DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
University of Wisconsin-Madison

HIST / ENVIR ST / HISTSCI 125
Green Screen: Environmental Perspectives Through Film

Spring 2025

Lectures:	Monday & Wednesday, 9:55 – 10:45 AM (Mosse 1111)
Film Screenings:	Wednesdays 4 – 6 PM (Mosse 1121)
Discussion:	Thursdays w/Chris Watkins
Canvas Page:	All up-to-date course information can be found on the Canvas Page.

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Teaching Assistant
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

From the 1933 Hollywood blockbuster "King Kong" to the recent reboot of "Twisters," from the timeless familiarity of "Soylent Green" to the animated classic "Bambi," the history of cinema offers a lens through which to understand changing ideas and attitudes about the relationships between humans and the natural world. How can film shed light on changing environmental ideas and beliefs in American thought, politics, and culture and their impact on the real-world struggles of people and wildlife throughout the world? And how can we come to see, understand, and confront racial, class, and gender biases that have shaped the contours of American environmentalism throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries?

This course will explore such questions as we treat film both as a historical document, offering a window onto the past, and as a cultural force helping to define the concerns of past, present, and future environmental visions and actions in the United States and abroad.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon completion of this course, undergraduate students will be able to:

- Interpret film as a historical document and place it in a particular historical context.
- Understand the changing historical contours of American environmentalism and how the past continues to shape issues around the meanings and representations of "the environment," particularly issues of class, gender, and race.
- Recognize how the experiences and struggles of different underrepresented minorities, including those of Black, Indigenous, and Latinx peoples, have led to a diversity of environmental visions and viewpoints.
- Identify major past, present, and future environmental issues and controversies in the United States and worldwide.

Student Hours & Open Door Policy

We welcome you to connect with us outside of class. Student hours are regularly scheduled times that Samm and Chris are available outside of scheduled course meetings. You can stop by unannounced or schedule a time beforehand. We can meet in person or online. If this time doesn't work for you, please email one of us so that we can find another time that works.

These hours are for you, and we want you to feel welcome to attend them.

Chris Watkins
In-Person: Mondays, 1 – 3 PM; Mosse 4260

Samm Newton
In-Person: Wednesdays, 11 AM – 12 PM; Mosse 4105
Virtual: Mondays, 5 -6 PM; Zoom link on Canvas sidebar

TIP: If you need something beyond what your instructors can provide, several campus resources are listed below, or we can work together to find what works best for you.

History Lab: The History Lab is a resource center for undergraduate students studying, researching, and writing about the past. Experienced graduate students from the Department of History staff it.

Writing Center: The WC offers consultations, writing groups, workshops, and more. WC instructors are generally wonderful people and are familiar with various assignment genres and writing processes.

UW Libraries: We have fantastic libraries across campus. Librarians are eager to help, so don't hesitate to contact them for guidance with your research project.

University Health Services: Help is always available! You can learn about free, confidential mental health services available to you. UHS also offers services from check-ups and vaccines to substance use recovery support.

COURSE DESIGNATION, REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

Details

- Requisites: None
- Credits: 3.00 credits
- Level: Elementary
- Breadth: Humanities or Social Science
- L&S credit type: Counts as LAS credit (L&S)

Grading Rubric

1. Attend and participate in lectures, film screenings, and discussions.
2. Prepare using the course schedule guidelines (readings, films, podcasts, etc.).
3. Grades will be calculated using the following guidelines:

Participation		**30%**
Discussion	20%	
In-Class Assignments	10%	
Capstone Writing Assignments		**40%**
Film Analysis One (Mar. 04)	15%	
Film Analysis Two (Apr. 15)	25%	
Final Exam (May 08) OR Digital Short (May 04)		**30%**

Grading Structure

0-59% (F); 60-69% (D); 70-77% (C); 78-82% (BC); 83-87% (B); 88-92% (AB); 93-100% (A)

Participation (30%)

In-Class Assignments

In-class assignments (10%) vary in format. These are designed to help with the material, practice historical methods, and prepare for your writing analyses. These assignments include, but are not limited to, the pre-, mid-, and post-course discussion participation surveys, primary and secondary source analysis activities, and preparing for our guest speaker.

Discussion

This course allows for **one absence from the discussion section** without penalty. The best way to secure a high participation grade (20%) is to attend your discussion section. Absences beyond this must be communicated with your instructors and may impact your overall participation grade.

Each student should assume the responsibility of being an active participant and learner. Success in the class depends mainly upon the time, energy, and commitment you invest. You should arrive at your discussion section having attended the lectures on Monday and Wednesday morning and the screening on Wednesday evening, read the material assigned for the week, and be prepared to engage in a thoughtful and constructive conversation that respects others in the classroom and takes seriously the issues and themes presented.

See your discussion section syllabus for more details on receiving full marks for participation.

TIP: Here are some ideas about how to contribute during discussion section:

1. **Something you've learned:** For example, something you learned from the readings; an explanation of why it is important and how it helped advance your thinking about themes and issues explored in the course; how the reading connects to the lecture, other readings from the course, outside readings from the course, and/or lecture; and/or how this material lines up with the learning objectives for the course (listed above).
2. **Something that is not clear:** A description of an issue, argument, or event from the readings that might be confusing or unclear and/or which you would like to learn more about and why; and/or terms you read that you would like to understand further/clarify.

Writing Assignments (40%)

Film Analysis

This assignment is a practice in analyzing film as a primary source and will assist you in preparing for the final exam. For the first film analysis (15%), you will analyze *King Kong* and write a 1,000-word analysis that discusses how the film has reflected and/or shaped past or present environmental perceptions. As part of this assignment, you will also submit a preliminary primary source analysis and a preliminary secondary source analysis that can be used in your final submission. These preliminary assignments are opportunities to receive feedback on your film analysis before it is due.

For the second film analysis (25%), you will repeat the process but be allowed to choose any film screened in class. As part of this assignment, you will also submit an assignment on identifying and applying themes in secondary sources that can be used in your final submission. These more conceptual assignments are opportunities to deepen your understanding and receive feedback on your film analysis before it is due

Peer review is also part of the writing process for these two assignments, and participation in the peer review process will be part of their overall grading rubric. Peer review writing workshops will be held on the Monday before the assignment is due during the lecture period.

Interpret your film as a historical document. Who made the film and why? In what context was the film shown and seen? Who was its intended audience? How did critics and the public receive the film? How did the film significantly reinforce or alter public attitudes toward nature or the environment?

Place your film in a particular historical context. In addition to primary source analysis, this essay is an opportunity to contextualize your film as part of a historical conversation. For full credit, you must incorporate at least two peer-reviewed academic secondary sources into your analysis.

These are due on March 4th and April 15th. A full description of the assignment will be on Canvas.

Late Work Policy

We adhere to a 2 to 4-day buffer period for submitting the writing assignments. We do this to offer you more flexibility and to help minimize stress, accommodating your various commitments outside of class. We recommend using this buffer period judiciously, only when you truly need it, while continuing to strive to meet the original deadlines.

This policy is a gesture of trust and partnership, reflecting our high expectations that you will continue to submit your assignments promptly. Please use student hours or email a request to one of us if you're struggling with an assignment.

Should you anticipate being unable to meet a deadline, even with the buffer period, **it is your responsibility to email Chris before the buffer period expires to avoid a penalty.**

Final Exam (30%)

Take-Home Essay

You will have one week to prepare answers of 1,000 words each to two of three questions on the course content. This essay should resemble your film analyses and require you to incorporate examples from course readings, lecture notes, and section discussion. The due date for the take-home exam is May 8.

TIP: Take notes during lectures and discussions so that you have lots of material to pull from for your exam essay.

OR

Digital Short Option

You will produce a 3-5 minute short video—or series of shorter (social media style) clips that amount to around the same duration—that challenges viewers to see the environment in a new way or offers a mashup of a previous film, challenging us to see its content in a completely different light. **This exam option should be approved with the Samm by February 3rd.** It has different expectations and timelines for completion than the standard exam. You can find more information on this in Canvas, or we can discuss it during student hours. The due date for the digital short option is May 4.

COURSE POLICIES

Digital Environment

Our digital environment can make a big difference in creating the conditions needed for shared learning. How we engage with our electronics shapes our ability to focus, collaborate, and be conscientious of one another's classroom experience. To accomplish this:

- Be intentional. Please avoid activities or distractions unrelated to class. Learning to resist our phones can be challenging, but I ask you to prioritize active engagement over multitasking.
- Be open. I will often ask you to put away all of your electronics. Please be open to this request. This also means you should always be prepared to take notes on paper. **Bring something to write on and write with to every class.** Embrace these as opportunities for deeper engagement.
- Be respectful. Be mindful of how your device usage affects others. Your actions impact the learning of those around you and the instructor working to connect with you.
- Be responsible. If your device usage becomes a problem, the principal instructor or the teaching assistant may ask you to leave.

Integrity

Please review UW-Madison's Academic Integrity statement for general information on what is expected of you as a student here at UW. Additionally, it is important to be mindful that original work is an investment in yourself. Taking credit for someone else's work or using a large language generator doesn't just put your grades at risk. It holds you back intellectually in all aspects of your personal growth and college experience.

At the end of the day, the most important thing is to show up and do your best because the main goal of the course is to learn how to think critically about the past, which isn't something that someone else (or an algorithm) can do for you. Technology and AI can be great tools when used properly. However, the required assignments are designed to help you communicate your thoughts and ideas.

Inclusivity

We acknowledge that the material may have overt and covert biases due to the lens with which it was written. Integrating diverse experiences is important for a more comprehensive and historical understanding of American environmentalism. Please contact us (in person or electronically) if you have any suggestions for improving the quality of the course materials.

Furthermore, we would like to create a learning environment for everyone that supports a diversity of thoughts, perspectives, and experiences and honors your identities (including race, gender, class, sexuality, religion, ability, etc.) To help accomplish this:

- **Please complete the pre-course survey (personal portrait) during week one (due Jan. 30).**
- If you feel like your performance in the class is being impacted by your experiences outside of class, please don't hesitate to come and talk with us.
- If you find yourself wondering whether the ways in which you are different from your peers or from the scholars we study make you less qualified to be a student or a scholar yourself, please remember this: the only thing we care about in this class is what you can do, and we promise to work to make sure you have what you need to be able to do it.
- This course will also, hopefully, help us to get better at having hard conversations about the past, present, and future. We will cover material that can be challenging or triggering, and we may make mistakes in grappling with these difficult issues. For this reason, it is important to practice respect and compassion for each other. Do know, however, that discriminatory and/or hateful language will not be tolerated.
- We (like many people) are still learning about diverse perspectives and identities. It is a lifelong process, after all. If something was said in class (by anyone) that made you feel uncomfortable, please talk to us about it.

Accessibility

Your success in this class is important to us, and we understand that students learn and participate in different ways. Whether or not you have a formally recognized disability or accommodation through the university, if you anticipate any issues related to this course's requirements, structure, or format, please communicate with us so we can discuss ways to ensure your full participation and success in our class. We understand that there may be unexpected personal, health-related, or other concerns that arise during the semester that may affect your participation in the course. In these circumstances, we are committed to working together with you, but to do so, it is important to communicate problems as they arise. We also respect your privacy and will not ask for personal details beyond what is necessary.

TIME MANAGEMENT – THREE CREDIT COURSE

Regular and substantive student-instructor interaction

This course involves regular and substantive student-instructor interaction through direct instruction during our weekly lectures. Further substantive interaction occurs through frequent feedback on written work and during individual or small-group meetings in the discussion section.

The credit standard for this course expects that we will spend 135 hours engaging with the course learning activities (at least 45 hours per credit), which include regularly scheduled instructor/student meeting times, reading, writing, and other student work as described in the syllabus. This averages out to roughly 9 hours per week, give or take.

We meet four times weekly. Monday lecture (50 minutes), Wednesday lecture and film screening (2 hours and 50 minutes), and Thursday discussion (50 minutes). Since we meet as a group for around 4.5 hours per week, in general, you can plan to spend an average of 4.5 hours per week in addition to class time reading, writing, studying, attending student hours, preparing for class, working on projects, and simply thinking about the course material.

TIP: If you need help with time management or balancing commitments outside academics, please chat with us about it. The course is designed to be manageable (for all of us), and we are happy to be a resource for you.

WEEKLY COURSE PLAN

Active engagement (contributing your thoughts and listening to others) is vital to our learning experience. Finishing the weekly reading materials and watching the weekly film before your scheduled discussion section on Thursday will set you up for successful participation and prepare you to contribute during group **conversations** and **in-class activities.** All readings are available digitally through the UW library or on Canvas.

This course schedule is tentative and subject to change.

Environmental Perspectives Through Film	
Week 1 Lecture *W Jan. 22* Discussion *R Jan. 23*	**Introduction to Film as a Primary Source** Read: 1.) The syllabus. Remember: **2.) First discussion section is this week.**
Week 2 Lecture *M Jan. 27* Lecture & Film *W Jan. 29* Discussion *R Jan. 30*	**Forces of Nature** Read: 1.) Kate Carpenter. The Real History Behind the Tornado-Control Theories in Twisters. *Time*, July 19, 2024. *2.)* Tom Gunning. "Making Sense of Films" in *History Matters the U.S. Survey Course.* Published online, February 2002 3.) Jacob D. Hamblin. "Acts of God and Acts of Man" in *Arming Mother Nature.* Oxford University Press, 2013. pp. 108-128 Watch: 4.) *Twisters* (2024, 120 mins) Remember: 5.) Personal Portrait is due **Thursday January 30 during discussion.**
Week 3 Lecture *M Feb. 3* Lecture & Film *W Feb. 5* Discussion *R Feb. 6*	**Whose Nature?** Read: 1.) Carolyn Finney. *Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors.* UNC Chapel Hill, 2014, pp. xi-xviii, 1-10, 32-50. 2.) Gregg Mitman. *Reel Nature: America's Romance with Wildlife on Film* University of Washington Press, 2009, pp. 26-59. Listen: 3.) Gene Demby. "Can You Make a Movie with King Kong Without Perpetuating Racial Undertones?" National Public Radio, March 11, 2017. Watch: 4.) *King Kong* (1933, 100 mins) Remember: **5.)** Preliminary Primary Source Analysis **Due Sunday February 9th.**

Entangled Pasts and Presents	
Week 4 Lecture *M Feb. 10* Lecture & Film *W Feb. 12* Discussion *R Feb. 13*	**Myth of the Vanishing Race** Read: 1.) Robert Flaherty. "How I Filmed *Nanook of the North," World's Work* 44 (1922): 632-640. 2.) John Grierson. "Flaherty" in *Grierson on Documentary,* edited and compiled by Forsyth Hardy. Faber and Faber, 1966, pp. 139-144 3.) Michelle H. Raheja. "Reading Nanook's Smile: Visual Sovereignty, Indigenous Revisions of Ethnography and *Atanarujat (The Fast Runner)." American Quarterly* 59 (2007): 1159-1185. 4.) Fatima Tobing Rony. *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle.* Duke University Press, 1996, pp. 99-126. Watch: 5.) *Nanook of the North* (1922, 79 mins) Remember: **6.)** Preliminary Secondary Source Analysis **Due Sunday Feb. 16th**
Week 5 Lecture *M Feb. 17* Lecture & Film *W Feb. 19* Discussion *R Feb. 20*	**New Deal Visions** Read: 1.) Finis Dunaway. *Natural Visions: The Power of Images in American Environmental Reform.* University of Chicago Press, 2005, pp. 33-86. 2.) Paul Sears. *Deserts on the Marach.* University of Oklahoma Press, 1935, pp. 157-184. 3.) William Stott. *Documentary Expression and Thirties America.* Oxford University Press, 1973, pp. 5-17. Watch: 4.) *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940, 129 mins)
Week 6 Lecture *M Feb. 24* Lecture & Film *W Feb. 26* Discussion *R Feb. 27*	**The Politics of Food** Read: 1.) Cesar Chavez. "Perils of Pesticides," Address to Pacific Luteran University, 1989. 2.) Alexandra Hall. "Under Trump, Wisconsin Dairies Struggle to Keep Immigrant Workers," *Wisconsin Public Radio*, March 16, 2017. 3.) Orrin Williams. "Food and Justice: The Critical Link to Healthy Communities," in *Power, Justice, and the Environment: A Critical Appraisal of the Environmental Justice Movement* edited by David Naguib Pellow and Robert J. Brulle. MIT Press, 2005, pp. 117-130. Listen: **4.)** Monica White. "Food Is Just the Beginning: A Conversation with Monica White." *Edge Effects*, October 12, 2019. Watch: 5.) *Cesar's Last Fast* (2014, 93 mins) Remember: 1.) Required writing workshop for your film analysis will take place during lecture on **Monday March 3rd.** 2.) Final Draft **due Tuesday March 4th.**

Week 7 **Writing Workshop** *M Mar. 3* Lecture & Film *W Mar. 5* Discussion *R Mar. 6*	**The End Times of Ecology** Read: 1.) Paul Ehrlich. *The Population Bomb.* Ballantine Books, 1968, pp. 15-35, 46-67. 2.) Hamblin. *Arming Mother Nature,* pp. 151-178. 3.) Garrett Hardin. "Lifeboat Ethics: The Case Against Helping the Poor," *Psychology Today* (September 1974). 4.) Carolyn Merchant. *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution.* Harper & Row, 1980, pp. xix-xxiv. Watch: 5.) *Soylent Green* (1973, 70 mins)
Week 8 Lecture *M Mar. 10* Lecture & Film *W Mar. 12* Discussion *R Mar. 13*	**Reclaiming Indigenous Sovereignty** Read: 1.) Finish Dunaway. "Gas Masks, Pogo, and the Ecological Indian: Earth Day and the Visual Politics of American Environmentalism," *American Quarterly* 60 (2008): pp. 67-99. 2.) Fatimah Tobing Rony, "Victor Masayesva, Jr., and the Politics of *Imagining Indians," Film Quarterly* 48 (1994-1995): pp. 20-33. 3.) Kyle Whyte. "Settler Colonialism, Ecology, and Environmental Injustice," *Environment and Society: Advances in Research* 9 (2018): pp. 125-144. Watch: 4.) *Imagining Indians* (1992, 60 min); *Lighting the Seventh Fire* (1995, 45 min) Remember: **5.)** Identifying Themes in Secondary Sources **due via Canvas Sunday Mar. 16** 6.) Mid-Term course evaluation **due via Canvas Sunday March 16**
Week 9 Lecture *M Mar. 17* Lecture & Film *W Mar. 19* Discussion *R Mar. 20*	**Extractive Burdens** Read: 1.) Antonia Juhasz. "Louisiana's 'Cancer Alley' Is Getting Even More Toxic—But Residents Are Fighting Back," *Rolling Stone* (October 30, 2019). 2.) Commission for Racial Justice, *Toxic Waste and Race in the United States.* United Church of Christ, 1987. 3.) Rob Nixon. "Pipedreams," in *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor.* Harvard University Press, 2011, pp. 103-127. Listen: 4.) Nick Estes. "Our History is the Future: Standing Rock versus the Dakota Access Pipeline," *New Books Network Podcast*, June 24, 2019. Watch: 5.) *Bad River* (2024, 87 mins) Remember: **6.)** Applying Themes in Secondary Literature **due via Canvas Sunday Mar. 23**

Week 10 *M Mar. 24 -* *F Mar. 28*	**NO CLASS Spring Recess**

Changing Futures / Changing Boundaries	
Week 11 Lecture *M Mar. 31* Lecture & Film *W Apr. 2* Discussion *R Apr. 3*	**Disney's Nature** Read: 1.) Walt Disney. "What I've Learned from the Animals," *American Magazine* 155 (February 1953): pp. 23, 106-109. 2.) Ralph Lutts. "The Trouble with Bambi: Walt Disney's *Bambi* and the American Vision of Nature" *Forest & Conservation History* 36 (1992): pp. 160-171. 3.) Scott Macdonald. "Up Close and Political: Three Short Ruminations on Ideology in the Nature Film," *Film Quarterly* 59 (2006): pp. 4-21. 4.) Mitman. *Reel Nature,* pp.109-131. Watch: 5.) *Nature's Half Acre* (1951, 33 mins); *Bambi* (1942, 70 mins)
Week 12 Lecture *M Apr. 7* Lecture & Film *W Apr. 9* Discussion *R Apr. 10*	**Critterland** Read: 1.) John Berger. "Why Look at Animals" in *About Looking.* Pantheon Books, 1980, pp. 1-26. 2.) Susan Nance. *The Historical Animal.* Syracuse University Press, 2015, pp. 1-16. 3.) Jonathan Romney. "Sometimes the Donkey Appears in my Dreams" *Financial Times*, January 22, 2023. Listen: 4.) Ed Yong. "On telling the grand and urgent stories of animal worlds," *When We Talk About Animals Podcast*, January 13, 2020. Watch: 5.) *EO* (2022, 88 mins) Remember: 3.) Required writing workshop for your film analysis will take place during lecture on **Monday April 14th** **4.)** Final Draft **due Tuesday April 15**
Week 13 **Writing Workshop** *M Apr. 14* **Aurora Conley** *W Apr. 16* Discussion *R Apr. 17*	**Your Turn – w/Guest Aurora Conley** Read: 1.) Mitman, *Reel Nature,* pp. 209-220. 2.) Additional materials will be added here once the film is finalized. Watch: 3.) This week we will screen a film chosen by the class. Remember: 4.) No in-person lecture on Monday April 14th. 5.) Asynchronous question asking assignment for Aurora Conley about *Bad River* due via Canvas midnight Monday night.

Week 14 Lecture *M Apr. 21* Lecture & Film *W Apr. 23* Discussion *R Apr. 24*	**Border Ecologies** Read: 1.) Sharada Balachandran Orihuela & Andrew Carl Hageman. "The Virtual Realities of US/Mexico Border Ecologies in *Maquilapolis* and *Sleep Dealer*," *Environmental Communications* 5 (2011), pp. 116-186 Listen: 2.) Paris Marx & Alex Rivera. "Sleep Dealer and the Border Politics of Tech," Tech Won't Save Us. July, 15 2021. Watch: 3.) *Sleep Dealer* (2008, 90 mins)
Week 15 Lecture *M Apr. 28* Lecture & Film *W Apr. 30* Discussion *R May 1*	**Facing a Warming Planet** Read: 1.) Ann McClintock. "Monster: A Fugue in Fire and Ice," *E-Flux Architecture*, June 1, 2020. 2.) Christian Parenti. *Tropic of Chaos: Climate Change and the New Geography of Violence.* Nation Books, 2011, pp. 3-20. 3.) Laura Pulido. "Racism and the Anthropocene," in *Future Remains: A Cabinet of Curiosities for the Anthropocene.* University of Chicago Press, 2018, pp. 116-128. Watch: 4.) *That Which Once Was* (2011, 21 mins); *Age of Consequences* (2016, 80 mins)
Exam Week May 1st – 8th	Remember: 1.) Student hours by appointment only this week. **2.)** Digital Short **due Sunday May 4.** **3.)** Take-home essay **due Thursday May 8.** 4.) Canvas final course evaluation **due Thursday May 8.**