Meeting Time: Tuesday & Thursday, 4:00-5:20PM  
Location: McKenzie Hall 240C

Instructor: Steve Leone, Dept. of History (instructor pro tempore)  
Office: McKenzie Hall 340X  
Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1-2:30PM (or by appointment)  
Email: sleone@uoregon.edu (or via Canvas)

Course Description
Historian Chris Sellers opined in a recent essay, “the city has blossomed into a scholarly frontier in environmental history.” While earlier scholarship emphasized rural, green, and conventionally “wild” spaces, increasing numbers of historians are turning their attention to urban areas, where a majority of the world now lives, and where many of us spend most of our time thinking about “nature” and the environment. Cities are wonderfully paradoxical! As sites they are among the most artificial ever created, vast conglomerations of asphalt, steel, plastic, pipes, and wires. Yet they are never removed entirely from “nature,” as the disastrous hurricanes and raging wildfires continually and tragically demonstrate to us. Moreover, the dynamic connection between metropolitan centers and their “hinterlands” (both locally and globally) are wide, complex, and intricate systems that bring together the social, the economic, and the environmental. As such, cities are the frequent sites environmental politics, activism, and efforts to achieve environmental justice.
HIST 473/573 examines the American city, from the colonial period to the present, focusing particular attention on its environmental impacts and consequences. Cities are at the heart of American historical development and experience—as engines of economic development, geographical expansion, and population growth, and as places of new social and cultural expression, of dynamic natural and built landscapes. They have been at the center of Americans’ complex “dialogue” with nature for nearly 400 years.

Required readings will include both primary sources and secondary materials, many of which will be available via our Canvas page. Each student will be evaluated based on their performance on two exams, one paper assignment, and the quality of their participation in class discussion.

Course Requirements & Format
The course will combine lecture with discussion, often weaving the two together, and therefore relies on your earnest attempt to engage with and read the assigned materials. Brief lectures will build upon or present alternate examples and not simply recapitulate our readings. Students are responsible for completing reading assignments each week as listed on the syllabus. These assignments (as noted above) will often provide the fundamental basis for class activity; students are expected to attend all class meetings and participate actively.

Note: because of the critical role of discussion in this course, excessive absence from class (more than 4 absences) will result in a failing grade. Grades will be assigned according to students’ performance on the following:

- Week 4 Analytical Response (25 percent)
- Week 8 Analytical Response (25 percent)
- Final Paper due December 6 (35 percent)
- Quality of class participation (15 percent)
Required Books
William Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*  
(New York: W.W. Norton, 1991)

Michael Rawson, *Eden on the Charles: The Making of Boston*  
(Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010)

Dawn Day Biehler, *Pests in the City: Flies, Bedbugs, Cockroaches, and Rats*  
(Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016)

Learning Objectives & Outcomes
By the end of the term, you should be able to:
- Trace the history of environmental ideas and practices in, and emanating from, American cities from the colonial period to the present.
- Explain American cities as “landscape”—that is, as physical space that is simultaneously natural and cultural, even when seemingly highly artificial.
- Trace American urban environmental history as a process that is culturally diverse and politically contested.
- Critically analyze and interpret “primary” historical sources, the basis for historical description, analysis, and interpretation.
- Write in-class essays that present and develop your own argument or thesis, illustrated and supported by historical evidence.
- Assess contemporary urban spaces in the U.S. in terms of the past that created or shaped them.

Written Work
Analytical Responses: In lieu of a “classic” midterm or final this course will instead use short analytical papers due at two different points in the quarter (currently week 4 & 8). These papers are not intended to be burdensome but instead will allow you to reflect, consider, analyze, and present ideas and concepts that are of interest to you built from the articles, books, lectures, and discussions that we have had up to each of those points. My hope for these papers is to see your creativity, though, I will also provide prompts well before each of those potential assignments are due to help spur and/or guide the topics or issues you might consider. More information will be provided during the quarter.

Final Paper: Throughout the quarter we will discuss numerous cities and their environments. Within that we will touch upon a variety of concepts and themes from the “commodification of nature” to the importance of waterways to American urban development. Many of these ideas and cities will resonate with you, some will not. The final paper is your opportunity to examine a particular city and its environmental story or, perhaps, a series of cities that demonstrate a specific theme. I understand the difficulty of a “research” paper during a 10 week course, as such, you should use all of the resources that are provided to you during the quarter (books, articles, primary sources, images, etc.) to construct your paper. I will provide potential topics to consider during the quarter, but I am also open to any avenue you might wish to pursue. Also, I am more than happy to help point you in the direction of the numerous and in-depth digital resources we have at our disposal to provide you additional evidence and sources from which to pull. All of this will be discussed during the quarter.
Grading Standards (Adopted from Department of History)
A+: Work of unusual distinction. This grade is rarely awarded.
A: Work that distinguishes itself by the excellence of its grasp of the material and the precision and insight of its argument, in addition to being well executed and reasonably free of errors.
B: Work that satisfies the main criteria of the assignment and demonstrates command of the material, but does not achieve the level of excellence that characterizes work of A quality.
C: Work that demonstrates a rudimentary grasp of the material and satisfies at least some of the assigned criteria reasonably well.
D: Work that demonstrates a poor grasp of the material.
F: Work that is weak in every aspect, demonstrating a basic misunderstanding of the material and/or disregard for the assignment, or it is plagiarized.

For the department’s official standards, see: https://history.uoregon.edu/undergraduate/grading-policy/

Academic Integrity & Plagiarism
All work that you turn in must be your own. Any work submitted for credit that includes the words or ideas of anyone else must fully and accurately identify your source with a citation. Note that replacing words with synonyms, changing verb tense, stringing together phrases from a source, or other minor alterations does not qualify as paraphrasing. Even with a citation, failure to put quotation marks around direct quotations constitutes plagiarism, because it implies that the writing is your own. (By the way, submitting the same paper to more than one class for credit is also academic misconduct.) In the event of an act of plagiarism or other academic misconduct, I will impose
sanctions, as provided in the Student Code of Conduct. **The minimum penalty will be a 0 on the assignment, but plagiarism can also merit an F in the course, even for a first offense.**

See: [https://policies.uoregon.edu/vol-3-administration-student-affairs/ch-1-conduct/student-conduct-code](https://policies.uoregon.edu/vol-3-administration-student-affairs/ch-1-conduct/student-conduct-code)

If you are confused about this or do not understand the consequences of academic dishonesty at the UO—or the ethical issues behind these university policies—please read these guidelines: [https://researchguides.uoregon.edu/citing-plagiarism/whycite](https://researchguides.uoregon.edu/citing-plagiarism/whycite)

**Accommodations**  
This course supports access and inclusion for students with disabilities. This includes but is not limited to exam adjustments, sign language interpretation, classroom relocation, and adaptive technology services available to students who register with the Accessible Education Center (AEC).

You can find more information at: [https://aec.uoregon.edu/](https://aec.uoregon.edu/)

**Safe Learning Environment**  
As an instructor, one of my responsibilities is to help create a safe learning environment for my students. I am required to report any instances of sexual harassment, sexual violence and/or other forms of prohibited discrimination. If you would rather share information about sexual harassment, sexual violence or discrimination with a confidential employee who does not have this reporting responsibility, you can find a list of those individuals at [https://safe.uoregon.edu/services](https://safe.uoregon.edu/services). Each resource is clearly labeled as either “required reporter,” “confidential UO employee,” or “off-campus,” to allow you to select your desired level of confidentiality.
**Tentative Course Syllabus as of 09/19/18, Subject to Change**

**Course Schedule**

Week 1: The Urban Idea and American Ambivalence.
How and why have Americans been ambivalent about cities or even anti-urban in their outlook? How, conversely, have cities been critical in shaping the American experience socially, economically, and physically? What is a city and what relationship does it have to “nature”?
Tuesday, Sept. 25: Introduction.
Thursday, Sept. 27: Urbanism and Anti-Urbanism in America.

Reading: Rawson, Preface and Prologue, vii-xii; Cronon, Preface and Prologue, xv-xix, 5-19.

Week 2: Early American City
How and why did cities emerge in colonial America? How did they relate to the colony, metropole, Atlantic World? How did they organize nature and affect environmental experience or alter environments nearby and more distantly?
Oct. 2: Colonial Urban Visions and Realities
Oct. 4: Early National Cities

Reading: Rawson, 1-40.

Week 3: Antebellum City: Commerce, Urban Growth, and Its Consequences
How and why did cities grow in the antebellum period as engines of commerce and economic development? What problems attended such growth, human and environmental? How such problems were addressed, and in turn what were the environmental consequences of such solutions?
Oct. 9: New Orleans
Oct. 11: New York

Reading: Rawson, 40-128
On Canvas: excerpts from Charles Dickens, American Notes; Henry David Thoreau, “Letters from Staten Island”; Walt Whitman, “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry”; Herman Melville, Moby-Dick (1851), excerpt from chapter 1; Melville, “Bartleby, the Scrivener; A Story of Wall-Street.”

Week 4: The Industrializing City
How, why, and where did Americans begin to industrialize? How did the growth of manufacturing transform American landscapes and Americans’ sense of space and the relationship between the country and city? How did industrial production transform cities—what were the proximate and distant environmental consequences? Was there a particular American mode of industrialization, was the U.S. “exceptional”?
**Tentative Course Syllabus as of 09/19/18, Subject to Change**


Reading: Cronon, 23-93.  

*Analytical Paper #1 due Online (via Canvas) Before Class Meeting on October 18*

Week 5: The Metropolis and the Great West: New Orleans and Chicago

How did the city create its hinterlands, how did such hinterlands enable the metropolis? How did cities create a “second nature”? How did technology transform the city, and what were the environmental consequences of such transformation?


Oct. 25: No Class (Midterm Week, stay ahead of the reading)

Reading: Cronon, 97-259

Week 6: Parks, Nature, Wilderness

How did cities reimagine nature and conserve it or reconstruct it in urban spaces? What were origins of urban green space? How “artificial” were/are cities, how “natural”? How did cities help to “create” wilderness and preserve it? How and why did Americans begin to construct “suburbs”?

Oct. 30: Boston: Congested cities, “rural cemeteries,” and “pastoral” suburbs

Nov. 1: New York and Central Park

Reading: Rawson, 129-276; Cronon, 341-85.

**Tentative Course Syllabus as of 09/19/18, Subject to Change**

**Week 7: Urban Immigration, Ethnicity, Race, and Environmental Justice**

What environmental problems have American cities faced, and how did they particularly affect the poor, particularly newly arrived immigrants and migrants? Were such problems gendered, class specific, or racially and ethnically experienced? How (and to what extent) were such problems solved, and did such solutions create new problems? In reform movements, can we see the roots of an environmental justice movement?

Nov. 6: Congestion, pollution, and health.

Nov. 8: Experiencing cities from the bottom.

Reading: Biehler, pp. TBD

**Week 8: The Modern and Postmodern City**

How did new technologies, values, interests, and circumstances transform the build landscapes and spaces of American cities? Did cities become more artificial or more able to transcend environmental constraints? What sort of environmental disasters did cities precipitate, and how were such disasters understood, experienced, and addressed?

Nov. 13: Modern Los Angeles

Nov. 15: Postmodern Los Angeles

*Analytical Paper #2 due Online via Canvas on November 15 by 11:59PM*

Readings: Biehler, pp. TBD

**Week 9: Cities and Suburbs in the late 20th Century**

Nov. 20: Modern/postmodern New York and its environs

**Nov. 22: No Class (Thanksgiving Holiday)**

Reading: Biehler, pp. TBD
**Tentative Course Syllabus as of 09/19/18, Subject to Change**

**Week 10: Ecotopia/Dystopia?**
Nov. 27: Urbanity and the Cities of the Pacific Northwest
Nov. 29: Conclusions

Reading: Biehler, pp. TBD

*Final Paper Due Online via Canvas on Thursday, December 6th at 11:59PM*