



Panorama of Yosemite Valley from Artist Point (1906)

THE CONSERVATION MOVEMENT IN AMERICA

HIS 100-03; Fall 2024
Tues: 10:00-11:50, Thurs: 10-10:50
HSSC N2112

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Fall Office Hours
Mon: 10am-noon;
& [by appointment](#)

This class explores the nature of history by focusing on the century-long debate among scholars to understand the complex origins, character and impact of the conservation movement in America. Weaving together strands of scientific, political, economic, moral and aesthetic thought, the movement to conserve the nation's natural resources became one of the defining features of the progressive era. It also shaped the way subsequent generations of Americans in the twentieth century interacted with nature and the way the modern state regulated the use of natural resources. But how does one write the history of a movement that included such a diverse array of actors, ideals, and causes? As we shall see, the banner of conservation encompassed everything from the national parks to eugenics, from fishing policy to recreational spaces in cities to the nature-study movement in America's schools. And while textbooks tend to focus on the larger-than-life leaders of conservation—figures like Theodore Roosevelt or John Muir—the cast of characters involved in conservation was much more diverse, ranging from government engineers to federal troops, women's clubs to boy scouts, sports hunters to photographers. Whose voices and experiences should historians prioritize when writing the history of such a complex movement?

After an introductory unit on the craft of history—focusing on issues of evidence, interpretation, and narrative—we will explore how different waves of historians have developed strikingly different ways of understanding what the conservation movement really entailed, and what lessons we should learn from it. Through these debates, students will learn to evaluate critically how and why historians have come to such disparate conclusions, gaining an appreciation for the complexities of historical inquiry as well as the complexities of the past. Students will also explore how the past can inform the present—i.e. how we might learn from both the successes and failures, the visions and the blind spots, of this first, environmental movement.

Course Objectives (shared by all sections of HIS 100)

Students in this class will learn how to:

- read and critically analyze primary sources
- read and critically analyze secondary sources
- research, synthesize, and critically evaluate a body of historical literature

They will engage with:

- history as a craft and a discipline
- a diverse array of concepts, methods, and narratives for investigating and explaining the past

They will develop:

- Their skills of analytical, argumentative writing
- Their skills of oral communication, dialogue, and classroom citizenship

Course Materials

The majority of the course readings will be made available to students in a digital format through our course module on pioneer web. You are encouraged to print out copies of the readings, so that you can take notes and navigate the texts more easily during class discussion. But it's also fine if you want to read and annotate the texts digitally, using a device in class for that purpose.

There are two books that are required for the course, but will not be provided as digital texts. Both are available for purchase at the college bookstore:

- John H. Arnold, *History: A Very Short Introduction* (New York & London: Oxford University Press, 2000).
- Nancy Langston, *Forest Dreams, Forest Nightmares: The Paradox of Old Growth in the Inland West* (Seattle & London: University of Washington Press, 1995 or 2015)

Course Assignments & Grades

There will be **three essay assignments**:

- 1.) One **film analysis** (2-3 pages) due in **week 4**.
- 2.) One **document analysis** (2-3 pages) due in **week 7**.
- 3.) One **short essay** (3-5 pages), analyzing the secondary literature in **week 10**.

There will also be a **final independent project** on the history of conservation, consisting of:

- 1.) A **short proposal**, submitted in **week 13**, along with some **preliminary steps** in exploring your topic, in **week 14**.
- 2.) An **annotated bibliography** of your research topic (6-10 pages) due **exam week**.
- 3.) Accompanied by a short introduction (1-2 pages) explaining your research theme and the historiographic context you discovered, due **exam week**.
- 4.) A concise (5 min) **video presentation** of your project due **exam week**.

Lastly, **class participation** is an important and evaluated part of the course

The relative weight of these assignments will follow the table below:

Assignment	Date	Percentage of Total Grade
Film Analysis	Sept 17	15%
Document Analysis	Oct 10	15%
Short Essay #1	Nov 7	20%
Final Bibliography	Dec 19	25%
Recorded Presentation	Dec 17	5%
Class Participation	***	20%

More detailed information about the assignments and course policies can be found at the end of the syllabus (after the schedule of class sessions and readings).

COURSE SCHEDULE

- Please bring a copy (either print or electronic) of the readings along with your notes to each class so that we can have a focused and grounded discussion.

Thurs (Aug 29): **Introductions**

SECTION 1: Historical Methods and Issues

Week 2

Tues (Sept 3): **Telling Stories about the Past**

Reading Due: John Arnold, *History: A Very Short Introduction*, ch. 1-2.

Ben A. Minteer and Stephen J. Pyne, "Restoring the Narrative of American Environmentalism," *Restoration Ecology* 21 (2013), 6-11.

Thurs (Sept 5): **History and Sources**

Reading Due: John Arnold, *History: A Very Short Introduction*, ch. 3-4.

Week 3

Tues (Sept 10): **The Art of Interpretation**

Reading Due: Sam Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts* (excerpts).
Primary Sources (Conservation documents).

Thurs (Sept 12): Reconstructing the Past

Reading Due: Arnold, *History*, ch. 5
A Midwife's Tale (PBS Documentary Film, 1997, 89mins)

Week 4**Tues (Sept 17): Treating the Past as a Foreign Country**

Reading Due: Arnold, *History*, ch. 6.
 Jennifer Price, *Flight Maps: Adventures with Nature in Modern America*, excerpts.

Film Analysis Due (6:00pm)**Thurs (Sept 19): Objectivity & Truth**

Reading Due: Arnold, *History*, ch. 7
 William Cronon, "A Place for Stories: Nature, History, and Narrative," *Journal of American History* 78 (1992), 1347-1376.

SECTION 2: Debating the Intellectual Origins & Legacy of Conservation**Week 5****Tues (Sept 24): Conservation and the Story of American Democracy**

Reading Due: J. Leonard Bates, "Fulfilling American Democracy: The Conservation Movement, 1907 to 1921," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 44 (1957), 29-57.

Primary Sources (Pinchot, Smythe, and Bartlett)

Thurs (Sept 26): The Ideology of Progressive Conservation

Reading Due: Primary Source Exercise (Library of Congress)
<https://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amrvhtml/conshome.html>

Week 6**Tues (Oct 1): The Call of the Wild: Romanticism & the Origins of Conservation**

Reading Due: Roderick Frazier Nash, *Wilderness & the American Mind* (excerpts).
 Primary Source Exercise

Thurs (Oct 3): The Scientific Roots of Conservation

Reading Due: Samuel P. Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency*, preface, ch. 1 & 13, index.

Week 7

Tues (Oct 8): **The Technocratic Impulse**

Reading Due: Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency*, ch. 2, 5-7.

Thurs (Oct 10): **Hunting, Wildlife, & the Beginnings of Conservation**

Reading Due: John F. Reiger, *American Sportsmen and the Origins of Conservation* (excerpts).

Document Analysis Due (6:00pm)

Section 3: Social, Cultural, & Environmental Perspectives**Week 8**

Tues (Oct 15): **The History of Conservation “from below”**

Reading Due: Ted Steinberg, “Conservation Reconsidered.”

Karl Jacoby, *Crimes Against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves, and the Hidden History of American Conservation*, excerpts.

Thurs (Oct 17): **Policing the Parks**

Reading Due: Jacoby, *Crimes Against Nature*, excerpts.

Fall Break (October 19-27)

Week 9

Friday (Oct 29): **Expanding the Scope of Conservation History**

Reading Due: Nancy Unger, “Nature’s Housekeepers”: Progressive-Era Women as Midwives to the Conservation Movement and Environmental Consciousness.”

Option A: Adam Rome, “Nature Wars, Culture Wars: Immigration and Environmental Reform in the Progressive Era.”

Option B: Adam Rome, “‘Political Hermaphrodites’: Gender and Environmental Reform in Progressive America.”

Thurs (Oct 31): **The Cultural Turn in History**

Reading Due: Jennifer Price, “When Women were Women, Men were Men, and Birds were Hats,” in *Flight Maps*.

Week 10Tues (Nov 5): **Incorporating Race into the Story**

Reading Due: Jeff Romm, "The Coincidental Order of Environmental Justice."
 Miles Powell, *Vanishing America: Species Extinction, Racial Peril, and the Origins of Conservation* (excerpts).
 Primary Sources

Thurs (Nov 7): **Recasting the Story of Environmental Justice**

Reading Due: Sylvia Hood Washington, *Packing Them In: An Archaeology of Environmental Racism in Chicago*, excerpts.

Short Essay due by 6pm

Week 11Tues (Nov 12): **Environmental History Perspectives**

Reading Due: Nancy Langston, *Forest Dreams, Forest Nightmares: The Paradox of Old Growth in the Inland West*, 3-59, 86-130.

Thurs (Nov 14): **Making Sense of Old-Growth**

Reading Due: Langston, *Forest Dreams, Forest Nightmares*, 130-83.

Week 12Tues (Nov 19): **Managing Resources**

Reading Due: Langston, *Forest Dreams, Forest Nightmares*, 201-246.

Thurs (Nov 21): **The Tragedy and Paradox of Conservation**

Reading Due: Langston, *Forest Dreams, Forest Nightmares*, 260-306.

Section 4: Transnational Approaches to Conservation

Week 13Tues (Nov 26): **The International Context of Conservation**

Reading Due: Ian Tyrrell, *Crisis of a Wasteful Nation: Empire and Conservation in Theodore Roosevelt's America*, 9-36.

Informal topic proposals (1pg) due by 6pm

Thanksgiving Break (November 28-December 1)

Week 14

Tues (Dec 3): **Natural Resources and the Imperial Scramble**

Reading Due: Tyrrell, *Crisis of a Wasteful Nation*, ch. 3-4.

Thurs (Dec 5): **Global Focal Points**

Group A: “Energy and Empire” (ch. 5)

Group B: “Irrigation and the Inland Empire” (ch. 6)

Group C: “Conservation, Scenery & Sustainability” (ch. 8)

Group D: “National Vitality & Human Conservation” (ch. 9)

3 Sample Annotations Due (6:00pm)

Week 15

Tues (Dec 10): **Assessing the Legacy of Conservation**

Reading Due: Tyrrell, *Crisis of a Wasteful Nation*, ch. 11-12, epilogue.

Thurs (Dec 12): **The Global Politics of National Parks**

Reading Due: Bernhard Gissibl, Sabine Höhler, Patrick Kupper, eds., *Civilizing Nature: National Parks in Global Historical Perspective* (excerpts)

Exam Week

Tues (Dec 17): **Recorded Presentation of Bibliography Project, Due by 9pm**

Thurs (Dec 19): **Final Annotated Bibliographies Due by 9pm**

Course Requirements & PoliciesClass Participation (20% of Total Grade)

Given the nature of this course—which revolves heavily around class discussion—it is crucial that students come to class prepared to engage the readings/topics at hand. This involves not only completing the assigned readings prior to class, but also taking the appropriate time to address the discussion questions, to organize your notes accordingly, and to *note specific examples and passages you want to highlight in our class discussions.*

Since class participation accounts for 20% of your overall grade, I will record a participation grade for each session, and will make these available to you (via a spreadsheet posted in the “Participation Grades” tab of p-web) on a regular basis so that you can have a relatively concrete

sense of where things stand in terms of this grade. I'm happy to meet anytime to discuss these issues (although earlier in the semester would be more productive).

Film Analysis (15% of Total Grade), due Sept 17th

This short essay (2-3 pages) involves articulating a critical analysis of the documentary film, *A Midwife's Tale* (PBS, American Experience), in light of Arnold's discussions about the process of history. Further guidelines will be posted a week before the assignment is due on blackboard and discussed in class.

Document Analysis (15% of Total Grade), due Oct 10th

This short essay (2-3 pages) will focus on critically analyzing some of the primary sources relating to the ideology of conservation. Further guidelines will be posted on blackboard and discussed in class.

One Short Essay Analyzing the Secondary Literature (20% of Total Grade), due Nov 7th

This short essay (3-5 pages) assignment will require you to analyze a particular question or issue *across* multiple readings, comparing how different historians have constructed their narratives or interpretations of the conservation movement. The essay prompts, and further guidelines, will be posted on blackboard by Fall break, for anyone interested in getting a head start on the assignment.

Annotated Bibliography Project (25% of Total Grade) due Dec 19th

One of the key assignments for HIS 100—shared across all the units taught by faculty at Grinnell—is an annotated bibliography project. The goal is for students to choose a particular question or theme in the history of conservation that they would like to explore in greater depth, and will be responsible for researching the “historiography” (i.e. the historical conversation or debate surrounding that issue). They will create a bibliography of these works, in which the bibliographic entry for each scholarly article or book is *annotated* with a short synopsis of the works' thesis, methodology, and importance to the topic at hand. The bibliography will also have a 1-2 page introduction framing the central issue you have chosen to research. This project will unfold in scaffolded stages that will be explained in the guidelines, posted by Fall break. The final draft of the project will be due by 9pm on Thursday, December 19th.

Recorded Presentation (5% of Total Grade) due Dec 17th

Each student will create a short (5 min) video presentation that highlights their research topic and historiographic findings from the annotated bibliography project. Students will use the lecture recording function on PowerPoint to create their video presentation, which will be due by 9on on Tuesday, December 17th.

Extensions & Late assignments

Please contact me if you have reasons for requesting an extension on particular assignments, or if you are unable to meet a particular deadline (so that we can work out an arrangement). But please note that no work can be submitted after 5pm on Friday, December 20th, since the college requires that ALL coursework be submitted by the end of exam week (unless you have been approved, by the Registrar, to take a formal incomplete).

Grades

Assignment	Date	Percentage of Total Grade
Film Analysis	Sept 17	15%
Document Analysis	Oct 10	15%
Short Essay #1	Nov 7	20%
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Class Participation	***	20%

I employ the following numeric grade scale: A+ (97-100), A (94-96), A- (90-93), B+ (87-89), B (84-86), B- (80-83), C+ (77-79), C (74-76), C- (70-73), D (60-69), F (below 60).

Academic Honesty and AI

Grinnell College's principles and policies surrounding "academic honesty" are spelled out in the handbook that is introduced to all incoming students in their first-year tutorial. I will happily discuss, in class, some of the issues surrounding the proper way to quote, cite, paraphrase and summarize material for the assignments, and more importantly, will discuss how *historians*, as a discipline, approach these issues as they write.

One topic I want to flag, at the outset, involves the use of AI software to generate material for course assignments. The college's position is that any use of AI in coursework is not necessarily prohibited, but it needs to be clearly documented. The college leaves it up to individual faculty members to create their own specific course policies regarding whether or not AI can be used for course assignments, or in what circumstances. If you plan to use AI for an assignment in this course, we need to meet beforehand to discuss how, exactly, you plan to use AI and whether it is, in fact, an appropriate use.

College PoliciesAccommodations & Students with Disabilities

Grinnell College makes reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities. Students with disabilities partner with the Office of Disability Resources to make academic accommodation letters available to faculty via the accommodation portal. To help ensure that your access needs are met, I encourage individual students to approach me so we can have a discussion about your distinctive learning needs and accommodations within the context of this course. If you have not already worked with the Office of Disability Resources and believe you may require academic accommodations for this course, Disability Resources staff can be reached via email at access@grinnell.edu, by phone 641-269-3089, or by stopping by their offices on the first floor of Steiner Hall.

Religious Observance

The following statement on religious observation policies comes from the Academic Handbook:

Grinnell College acknowledges and embraces the religious diversity of its faculty, students and staff. Faculty and students share responsibility to support members of our community

who observe religious holidays. Students will provide faculty members with reasonable notice of the dates of religious holidays on which they will be absent, and this notice would be expected to occur no later than the third week of the term. Faculty members will make reasonable efforts to accommodate students who need to be absent from examinations or class due to religious observance. Students are responsible for completing any part of the course work, including examinations, they have missed due to religious observance, and faculty members are responsible for giving them the opportunity to do so. (Approved by the Faculty, September 21, 2009)

There is a more descriptive list of the holy days available on our website <http://www.grinnell.edu/about/offices-services/crssj/calendars>

I encourage students who plan to observe holy days that coincide with class meetings or assignment due dates to consult with me so that we can formulate a plan.

Academic Support

If you have other needs not addressed above, please let me know soon so that we can work together for the best possible learning environment. In some cases, I will recommend consulting with the Academic Advising staff: <http://www.grinnell.edu/about/offices-services/academic-advising>. They are an excellent resource for developing strategies for academic success and can connect you with other campus resources. If I notice that you are encountering difficulty, and I have reached out to you and not received a response, or if you have missed multiple class sessions or are not meeting our class objectives repeatedly, I will submit an academic alert via Academic Advising's SAL portal. This notifies you of my concern, along with the Academic Advising team and your advisor(s), so that they can reach out to you with additional offers of support.

Title IX and Pregnancy Related Conditions

Grinnell College is committed to compliance with Title IX and to supporting the academic success of pregnant and parenting students and students with pregnancy related conditions. If you are a pregnant student, have pregnancy related conditions, or are a parenting student (child under one-year needs documented medical care) who wishes to request reasonable related supportive measures from the College under Title IX, please email the Title IX Coordinator at titleix@grinnell.edu. The Title IX Coordinator will work with Disability Resources and your professors to provide reasonable supportive measures in support of your education while pregnant or as a parent under Title IX.

Writing Lab

You are welcome to take any of your assignments to the writing lab this semester. For those unfamiliar with the writing lab, this is the short description provided by its director:

Grinnell's Writing, Reading, and Speaking Center supports students working on papers, projects, presentations, and applications. Schedule a session with one of the Center's professional instructors and get feedback as you interpret readings, talk through your ideas, analyze evidence, develop and organize arguments, craft introductions and conclusions, rewrite sentences and paragraphs, or plan presentations. Center instructors do not proofread papers, but they can show you how to edit your own work effectively. Make an appointment online:

<http://mywco.com/grinnell>