Course Description:
Nature’s powers exceed human forces, yet “nature” itself is an artifact of human invention. When we transform nature, we transform ourselves. Environmental historians write stories about the past that grapple with this paradox.

The worlds that humans inhabit are both our own creation as well as the creation of nonhuman actors. Transformations we regard as “social,” “cultural,” “economic,” or “political” are all grounded in the complex material worlds in which we dwell. How have Americans lived within and against the constraints of the earth over the last five centuries? How has “nature” interwoven human and nonhuman worlds? How have the diverse cultural lives of Americans remained rooted in physical and biological processes?

By exploring answers to these questions, this course offers a survey of important topics and ideas in American environmental history as well as providing specific training in the theoretical and methodological approaches that environmental historians use to practice their craft. Students will study the historical contexts of present-day environmental controversies, learning how to put contemporary issues into deeper historical perspective. The goal of this course is for students to become more explicitly aware and thoughtfully critical of the ways that historical processes have affected and continue to affect environmental relationships.

Course Texts:

Grading Criteria:

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<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Place-Making Paper</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exam #1</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<td>Exam #2</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<td>Discussion Responses (10@3%)</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Historical Context Paper (final)</td>
<td>20%</td>
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Course Policies:

**Attendance and Participation**
Attendance is mandatory and students are expected to attended all class sessions. Four or more absences will result in an “F.”

**Blackboard**
Grades and digitized course materials, including all assigned readings, will be available on Blackboard. Please note, however, that this is *not* an online course, and that changes to the syllabus and other important information will not always be available on Blackboard.

**Discussion Responses**
On the ten class days devoted to class discussion, students will be responsible for responding, in writing, to a question regarding that day’s reading assignment(s). This exercise is intended to help prepare students for class discussion and will be graded on a “check/plus/minus” basis. More information will be provided in class.

**Exams (March 2nd and April 30th)**
Each in-class examination will require students to respond, in detail, to one essay question (out of a choice of three) as well as answering ten “objective” questions.

**Place-Making Paper**
This assignment asks students to write an essay of no longer than three pages discussing their own historical relationship to a specific place. It will be due on Friday, February 2nd. I will provide detailed information in class on Friday, January 26th.

**Historical Context Paper**
The twenty-first century surrounds us with environmental controversies. This assignment asks you to research a current environmental issue in the United States and write a minimum 1,000-word analysis paper that situates the issue into a deeper historical perspective. You will have opportunities to discuss your research in small groups over the course of the semester. The paper will be due during finals week and will stand in the place of a traditional final exam.

**Accessibility**
This course is committed to accessibility. If you need certain accommodations, please notify me (Professor Michael Wise) in person as soon as possible. If it is not possible to discuss accommodations in person, for whatever reason, then please email me at michael.wise@unt.edu or call me at (940) 891-6774.
Week 1:
W, Jan 17  no class (Professor Wise at a memorial service)
F, Jan 19  Course Introduction: What is Environmental History?

Week 2:
M, Jan 22  Deep Time and the Fictions of Pre-history
READ:
1. *George R. Stewart, Names on the Land (1945): 1-10 (“Of what is attempted in this book”; “Of the naming that was before history”).

W, Jan 24  Environmental History and the Material Turn
READ:

F, Jan 26  DISCUSSION #1: DOES HISTORY HAVE A “PLACE?”
READ:

Week 3:
M, Jan 29  Body and Environment in Early Modern New Spain
READ:

W, Jan 31  Environment and Disorder in Colonial New England
READ:

F, Feb 2  DISCUSSION #2: HOW DID LES HABITANTES “KNOW NATURE?”
READ:

DUE:
PLACE-MAKING PAPER (minimum 500 words)
**Week 4:**

**M, Feb 5**  
*Nature and the Age of Reason*  
READ:  

**W, Feb 7**  
*Biogeography and the Early Republic*  
READ:  

**F, Feb 9**  
**DISCUSSION #3: WERE JEFFERSONIANS REALLY “ENLIGHTENED?”**  
READ:  

**Week 5:**

**M, Feb 12**  
*Time, Distance, and the Origins of Modern Agriculture*  
READ:  

**W, Feb 14**  
**HISTORY GARDEN DAY #1:**  
In North Texas, Valentine’s Day is potato-planting day! Meet at the UNT Community Garden (located outside Legends Hall) to plant potatoes.  
READ:  

**F, Feb 16**  
*The Political Ecology of the Antebellum Plantation*  
READ:  
1. Fiege, 100-138, 148-150 (“King Cotton”; “Hard Labor”).

**Week 6:**

**M, Feb 19**  
*Nature to Market*  
READ:  

**W, Feb 21**  
*War Upon the Land*  
READ:  
DISCUSSION #4: DID THE CIVIL WAR CHANGE AMERICANS' IDEAS ABOUT NATURE?
READ:

WEEK 7:
M, Feb 26
FILM: Ric Burns, Death and the Civil War (2012).
READ:

EXTRA CREDIT OPPORTUNITY
Tuesday, February 27, 9:30 AM, location tbd
UNT Black History Month Lecture:
“Deamonte Driver and the Subaltern History of Dentistry”
Professor Richard M. Mizelle (Univ. of Houston)

W, Feb 28
EXAM REVIEW SESSION

F, Mar 2
EXAM #1

WEEK 8:
M, Mar 5
The Transcontinental Railroad
READ:
1. Fiege, 228-270 (“Iron Horses”)

W, Mar 7
The Destruction of the Bison
READ:

F, Mar 9
DISCUSSION #5: HOW DID RAILROADS CHANGE “NATURE?”
READ:

SPRING BREAK (March 12-16)

WEEK 9:
M, Mar 19
Conservation and the Progressive Era, Part 1
READ:

W, Mar 21
Conservation and the Progressive Era, Part 2
READ:

**F, Mar 23**

**DISCUSSION #6: WHAT IS “CONSERVATION?”**

READ:

**Week 10:**

**M, Mar 26**

**HISTORY GARDEN DAY #2**

Spring is in the air! Meet at the UNT Community Garden (located outside Legends Hall) to harvest radishes and plant chiles.

READ:

**W, Mar 28**

**Food and Health in the Progressive Era**

READ:

**F, Mar 30**

**DISCUSSION #7: ARE YOU WHAT YOU EAT?**

READ:

**Week 11:**

**M, Apr 2**

**FOOD HISTORY LECTURE - location tbd**

Professor Krishnendu Ray (New York University)

READ:
W, Apr 4  The Dust Bowl
READ:

F, Apr 6  DISCUSSION #8: WAS “NATURE” A LIBERATING FORCE DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR?
READ:

Week 12:
M, Apr 9  no class (Professor Wise at the Sid Richardson Museum in Fort Worth)
W, Apr 11  no class (Professor Wise at the Association of American Geographers)
F, Apr 13  no class (Professor Wise at the Association of American Geographers)

Week 13:
M, Apr 16  DISCUSSION #9: WHAT WAS LIFE LIKE IN NORTH TEXAS 100 YEARS AGO?
READ:

W, Apr 18  Mass Production During the Second World War
READ:

F, Apr 20  Mass Destruction During the Second World War
READ:

Week 14:
M, Apr 23  The Environmental Movement
READ:

W, Apr 25  HISTORY GARDEN DAY #3
Temperatures are rising. Time to plant okra and sweet potatoes!
READ:
1. Fiege, 275-277, 318-357 (“Natural Hazards”; “The Road to Brown vs. Board”).
F, April 27  **Cars and the Making of Postmodern America**  
READ:  
1. Fiege, 278-280, 358-402, 403-429 (“Lipids and Liberty”; “It’s a Gas”; “Paths that Beckon”).

**Week 15:**  
M, April 30  **EXAM #2**

W, May 2  **DISCUSSION #10: WHAT CAN ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY TELL US ABOUT THE PRESENT?**

**Finals Week:**  
M, May 7  **DUE:**  
Historical Context Paper (minimum 1,000 words) by email to michael.wise@unt.edu