

# HIST 5540: North American Environmental History

## #yorkhist5540

Fridays 11:30am to 2:30pm



Department of History

Instructor: Sean Kheraj

Office: Vari Hall 2124

Office Hours: Fridays 9:30am-10:30am; Fridays 2:30pm-3:30pm

Email: [kherajs@yorku.ca](mailto:kherajs@yorku.ca)

Twitter: [@seankheraj](https://twitter.com/seankheraj)

## Course Description

To understand the past, historians must consider the role of the reciprocal relationship between people and the rest of nature. This course examines the historiography of the North American environment since the advent of the Industrial Revolution spanning the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. We cover a broad range of topics, taking a thematic approach to the field of environmental history. At the same time, we will explore these themes along a chronological framework to convey an understanding of change over time. Because ecological boundaries do not always conform to political boundaries, this course will examine both Canada and the United States. This course also considers some of the theoretical and methodological approaches to environmental history.

## Organization of the Course

The course involves three-hour seminar sessions once per week. These sessions will combine discussion of key concepts and themes from course readings. **All listed readings are mandatory and essential to completion of this course. Active oral participation is crucial to success in this course.** Overall, students will focus on a single historiographical review essay assignment. Students must consult with the instructor to determine the topics of their essays. Students will also complete an essay proposal and an in-class presentation.

This course includes online participation using Moodle and Twitter. Students are encouraged to follow the **#yorkhist5540** hashtag on Twitter for course announcements, discussion questions, and other relevant course information.

## Readings

All books used in this course are available from Scott Library and other local libraries in the Greater Toronto Area. These books are also available for purchase online. All articles used in this course are available electronically through the York Library e-resources. Links to electronic readings will be posted to Moodle.

## Assignments and Evaluation

The grade for the course will be based on the following percentages:

Participation	30%
Essay Proposal	10%
Review Essay	40%
Presentation	20%

### General Rules, Policies and Expectations

Please make sure that all work that you hand in and present for this class is your own. The university takes this issue very seriously. We expect you to be familiar with all of the university policies relating to academic integrity. Violations of the York Senate Policy on Academic Honesty – including submitting work written by someone else or submitted in another course, failing to use quotation marks and citations when using or paraphrasing the printed or electronically-transmitted work of others, collaborating on written assignments, cheating during examinations, and aiding or abetting academic misconduct – will be treated severely. Recent penalties have included failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension from the University, and withholding or rescinding a York degree. For further information, see <http://www.yorku.ca/univsec/policies/document.php?document=69>.

All assignments should be submitted as PDF files in Moodle. Please double-space all written assignments and print them in standard 12-point font with 1-inch margins. Include your name and the assignment's title at the top of the paper (no separate title pages necessary). All sources should be credible scholarly sources and should be cited, using the Chicago Manual of Style (notes and bibliography) (<http://www.library.yorku.ca/eresolver/?id=996235>), in **footnotes**. You must also provide a properly formatted bibliography for each assignment. **Please also keep copies of all drafts and rough work.**

Please submit all assignments on the designated due dates. The instructor will not grade assignments submitted later than five days. All deadline extension requests must be made in writing via email to the instructor.

We will accommodate students with disabilities working with the York University Learning Disability Services office (<http://www.yorku.ca/cds/lds/>). Please contact the instructor directly to make sure we are informed of your needs. If you will require any kind of accommodation for religious reasons, please let us know as soon as possible. Attendance is otherwise mandatory (see “Course participation” section below).

#### Essay Proposal

**Due: February 3**

All students are required to submit a short 2-3 page essay proposal along with a 1-page bibliography. This assignment is worth 10% of your final grade. Please consult the detailed assignment description available on the course website.

#### Review Essay

**Due: April 7**

Students must write a critical review essay (20-25 pages). This essay should survey and review a selection of 5-7 key works in a given sub-field of environmental history. Please consult the detailed assignment description available on the course website.

### **Presentation**

All students are required to complete a presentation no longer than 10 minutes. This presentation will be based on the readings and topic of a given week of the course. Students will be required to provide an outline of key issues and topics covered in the readings as a way of leading into seminar discussion. Please consult the detailed assignment description available on the course website.

### **Course participation**

Your active participation in class is essential, and we will measure it in a variety of ways. You must show that you are engaging with course readings and themes by orally contributing thoughtfully to in-class discussions.

**All course participation must be in compliance with the York University Student Code of Conduct (<http://www.yorku.ca/oscr/pdfs/StudentCodeOfConduct.pdf>). In order to ensure this, students should try at all times to be respectful toward one another and toward all faculty and staff. Active and respectful student participation is essential to establishing a productive and engaging learning environment for everyone.**

# Course Schedule

## Week 1: Introduction to Course

Friday, January 6, 2017

- Review course syllabus and expectations

## Week 2: What is environmental history?

Friday, January 13, 2017

- Read: Hughes, J. Donald. *What is Environmental History?* Cambridge: Polity, 2006.
- Read: Hoffmann, Richard C. *An Environmental History of Medieval Europe*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2014. "Introduction" pgs. 1-20.

## Week 3: Surveying the Field

Friday, January 20, 2017

- Read: Fiege, Mark. *The Republic of Nature: An Environmental History of the United States*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012.
- Read: Forkey, Neil S. *Canadians and the Natural Environment to the Twenty-First Century*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012.

## Week 4: Rural Environments

Friday, January 27, 2017

- Read: Sandwell, R.W. *Canada's Rural Majority: Households, Environments, and Economies, 1870-1940*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016.
- Read: Brown, Dona. *The Enduring Dream of Self-Sufficiency in Modern America*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011.

## Week 5: Parks and Conservation

Friday, February 3, 2017

- Read: Cronon, William. "The Trouble with Wilderness or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature." *Environmental History* 1.1 (1996): 7-28.  
<http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/stable/3985059>
- Read: Jacoby, Karl. *Crimes Against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves, and the Hidden History of American Conservation*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.
- Read: Sandlos, John. "Nature's Playground: The Parks Branch and Tourism Promotion in the National Parks, 1911-1929" in *A Century of Parks Canada, 1911-2011*, edited by Claire Elizabeth Campbell, 53-78. Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2011.  
<http://press.ucalgary.ca/books/9781552385265>

## Week 6: Wildlife

Friday, February 10, 2017

- Read: Loo, Tina. *States of Nature: Conserving Canada's Wildlife in the Twentieth Century*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2006.
- Read: Sandlos, John. *Hunters at the Margin: Native People and Wildlife Conservation in the Northwest Territories*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007.

## Week 7: Mining

Friday, February 17, 2017

- Read: Van Horssen, Jessica. *A Town Called Asbestos: Environmental Contamination, Health, and Resilience in a Resource Community*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2016.
- Read: Piper, Liza. "Subterranean Bodies: Mining the Large Lakes of North-West Canada, 1921-1960." *Environment and History* 13, no. 2 (May 2007): 155–86.

## Week 8: Urban Environments

Friday, March 3, 2017

- Read: Cronon, William. *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1991.
- Read: Melosi, Martin V. "Humans, Cities, and Nature: How do Cities Fit in the Material World?" *Journal of Urban History* 36, no. 1 (2010): 3-21.  
[http://journals1.scholarsportal.info.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/details/00961442/v36i0001/3\\_hcanhdcfitmw.xml](http://journals1.scholarsportal.info.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/details/00961442/v36i0001/3_hcanhdcfitmw.xml)

## Week 9: Animals and Cities

Friday, March 10, 2017

- Read: McShane, Clay and Joel Tarr. *The Horse in the City: Living Machines in the Nineteenth Century*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007.
- Read: Biehler, Dawn Day. *Pests in the City: Flies, Bedbugs, Cockroaches, and Rats*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013.
- Read: Kheraj, Sean. "Urban Environments and the Animal Nuisance: Domestic Livestock Regulation in Nineteenth-Century Canadian Cities" *Urban History Review/Revue d'histoire urbaine* 44, no. 1-2 (Fall/Spring 2015/2016): 37-55.

## Week 10: High Modernism

Friday, March 17, 2017

- Read: Scott, James C. *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.
- Read: Loo, Tina, and Meg Stanley. "An Environmental History of Progress: Damming the Peace and Columbia Rivers." *Canadian Historical Review* 92, no. 3 (2011): 399–427.

## Week 11: Energy History

*Friday, March 24, 2017*

- Read: Jones, Christopher F. *Routes of Power: Energy and Modern America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014.
- Read: Sandwell, R.W. *Powering Up Canada: A History of Power, Fuel, and Energy from 1600*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016.

## **Week 12: Toxicity**

*Friday, March 31, 2017*

- Read: Langston, Nancy. *Toxic Bodies: Hormone Disruptors and the Legacy of DES*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011.
- Read: Nash, Linda Lorraine. *Inescapable Ecologies: A History of Environment, Disease, and Knowledge*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.