

RHODES COLLEGE  
FALL 2009  
**GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY**  
HIST 270

Prof. Tait Keller  
[kellert@rhodes.edu](mailto:kellert@rhodes.edu)  
Office: Clough Hall 317  
Office Hours: Tuesday 1-2:30; Wednesday 3:30-5;  
and by appointment

Class Days: MW 2:00-3:15  
Excursion Days: Friday Afternoons  
Classroom: Buckman Hall 214

### **Course Description**

What can our environment tell us about our past? How have natural resources shaped patterns of human life? What meanings have people attached to nature, and how have those attitudes shaped their cultural and political lives? This course is intended as an introduction to the field of environmental history. We will analyze the ecological context of human existence, with the understanding that the environment is an agent and a presence in human history. Because environmental change often transcends national boundaries, this course places important subjects in environmental history into a global context. Yet we should remember that global concerns stem from local challenges. We will incorporate several off-campus educational experiences to draw connections between our course work and environmental issues in Memphis. The knowledge gained from our outings will be essential to our understanding of environmental history. This course will help us recognize the important developments that contributed to present day environmental issues around the world and in our local community.

### **Course Requirements and Grading**

Grades in the course will be based on several components. The first is spirited participation in the discussions, as well as leading one of them. The second component will be six reflection pieces. The third is a place paper, and the last component is a midterm and final exam.

#### *I. Participation*

The success of the course depends on your active participation, which also happens to make up a big part of your grade. I expect you to come to the class and field trips prepared, having done the assigned reading and eager to participate. Learning how to talk enthusiastically and intelligently about significant subjects is actually one of the most important skills you can learn in college, and this course is a great place to work on that skill. This is a skill necessary for success in this class, and for whatever you decide to do after graduation. So not participating is not an option, and unexcused absences will negatively impact your final grade.

You will also be responsible for leading one of the Wednesday discussions. I require that you meet with me at some point before the discussion to go over your ideas and the questions you intend to ask.

#### *II. Reflections*

Throughout the course, you will be expected to reflect on how the topics that we discuss in class relate to local environmental concerns. To help you with this, I require that you submit a "reflection piece" for 6 of the 15 weeks on the syllabus. For each of these weeks you should consider a key concept or question from the lecture, discussion, or readings and seek to explore that issue in Memphis. Your reflections must be based on field observations that you conduct off-campus. You must use 3, but no more than 4, of our class excursions for your reflections. In your reflections you may want to consider the historical background to the environmental issues and how a more historical perspective could (or could not) help us think about those environmental issues today. Each piece is to be 500-700 typed words in length. In no event should your reflection be more than 700 words; I look for cogency not length. You may choose the weeks for which you will write your piece, but you

must submit at least 3 reflections by Fall Break, and the remaining reflections by Thanksgiving Break. Your reflection is due at the start of class on the Monday following the week of your choice.

### III. Place Paper

The purpose of the place paper is for you to put into practice some of the approaches that environmental historians use. In it, you are to choose some place in the greater Memphis area and write an essay discussing your interpretation of some aspects of its environmental history. You should think of this paper as an exercise in historical, geographical, and environmental interpretation, asking you to read a small patch of landscape as a historical document of past environmental change. For example, you may want to walk through Overton Park and write an account of its history. You could take a trip down to Mud Island and analyze the ways in which the Mississippi River has shaped the city. If you run along V&E Greenline you could write a history of its development. You may also use one of our field trips as the basis for your paper or expand on one of your reflections. The possibilities for this essay are almost endless. Several possible topics and helpful suggestions for this assignment are posted on Moodle.

The paper is to be 5-6 pages in length (Times New Roman, 12 pt. font, 1 inch margins), double spaced, and follow the guidelines of either the *MLA Handbook* or Turabian's *A Manual for Writers*. A writing style guide is available on Moodle to assist you when you proofread your papers. Be sure to follow the style guide and make note of typical mistakes undergraduates often make in their papers. Your grade will suffer if you commit these mistakes. No, this is not an English course, but you cannot do good history without writing competently. The paper is due at the start of class on **Monday, Dec. 7.**

### IV. Midterm and Final Exams

The exams will test your mastery of the course material. Each exam will be a combination of identifications and essay questions. The midterm exam will be held on **Wednesday, Oct. 14**, and the final exam on **Monday, Dec. 14**. Review sheets for each exam are on Moodle.

The final grade for the class will be established as follows:

Grading Scale:

Participation	25%	A Outstanding
Reflections	15%	B Above Average/Very Good
Place paper	25%	C Average/Good
Midterm exam	15%	D Below Average/Poor
Final exam	20%	F Fail

A (93-100); A- (90-92); B+ (87-89); B (83-86); B- (80-82); C+ (77-79); C (73-76); C- (70-72) and so on. Any number below 60 will be marked as an F

**\*NOTE:** All assignments must be completed to pass the course. Failure to complete any of the course requirements by **Monday, December 14** will result in a final course grade of F.

### Required Texts (in order texts are read)

John R. McNeill, *Something New under the Sun*

*Prentice Hall Atlas of World History*

William Cronon, *Changes in the Land*

Steven Johnson, *The Ghost Map*

All of these titles are on sale at the bookstore and on reserve in the library. You can also find all these books used (read: much cheaper) at online bookstores, including addall.com, alibris.com, amazon.com, and half.com. You are welcome to read these books in any edition, condition, or language.

## **Course Policies – read these all carefully**

**Special Needs and Accommodations:** I am strongly committed to accommodating students with disabilities, and ask your cooperation in making sure that I am aware of any such accommodation you might need. All accommodation requests are the responsibility of the student. For more information, please contact Student Disability Services (SDS) to alert them of any needs you may have.

**Moodle:** All students in the class are automatically registered for this course on Moodle. When you log on to Moodle and access the site for this course, you will find all course materials, including this syllabus, readings, and guidelines for assignments.

**Email:** All email correspondence will be sent to your Rhodes email account. It is your responsibility to check this account regularly. Emails are not text messages. When writing me, I expect your emails to be professional.

**Field Trips and Learning Community Activities:** The field trips and LC activities are an integral part of the course. Attendance to all field trips and activities is required for the successful completion of the course. Excused absences will be granted only on a case-by-case basis.

**Food, Drink, Tobacco:** Drink is permitted in my classroom, but food and tobacco products of all kinds are prohibited.

**Cell phones:** Turn them off! If I see you using your phone in class, I will confiscate it.

**Laptops:** The use of laptop computers or other screen-based devices is not permitted during lectures or discussions. If you have a medical reason for needing to use a laptop or other screen-based device, please let me know.

Sleeping in class is not permitted. Those who fall asleep will be subject to a rude awakening.

**Grades:** I do not give “I” (incomplete) grades. Late papers, except in documented cases of bereavement or catastrophic illness, will suffer a substantial reduction in grade. Therefore, please plan ahead and do your work on time. I will be delighted to discuss your papers with you. Be advised however that grades, once assigned, are not subject to change. I also will not communicate grades over email or the telephone. The most important part of the grading process is not the grade, but the comments you will find on your papers when you pick them up.

**Honor Code:** I believe in the College’s standards of academic honesty, and I do my best to enforce them vigorously and to the letter. Be aware of those standards, and observe them. Plagiarism and cheating are easy to detect; so are papers pulled off the internet. If I suspect that you have cheated or plagiarized another’s work, I will discuss this matter with you. If I am not satisfied, I will report your case to the Honor Council for due process. I always recommend failure for the course when I submit a file. The bottom line is this: do your own work. You are spending your time and money to be here and learn. Don’t waste either by plagiarizing or cheating.

**SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND ASSIGNMENTS**  
(subject to change)

<i>Opening Week</i>	W Aug 26	Welcome!
<i>Lay of the Land</i>	M Aug 31	People and the Environment
	W Sept 2	Nature and Culture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▷ William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," in <i>Uncommon Ground</i></li> <li>▷ Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," <i>Science</i> (1967)</li> <li>▷ McNeill, chapter 1</li> </ul>
<i>Neolithic Revolutions</i>	M Sept 7	<b>Labor Day Holiday</b>
	W Sept 9	A Harvest of Riches <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▷ Jared Diamond, <i>Guns, Germs and Steel</i>, chapters 1, 4, 6, 10</li> <li>▷ Atlas, pp. 10-21, 25-27</li> </ul>
<b>Optional activity: Sat, Sept 12, Wolf River Day Expo at the V&amp;E Greenline, University Street and Jackson Avenue entrance, <a href="http://www.vegreenline.org">www.vegreenline.org</a></b>		
<i>Ancient Empires</i>	M Sept 14	Classical Civilizations and Environmental Collapse
	W Sept 16	Discussion: Vanished Edens? Guest moderator: Prof. Lusteck, Dept. of Anthropology & Sociology <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▷ Jared Diamond, <i>Collapse</i>, chapters 2, 4, 5</li> <li>▷ Atlas, 32-45, 50-53, 70-71</li> </ul>
<i>Transoceanic Transfers</i>	M Sept 21	The Columbian Exchange
	W Sept 23	Discussion: Fields and Fences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▷ Cronon, parts I and II (part III optional, but recommended)</li> <li>▷ Atlas, 72-77, 91</li> </ul>
<i>Early Modern Ecologies</i>	M Sept 28	The Little Ice Age
	W Sept 30	Discussion: Strategies of States <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▷ John Richards, <i>The Unending Frontier</i>, chapters 5-6</li> <li>▷ Atlas, 84-87</li> </ul>
<i>Machine in the Garden</i>	M Oct 5	Industrial Realities and Romantic Dreams
	W Oct 7	Discussion: Capital, Commodities and Environmental Change <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▷ Robert B. Marks, "Commercialization without Capitalism: Processes of Environmental Change in South China, 1550-1850," <i>Environmental History</i> (1996)</li> <li>▷ Franz-Josef Bruggemeier, "A Nature Fit for Industry: The Environmental History of the Ruhr Basin, 1840-1990," <i>Environmental History Review</i> (1994)</li> <li>▷ Atlas, 98, 108-109</li> </ul>
	<b>Sat Oct 10</b>	<b>Overton Park Nature Hike (10 AM!) - note day and time</b>
<i>Midterm Week</i>	M Oct 12	Guest: Thomas Homer-Dixon 7:00 PM Lecture (attendance required)
	W Oct 14	<b>Midterm Examination</b>

## Fall Break: Mississippi River Adventure Camping Trip

<i>The Flow of Power</i>	M Oct 19	<b>Fall Break</b>
	W Oct 21	Hydraulic Societies <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▷ David Blackbourn, “Time is a Violent Torrent,” in <i>Rivers in History</i></li><li>▷ McNeill, chapters 5 and 6</li></ul>
	<b>F Oct 23</b>	<b>Wolf River Wildlife Area Hike</b>
<i>Imperialism and “Improvement”</i>	M Oct 26	Managing the World
	W Oct 28	In-class film: <i>Elephant People</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▷ Atlas, 99-100, 106</li></ul>
	<b>F Oct 30</b>	<b>Memphis Zoo Visit</b>
<i>Development and Disease</i>	M Nov 2	Urban Spaces
	W Nov 4	Discussion: Pathogens and Progress <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▷ Johnson</li></ul>
	<b>F Nov 6</b>	<b>Historic Elmwood Cemetery Visit</b>
<i>The Fossil Age</i>	M Nov 9	Fuel and Fire
	W Nov 11	Discussion: Energy Regimes <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▷ McNeill, chapter 10</li><li>▷ David Nye, <i>Consuming Power</i>, chapters 7 and 9</li></ul>
	<b>F Nov 13</b>	<b>Biofuel Facility Tour</b>
<i>The Many Shades of Green</i>	M Nov 16	Consumption and Conservation
	W Nov 18	Discussion: Is Environmentalism Dead? <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▷ McNeill, chapter 11</li><li>▷ Rachel Carson, “<a href="#">A Fable for Tomorrow</a>”</li><li>▷ Michael Shellenberger and Ted Nordhaus, “<a href="#">The Death of Environmentalism</a>,” along with accompanying critical comments</li></ul>
	<b>F Nov 20</b>	<b>Shelby Farms Park Visit</b>
<i>Resilient Landscapes</i>	M Nov 23	In-class film: <i>Arid Lands</i>
	W Nov 25	<b>Thanksgiving Holiday</b>
<i>Malthusian Prospects</i>	M Nov 30	The Wastes of War
	W Dec 2	Discussion: Politics and the Population Bomb Guest moderator: Prof. Sciubba, Dept. of International Studies <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▷ McNeill, chapter 9</li><li>▷ Newspaper articles</li><li>▷ Atlas, 132-135</li></ul>
<i>Sustainable Futures?</i>	M Dec 7	<b>Place Paper Due</b>
	W Dec 9	Forward the Green Millennium

**Final Exam**  
**Monday, December 14, 5:30 PM**

## Excursions: Wild Places and Humans Spaces

One of the aims of this course is to help us become engaged citizens by participating in the local community. Our various field trips are designed to complement our classroom activities and explore the environmental challenges that Memphis faces, as well as the aspirations to which the city aspires. Our off-campus excursions will help us better understand the intricate relationships between us and our environment – the built and the natural, the local and the global, our role in it, and our effects upon it. Our activities off campus will provide the experience, knowledge and skills needed to evaluate and address contemporary environmental challenges at the neighborhood, national, and international levels. Listed below is a brief description of each excursion, a few words on how it connects to our classroom materials, and some questions to keep in mind while on the field trip.

### **Saturday, Oct 10: Overton Park Nature Hike (10 AM!)** [www.overtonparkforever.org](http://www.overtonparkforever.org)

Guide: Naomi Van Tol, Citizens to Preserve Overton Park

Overton Park was established at the start of the twentieth century, and its creation helped lay the foundation for municipal park systems across Tennessee. Overton Park's history is filled with controversy. City officials faced legislative battles to exercise eminent domain rights to create the Park. In the later half of the twentieth century, federal highway planners set Interstate Highway 40 to pass through the Park and designated several acres of the old-growth forest for demolition. In response, midtown residents formed the Citizens to Preserve Overton Park and took their case to the Supreme Court, which ruled in their favor. Controversy remains alive today as CPOP reincorporated itself to challenge the Memphis Zoo's expansion plans. Questions to keep in mind during the hike: how is the park presented? Was there a message or agenda? Prof. Carden (Dept. of Economics) recently wrote in *Forbes*: "Development is opposed by people saying that we owe it to our children to conserve our precious natural resources, but University of Rochester economist Steven Landsburg asks the right question. Who are we to say that our children will prefer an old-growth forest to the income produced by a parking lot or high rise?" What do you think responsible environmental stewardship means?

### **Fall Break: Mississippi River Adventure** [www.island63.com](http://www.island63.com)

Guide: John Ruskey, Quapaw Canoe Company

The Mississippi is an iconic river. The second-longest river in the US (the Missouri is the longest), it runs through ten states and covers over 2,300 miles. As we discussed in class, the river played a key role in the development of the US and is an intrinsic part to the nation's cultural heritage. To appreciate fully the importance and power of the Mississippi River, one must experience it first hand. We will canoe along the lower portion of the river, and along the way learn more about its history. As we float down the river, think about how the landscape around the Mississippi has changed. How has commerce and recreation shaped the river? In what ways does the river inform the lives of those who live along its banks?

### **Friday, Oct 23: Wolf River Wildlife Area Hike** [www.wolfriver.org](http://www.wolfriver.org)

Guide: Allan Trently, TN State Natural Areas Stewardship Ecologist

Shaping rivers is closely connected to the increased power of the state in the modern era, as we learned in class about the Nile, Yangtze, and Rhine Rivers. This conquest of nature carried unintentional environmental consequences. The Wolf River is a prime example of such change. Until its water became too foul, the Wolf River once served as Memphis' principle source of drinking water. The river's acquired stench of sewage led engineers to divert it north of the city. Its channelization led to diminished wetlands along some sections and rapid erosion along others. We will visit the [Lucius Burch State Natural Area](#) for a channelized example, then head to the [William B. Clark Preserve](#) for an un-channelized example. As we hike through the various nature areas what differences do you see in the river? What connection is there between the river and suburban development? To what extent can humans undo the damage caused by human action?

**Friday, Oct 30: Memphis Zoo Visit** [www.memphiszoo.org](http://www.memphiszoo.org)

Host: Prof. Jon Davis, Dept. of Biology, Rhodes College

Zoos have existed for centuries. Once the exclusive property of royalty, zoos became public spaces in the late nineteenth century. This development is linked closely to the expansion of European empires in the 1800s, whose imperial governments used scientific principles to organize nature in their dominions. Zoos came to exemplify the scientific approach to nature preservation, as well displaying the “exotic creatures” from far-flung lands. Today, zoos stand at the forefront of wildlife conservation. As we walk around the property, think about how is zoo organized and designed? How do you think endangered species should be preserved? How does the Zoo’s approach to conservation compare with what we saw on the Overton Park Nature hike? Some conservationists focus on scientific principles of resource management and others on spiritual, more romantic reverence for the natural world? Which approach has better served environmental protection?

**Friday, Nov 6: Historic Elmwood Cemetery Visit** [www.elmwoodcemetery.org](http://www.elmwoodcemetery.org)

Like the living, the dead also shape the natural world. We will visit the Elmwood Cemetery to see what we can learn from it as a historical document. As we learned in class, Yellow Fever devastated the city of Memphis in the late 1870s. Many of the gravestones tell that story. What can we learn about the lives of those who are buried there: how long they lived, how they died, what their family relations were? What does the cemetery tell us about their attitudes toward life, death, and their place in the natural world? Elmwood is a classic example of a garden cemetery with its park-like setting, sweeping vistas, shady knolls, large stands of ancient trees, and magnificent monuments. How does the physical form of the cemetery itself reflect cultural attitudes toward nature?

**Friday, Nov 13: A Biofuel Facility Tour**

Since the Industrial Revolution, our demand for energy has accelerated. Being the only creatures on earth to harness fire, we have spent the past two centuries burning immense quantities of fossilized biomass. According to many, we are on the verge of expending our fuel. In recent years an alternative energy industry has begun to emerge. Memphis, one of the primary transportation hubs in the US with access to planes, trains, trucks, and boats, is home to a number of biofuel facilities. As concerns about foreign oil dependency and the depletion of petroleum reserves increase, alternative energy companies have gained an increasingly stronger foothold (or, sometimes a toehold) in the economy. Such changes are not without their challenges. What difficulties or market barriers do these companies face? What would it take for alternative energy sources to be viable? How can we change an energy regime?

**Friday, Nov 20, 2 PM Shelby Farms Park Visit** [www.shelbyfarmspark.org](http://www.shelbyfarmspark.org)

Host: Jen Andrews, Manager of Communications

Shelby Farms is the largest urban park in the United States, more than five times larger than Central Park in New York City. Shelby Farms evolved from private property in the 1800s, home to a commune that sought to educate and emancipate slaves, to a penal colony in the early 1900s whose inmates provided agricultural labor, and finally to a recreational park today. This transformation typifies crucial land-use changes taking place in many communities during the modern era. Currently Shelby Farms has adopted a Master Plan to redesign the park. One of the key elements to the plan is to blend consumption with conservation. As we discussed in the class, this is not an easy balance to strike. When we tour park, ask yourself how its design compares with Overton Park. Other than size, what differences do you see? How should we balance consumption and conservation? Or, to put the Park’s Master Plan in a broader context, why have some environmental initiatives succeeded while others have failed?