

## Course Syllabus

### Eng 475—Problems in American Studies: Environmentalism as Culture

Instructor: David Mazel

8-9:15 a.m. TTh • ES 327

Spring 2009 • 3 credit hours

Office Hours: 9-10 a.m. MWF; 11 a.m. to noon MW

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In this course we will begin with R.W.B. Lewis's "American Adam" argument that Americans have tended to see themselves like Adam and Eve in Eden, standing innocently in a new world, at the beginning of a new history that is theirs for the shaping. This national myth has proved to be durable, optimistic, and at times liberating, enabling the creation of myriad new forms of personal and political expression. But it also has a downside: what if, like Adam and Eve, Americans have misused their Adamic freedom and precipitated a second Fall, unleashing new miseries upon themselves and the world?

This course explores the possibility that these hopes and anxieties helped determine the schizoid nature of twentieth-century green culture. It takes as a given the fact that, unlike Adam and Eve, we are not born outside of history. We inherit a past and live in a present constructed long before we were born. We will treat American environmentalism — in all its manifestations, from Bambi to ecoterrorism — as a particularly important site for examining the interplay between Adamic myth and historical reality.

**Student learning outcomes:** Upon completing this course, you should be better able to —

Understand the scope, methods, and aims of American studies.

Write a theoretically sophisticated, well developed, and well supported paper.

Understand the relations between ideology, myth, politics, literature, and culture.

**Prerequisite:** Eng 210 or instructor's permission.

#### Required Books:

Edward Abbey, *The Monkey Wrench Gang*

Ernest Callenbach, *Ecotopia*

John Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierra*

Dave Foreman, *Confessions of an Eco-Warrior*

Course packet

**Course requirements and grading:** Please read and think about the assigned works and come to class prepared to answer questions such as these: Did you like or dislike what you read? Was there some aspect of it you found particularly interesting, disturbing, uplifting, or puzzling? How might it be related to the recurring questions discussed in class? Why would anyone want to read it today?

This is a reading-intensive course. Because of the heavy reading load, I am only assigning one formal essay/project.

I grade on a point system (900s = A, 800s = B, 700s = C, 600s = D, 0-599 = F):

Grizzly@Adams contributions — required; no points

Exam #1: key American studies texts — up to 200 points

Exam #2: key environmental theory texts — up to 200 points

Formal essay/project — up to 600 points

Final exam — required; no points

This is a senior-level college course, and I expect your finished work to be of corresponding quality. Your formal essay/project should clearly express and adequately support an original and significant argument. It should make appropriate use of its sources and have no significant grammar or spelling errors. If it is an essay it should be about 1,500 words long (about six pages) and use MLA style and format: double spaced, left-justification, 12-point Courier font, one-inch margins all around, in-text citations, and Works Cited page. If it is an *Inquiry* submission it should be addressed to a general campus audience and should demonstrate the contemporary significance of one or more of the texts studied in class. (In addition to turning in a hard copy of this essay, be sure to save an electronic copy in MS Word format in case it is lost or selected for publication.) If it is a poster display or other creative project, see me for details.

The assignments listed above allow you to earn points toward your final grade. In addition you must complete the following two ungraded assignments. Each assignment not completed will cost you up to 100 points.

**Grizzly@Adams:** You must contribute at least one reply to each of the American Studies posts I make on my blog at <http://davidmazel.blogspot.com>. Your initial reply to a post may be brief, but it should nonetheless be a literary-critical *argument*. It should make a claim, however tentative, and justify it by reference to a relevant text. After your initial post you can continue to reply on the same thread as you see fit. Just remember your netiquette and play nice.

You will need to adopt a user name or handle that allows you to post anonymously. (Of course, if you want credit for your replies you will have to reveal your user name to me, but you may remain anonymous to everyone else.) In addition, you might want to create a Google account. To do so, click on the “Comments” link at the bottom of the post. This will take you to a new page, where you should click on the link that reads “No Google Account? Sign Up Here” and follow the directions.

If you don’t create a Google account, you can still post replies. Simply click the “Anonymous” button, paste your reply into the text box, and click “Publish Your Comment.” If you use this option, be sure to type in your user name at the end of your reply.

Generally, I will post a new American Studies question before each class meeting. We will then discuss that question in class. You should post your response before the next class meeting. Note that I use Grizzly@Adams for other courses besides this one; to access American Studies posts only, click on the link provided.

**Final exam.** For this exam I will ask you an individually tailored question about the positions you have taken in class discussions, on the blog, or in one of your essays. You must defend your answer orally before the class. I will distribute questions a week or so beforehand.

**Academic Integrity Policy:** No cheating allowed! All the work you turn in must be your own. In my freshman composition courses, the penalty for cheating on a test or plagiarizing a paper is generally a grade of zero points on the paper or test in question. In my other courses, the penalty is generally an “F” in the course. The campus uses Turnitin.com to help detect plagiarized papers. As per campus policy, I report all cases of cheating to the ASC administration, which has the authority to expel repeat offenders from the college. *If you are not sure whether your use of outside sources is plagiarism, consult with me before turning in your work.*

**If you require course adaptations** or accommodations because of a documented disability, if you have emergency medical information to share with me, or if you need particular arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible.

**COURSE CALENDAR** (Subject to change—check with me or a classmate if you’ve missed class.)

- Jan 13** Lecture: American studies as an interdisciplinary field  
**Jan 15** Lecture: Environmentalism, identity, and culture
- Jan 20** Yahwist Creation Account; John Milton, excerpt from *Paradise Lost*; Harriet Prescott Spofford, “Circumstance” (packet)  
**Jan 22** Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” (packet)
- Jan 27** Henry Nash Smith, “The Myth of the Garden and Turner’s Frontier Hypothesis”; Perry Miller, “Nature and the National Ego” (packet)  
**Jan 29** Leo Marx, excerpt from *The Machine in the Garden* (packet)
- Feb 3** Annette Kolodny, excerpt from *The Land Before Her* (packet)  
**Feb 5** **Exam #1: Key American studies texts**
- Feb 10** David Mazel, excerpt from *American Literary Environmentalism*; Freeman Tilden, excerpt from *Interpreting Our Heritage*; National Park Service, “Montville Nature Trail” (packet)  
**Feb 12** Jennifer Price, “Looking for Nature at the Mall” (packet)
- Feb 17** (Snow Day—class does not meet)  
**Feb 19** William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness”; Gary Lease, “Nature Under Fire”; Michael Soulé, “The Social Siege of Nature” (packet)
- Feb 24** Carolyn Merchant, “Reinventing Eden: Western Culture as a Recovery Narrative”; Richard White, “Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?” (packet)  
**Feb 26** Andrew Ross, “Wet, Dark, and Low, Eco-Man Evolves from Eco-Woman” (packet)
- Mar 3** **Exam #2: Key environmental theory texts**  
**Mar 5** Begin John Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierra*
- Mar 10** Finish *My First Summer in the Sierra*  
**Mar 12** Aldo Leopold, excerpt from *A Sand County Almanac* (packet)
- Mar 24** Begin Ernest Callenbach, *Ecotopia*  
**Mar 26** Continue *Ecotopia*
- Mar 31** Finish *Ecotopia*  
**Apr 2** Begin Edward Abbey, *The Monkey Wrench Gang*
- Apr 7** Continue *The Monkey Wrench Gang*  
**Apr 9** Finish *The Monkey Wrench Gang*
- Apr 14** Begin Dave Foreman, *Confessions of an Eco-Warrior*  
**Apr 16** Continue *Confessions of an Eco-Warrior*
- Apr 21** Finish *Confessions of an Eco-Warrior*  
**Apr 23** Analyze films (*Bambi*, *Free Willy*, *Erin Brockovich* — screenings outside of class TBA); begin formal papers/projects

**Apr 28** Continue films and papers/projects

**Apr 30** Continue films and papers/projects

**May 7** **Final exam: 3-4:50 p.m.**

**May 8** **Formal papers/projects due by 5 p.m.**