointment, email me at gmitman@med.wisc.edu or reach me by phone: 262-9140.

DESCRIPTION:

Typically offered each spring, the CHE Methods seminar is one of the most important curricular offerings of the Nelson Institute’s Center for Culture, History, and Environment. It has several goals:

- It introduces graduate students from a wide array of departments and programs to different disciplinary and interdisciplinary methods for studying past environmental change and the human cultural contexts within which it occurs.
- It explores the disparate forms of evidence that can be used to reconstruct past environmental change and its human meanings.
- It strives to build a strong sense of community among graduate students and faculty members at UW-Madison who share an interest in past environmental change by creating a place within which grad students from different departments and programs can work together and become colleagues while getting to know faculty members associated with CHE.
- Assignments for the seminar are designed to cultivate research skills and methods. This year, the Mississippi watershed and river histories offer a touchstone around which we will address disciplinary and interdisciplinary skills and methods. This theme also serves as the basis for this year’s CHE Place-Based Workshop, an annual field trip that occurs each May. The dates of this year’s workshop are May 15-20.

Because the seminar strives to reflect and incorporate the interests of the graduate students who are taking it, and also those of the many CHE faculty members who participate, this syllabus is being left somewhat open at the start of the semester. The syllabus may evolve as the goals and interests of seminar members become clearer, and as CHE faculty members contribute readings for the sessions in which they participate.

READINGS

Although the majority of readings in this syllabus have been finalized, there may be additions as visiting CHE faculty members identify texts they want to discuss and as seminar members decide topics we would like to explore together. Some added readings could reflect the evolution of our conversations together, and some may be generated by the assignments you'll be doing as background for your final projects. Whenever possible, students will be informed of readings at least a week ahead of time, and in general the total number of pages assigned in a week will be under 200 pages except when an entire book is being assigned.

SEMINAR REQUIREMENTS:

Participation: (40%) This course is based on a seminar-discussion format. Each one in class needs to assume the responsibility of an active participant and learner. Success in the class depends largely upon the time, energy, and commitment you invest. You will be required to arrive at class having read the material assigned for the day and prepared to engage in a thoughtful and constructive conversation that is respectful of others in the classroom and takes seriously the issues and themes presented in the readings

Found Object Assignment: (20%) You will be required to write a 1,000-word interpretive essay that takes a found object from the archive—a document, a sound, a photograph, a film clip, a sediment core, e.g-- to tell a story about the Mississippi and its history in relationship to time, place, or culture.

Edge Effects Submission (40%):

You will be required to pitch and submit an essay or exhibit to CHE's digital magazine, *Edge Effects* <http://edgeeffects.net>. These are pieces up to 2,000 words in length with images. The topic can be related to your research, and need not be connected to the Mississippi, but it must be conceived in a way that integrates a theme or topic we have raised in the seminar connected to river histories or watery landscapes.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

The following questions are meant as a guide to help navigate us through the various topics, readings, and discussion sessions with CHE faculty participants over the course of the semester. Each session is oriented around a subset of the questions in this list, which should be taken as preliminary and evolving as we identify areas of interest and issues we would like to explore as a group.

Questions about Disciplines and Interdisciplinary Scholarship

What is a discipline, and how does one find one's bearings both within and between disciplinary spaces? How do our different disciplines conceive of time, space/place, and culture?

What are the key ways we seek to know nature, both within and between academic disciplines, and in the rest of human life?

What are the most interesting questions about past environmental change that tend to fall

between the cracks when a single discipline tackles them on its own? (The answer to this question will likely vary from discipline to discipline, but are there also questions that tend to fall between the cracks for all disciplines?)

What strategies are most effective when people with different disciplinary training try to work together on a common problem or project?

In studying the environmental past and thinking about its relationship with the environmental present, how can we best resolve the creative tensions between scholarship and activism?

How can we best communicate our scholarly and scientific insights beyond the boundaries of our discipline, both to our colleagues in other fields and to the larger public?

Questions about Methods and Evidence:

What constitutes an interesting and important research question--and what shapes our judgment in deciding whether or not a question is "significant"?

What different skills do we need for reading different kinds of scholarly communications? How does a scientific article, for instance, differ from an article in a humanities discipline like history or literature?

What is evidence, and what constitutes forms of evidence in different disciplinary domains?

What are the differences between quantitative and qualitative information, and how are they used differently across scholarly domains?

How can interviews with people be incorporated into scholarly research in ways that are respectful of cultures, traditions, and the rights of human subjects?

How do we tell stories, and what are the opportunities and hazards of narrative as a rhetorical form?

How do we synthesize different analytical insights and different forms of knowledge to produce a unified argument?

SYLLABUS, READINGS, AND HOMEWORK

January 19

Introduction to the CHE Methods Seminar

Getting to know each other: extended introductions

Brainstorming goals and protocols for the seminar

January 26 Navigating the Crossroads of Disciplines

Part I: What is a discipline? How do you know when you are in one? How does one find one's bearings both within and between disciplinary spaces?

Part II: What are the basic stages of the academic research process, and what skills does one need to acquire to become an effective researcher?

READINGS:

Carl Sauer, "The Agency of Man on the Earth," in *Man's Role in Changing the Face of the Earth*, edited by William L. Thomas, Jr., pp. 49-69 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956).

Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), pp. 42-68, 301-303.

Gregg Mitman, "Where Ecology, Nature, and Politics Meet: Reclaiming *The Death of Nature*," *Isis* 97 (2006): 496-504.

Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, Joseph M. Williams, *The Craft of Research* (University of Chicago Press, 3rd edition, 2008), pp. 3-27.

Definitions of the word "discipline" (and "interdisciplinary" and "transdisciplinary," *American Heritage Dictionary* and *Oxford English Dictionary*. (Available online)

Review research process portions and "How We Built This Website" page of *Learning to Do Historical Research* website: www.williamcronon.net/researching/index.htm

ASSIGNMENT: Find reviews of *The Death of Nature* in at least two different disciplinary journals and bring them to class prepared to discuss.

TIME

February 2 Capital, Commodities, and Narratives of History

Guest: Bill Cronon, History, Geography, and Environmental Studies

Part II: What constitutes an interesting and important research question--and what shapes our judgment in deciding whether or not a question is "significant"?

READINGS:

William Cronon, "The Wealth of Nature: Lumber, in *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991), 148-206.

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

Booth et. al., *The Craft of Research*, pp. 31-68.

Review "How to Frame a Researchable Question" of *Learning to Do Historical Research* website: www.williamcronon.net/researching/index.htm

ASSIGNMENT: Bring to class a single well-formed research question that you feel confident most members of your discipline would regard as valuable and/or significant connected to a watershed and its history.

February 9 Sedimentary Archives and Geological Time

Guest: Eric Carson

Part II: Finding documentary sources for river histories

Guest: Lisa Saywell, Wisconsin Historical Society

READINGS:

BACKGROUND

R.H Dott, Jr. and J. W. Attig, *Roadside Geology of Wisconsin* (Denver, CO: Mountain Press, 2004), 1 – 28.

MAIN READINGS

J. C. Knox, "The Mississippi River System," in A. Gupta, ed., *Large Rivers: Geomorphology and Management* (London: John Wiley & Sons, 2007), 145 - 182.

R. W. Baker, J. C. Knox, R. S. Lively, and B. M. Olsen, "Evidence for early entrenchment of the upper Mississippi valley," in *Contributions to Quaternary Studies in Minnesota*, 49 edited by C. J. Patterson and E. H. Wright, H.E., Jr. Minnesota Geological Survey Reports of Investigations (1998) 49: 113 - 120.

E. C. Carson, E.C. and J. E. Rawling III, "Late Cenozoic evolution of the lower Wisconsin River valley: Evidence for reversal of the river," *Wisconsin Geological and Natural History Survey Open-File Report 2015-02*, 21 pp.

Booth et. al, *The Craft of Research*, pp. 68-170.

Review "What are the Documents" of *Learning to Do Historical Research* website:

www.williamcronon.net/researching/index.htm

February 16 Discerning Ecological Pasts

Guest: Sara Hotchkiss, Botany and Environmental Studies

Part II: Finding the sedimentary remains of a river's history: reports from the scavenger hunt

READINGS:

Hotchkiss, S.C., R. Calcote, and E.A. Lynch. 2007. Response of vegetation and fire to Little Ice Age climate change: Regional continuity and landscape heterogeneity. *Landscape Ecology* 22(suppl.1):24-41.

Daniel R. Engstrom, James E. Almendinger, and Julie A. Wolin, "Historical changes in sediment and phosphorous loading to the upper Mississippi River: mass-balance reconstructions from the sediments of Lake Pepin," *Journal of Paleolimnology* 41 (2009): 563-588.

Booth et. al., *The Craft of Research*, 171-269.

Review "Arguments and Narrative" of *Learning to Do Historical Research* website:

www.williamcronon.net/researching/index.htm

ASSIGNMENT:

Bring to class two primary documents—text, image, map, or sound--that you found related to the Upper Mississippi watershed and questions of time. Be prepared to discuss.

PLACE

February 23 From Miasmas to Toxics: Landscapes of Health and Illness

Gregg Mitman

Part II: Pitching to *Edge Effects*

Guest: Nathan Jandl, English, Editor of *Edge Effects*

READINGS:

Erwin Ackerknecht, *Malaria in the Upper Mississippi Valley, 1760-1900* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1945), selections.

Gregg Mitman, "In Search of Health: Landscapes and Disease in American Environmental History," *Environmental History*

Conevery Bolton Valencius, *The Health of the Country: How American Settlers Understood Themselves and Their Land* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 133-190.

Richard Misrach and Kate Orff, *Petrochemical America* (Aperture, 2012), selections.

March 1 Flyways: Questions of Animal Agency

Guest: Elizabeth Hennessey, History and Environmental Studies

Part II: Pitching object for interpretive essay

READINGS:

David Gary Shaw, "A Way with Animals: Preparing History for Animals" *History and Theory*, Issue 52, December 2013, pp. 1-12.

Thom van Dooren, *Flight Ways: Life and Loss at the Edge of Extinction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 1-43.

Robert Wilson, *Seeking Refuge: Birds and Landscapes of the Pacific Flyway* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010), 1-15, 65-98.

ASSIGNMENT: Come to class with a pitch for your found object from the archive to write your 1,000 word interpretive essay.

March 8: Watery Landscapes

Guest: Adam Mandelman, Geography

Ann Vileisis, *Discovering the Unknown Landscape: A History of America's Wetlands* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1997), 1-10, 95-109.

Thomas Buchanan, "Levees of Hope: African American Steamboat Workers, Cities, and Slave Escapes on the Antebellum Mississippi," *Journal of Urban History* vol. 30, no. 3 (2004): 360-377

Mart Stewart, "Rice, Water, and Power: Landscapes of Domination in the Lowcountry, 1790-1880," *Environmental History Review* vol. 15, no. 3 (1991): 47-64.

Craig Colten, "Making a Lemon Out of Lemonade: The Transformation of Louisiana's Petrochemical Corridor," in *Energy Capitals: Local Impact, Global Influence*, eds. Martin Melosi and Joseph Pratt (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014), 58-76

Adam Piore, "Blissed-Out Fish on Prozac," *Nautilus*, December 18, 2014

http://nautil.us/issue/7/waste/blissed_out-fish-on-prozac

Optional Reading

Rodney Giblett, *Postmodern Wetlands: Culture, History, Ecology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 3-24.

Gallery: Visualizing Rivers

Harold Fisk, Plate 22-9, *Geological Investigation of the Alluvial Valley of the Lower Mississippi River* (Vicksburg, LA: Mississippi River Commission, 1944).

Mississippi River Commission, "Distribution of Project Flood," 1952. Note numbers represent cubic feet per second (cfs). For background, see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Project_design_flood

Daniel Huffman, "Mississippi River System," 2011

Arthur Lidov, "The Human Body part 2, Down a Long Canal," *Life*, 1962.

ASSIGNMENT: Exploring Watersheds

Take a half hour or so to try and follow the below guide to for exploring major US watersheds using Google Earth. They're not the clearest instructions and the datasets can be large and awkward to navigate, so don't get too hung up on this if you get stuck. If you manage to make it work, however, spend some time thinking "hydro-geographically," that is, how water connects places in ways we don't typically think about. Pro tip: be sure to play with disabling and enabling the dataset's various layers (Land Cover, Population, Elevation, etc.) in Google Earth.

<http://serc.carleton.edu/eslabs/drought/2b.html>

March 15: Ancestral Places

Guest: Larry Nesper

Part II: Discussion of found object essays

READINGS:

Shepard Krech, "Introduction," in *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History* (W.W. Norton and Company, 2000).

Clark Mallam "Ideology from the Earth: Effigy Mounds in the Midwest," *Archaeology* 35(1982):60-64.

Larry Nesper and James Schlender, "The Politics of Intercultural Resource Management," In *Native Americans and the Environment: Perspectives on the Ecological Indian*, Eds., Michael Harkin and David Rich Lewis (University of Nebraska Press, 2007).

James Theler and Robert Boszhardt, "The End of the Effigy Mound Culture: The Late Woodland to Oneota Transition in Southwestern Wisconsin," *Midcontinental Journal of Archaeology* 25 (2000):289-312.

ASSIGNMENT: Circulate drafts of found object essay. Be prepared to discuss and critique.

March 22 (NO CLASS: SPRING RECESS)

March 29 Soundscapes

Guest: Craig Eley

Part II: Screening of *The River*

READINGS:

Peter A. Coates, "The Strange Stillness of the Past: Toward an Environmental History of Sound and Noise." *Environmental History* 10.4 (2005): 636–65.

Rachel Mundy, "Birdsong and the Image of Evolution." *Society & Animals* 17.3 (June 2009): 206–23.

Jacob Smith, "Green Discs," from *Eco-Sonic Media* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2015), 13-41.

Jonathan Sterne, "The Stereophonic Spaces of Soundscape," from *Living Stereo: Histories and Cultures of Multichannel Sound*, Paul Théberge, Kyle Devine, and Tom Everrett, eds. (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 65-83.

Suggested:

Murray R. Schafer, "Introduction," "The Natural Soundscape," "The Sounds of Life," and "The Rural Soundscape" from *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 1993), 3-52.

ASSIGNMENT: Final drafts of Found Object essay due

CULTURE**April 5 Material Cultures**

Guest: Anna Andrzejewski

Part II: Come to class prepared to pitch your idea for your *Edge Effects* essay

READINGS:

Rich Schein, "The Place of Landscape: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting an American Scene," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 87 (December 1997): 660-80.

Sarah Faye Scarlett, Crossing the Milwaukee River: A Case Study in Mapping Mobility and Class Geographies, in *Landscapes of Mobility: Culture, Politics and Placemaking*, ed. Arijit Sen and Jennifer Johung (London: Ashgate, 2013), 87-104.

ASSIGNMENT: Come to class prepared to pitch your idea for your *Edge Effects* essay

April 12 Exploring River Life: Perspectives from Public Folklore

Guests: Janet Gilmore and James Leary

Part II: Share images or sounds that will be part of your *Edge Effects* submission

READINGS: TBA

ASSIGNMENT: Come to class with a selection of images and sounds to accompany your *Edge Effects* submission.

April 19 *A River Runs through It*: The Methods of Ecocriticism

Guest: Lynn Keller, English

Part II: First draft of *Edge Effects* essay due.

READINGS:

Lawrence Buell, "The World, the Text, and the Ecocritic," *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005: 29-61.

Literary text:

Norman Maclean, "A River Runs Through It." *A River Runs Through It and Other Stories*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1976: 1-104.

Sample of ecocriticism on that novella:

George F. Grattan, "Climbing Back into the Tree: Art, Nature, and Theology in *A River Runs Through It*." *Reading Under the Sign of Nature: New Essays in Ecocriticism*. Ed. John Tallmadge and Henry Harrington. Salt Lake City: U of Utah Press, 2000: 231-242.

Another brief and quite different ecocritical take on the same text:

Timothy Clark. "Environmental Justice and the Move 'Beyond Nature Writing.'" *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011: 87-95.

ASSIGNMENT: Circulate first draft of *Edge Effects* essay and be prepared to discuss

April 26 Water Politics

Guest: Samer Alatout, Community and Environmental Sociology/Environmental Studies

Part II:

READINGS: TBA

May 3 Wrap Up

ASSIGNMENT: Final draft of *Edge Effects* essays due.