

**An Unsettled Place: 400 Years of Remaking the Hudson River Landscape
SSP 100, Section 38**

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Required Texts

Tom Lewis, *The Hudson: A History*

Most other readings are available on-line at:

<http://www2.skidmore.edu/library/reserves/index.cfm> (log in, then find our course, then locate the correct reading, and you're off!)

A few readings, noted by "handout" or "e-mail" in the Course Calendar, below, will be distributed in class or via e-mail.

Introduction

How does an ecological locale—a "landscape"—become geographically, socially, and temporally special to a group of people? How do they manage to keep it that way or change it? Many regions in the United States supply answers to these questions of space, time, and place, and one of the oldest and most complex sets of responses emerges from the history of the landscape that is home to Skidmore. As of this year, the Hudson River Region will have existed for 400 years in the Euro-American consciousness, which makes this a unique moment to explore the region's landscape as a history of place-making. We will examine how and why both the conceptual understandings and the physical realities of the Hudson Region have changed as they have over the last four centuries. The landscape's ecology is its lifeblood, and we will continually return to it. Yet human societies and their ecologies co-evolve, so we must look elsewhere to tell a complete ecological story. As such, we will explore the Hudson landscape as it has evolved through art, literature, warfare, technology, and shifts in cultures and laws.

It is ironic that I would call the Hudson River region "unsettled." Just look at New York City—is any place in the world more settled than there? Even Central Park, that seemingly natural hyphen surrounded by concrete and people, is completely artificial. Surely the Hudson River itself is natural, isn't it? Perhaps, but by one count, the River and its tributaries are blocked by more than 800 dams, and artificial, cancer-causing PCBs heavily contaminate the River as it flows along Saratoga County's eastern border, fifteen minutes from campus. Moreover, nearly every square inch of the 13,400 square-mile Hudson River drainage has been directly touched by society. So in what sense is this place "unsettled"?

We will begin to answer these questions by examining the concepts of "place" and "landscape" theoretically. Neither notion, it turns out, is very self-evident; both are full

of complexities. Then we will turn to the Hudson Region's ecology, human history, art, and literature; first we will consider those topics alone, but soon we will find ourselves exploring their intersections—what I call “socio-ecological history.”

Our central question for most of the course will be, How have succeeding generations affected the Hudson Region landscape, and how has the (transformed) landscape affected those societies? When we begin attempting to answer those questions, they prompt numerous others. It is those additional questions—we'll leave the teasing-out of them to emerge over time—that will pose the greatest challenges for us.

Course Goals

This course will introduce you to disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives on the Hudson Region's landscape history. Along the way, we will fulfill both course-specific and more general goals. Those for our course include:

1. *grasping the importance of landscape in individuals' and communities' lives; and*
2. *appreciating the often subtle role of history, art, and literature in our worldviews;*

In addition, this is a course about knowing, particularly about ways to identify problems, formulate productive questions about those problems, and go about answering those questions, all of which, taken together, is one path toward knowledge. So, by the end of this course you will improve your abilities to:

1. *distinguish among, and formulate, types of questions asked by different disciplines;*
2. *read critically and gather and interpret evidence;*
3. *distinguish among the evidence and methodologies appropriate to different disciplines;*
4. *consider and address complexities and ambiguities;*
5. *make connections among ideas;*
6. *recognize choices, examine assumptions and ask questions of yourself and of your own work;*
7. *formulate conclusions based upon evidence;*
8. *communicate ideas both orally and in writing;*
9. *relate the results of the course to your educational goals.*

Service-Learning

A core component of the course will actually happen outside of the classroom. You are required to work three hours a week (on average) on a service-learning project (note that the fourth credit hour for this course will, in part, be dedicated to your project). Service-learning is like an internship of steroids: You volunteer with a community partner like any internship, but the difference is that you bring some of what we learn in the classroom to the internship, and then you reflect on the interplay between classroom learning and internship learning. That reflection is a key part of your learning experience, and a major assignment for this course will be a reflection journal that you should keep throughout the semester (see below under “Written Assignments”).

You will need to commit yourself to working on your service-learning project effectively. That is, you will need to show up for your project when you say you will, you will need to work well with others in your group and with your community partners, and you will need to be disciplined enough to write in your service-learning journal weekly, beginning the third week of classes.

Written Assignments

Your primary written assignments will be two papers and your service-learning reflection journal. The paper assignments—which I will distribute in class—will address some combination of the readings, class discussions, and field trips, and I will give you specific guidelines for each assignment one week before the assignment is due for peer editing. Each paper will be weighted at 20 percent of your final grade, as will your service-learning reflection journal. I will *severely* penalize any late paper.

Your reflection journal is a space where you should consider the intersection of the material we discuss in class and your experiences working with your community partner on your service-learning project. Create a Word document devoted exclusively to your journal. Each week you should write a new entry of 150 to 200 words, minimum, where you explore the relationship of the readings (either the current readings or those from earlier in the term) and your service-learning work. Make sure to date each of your entries. Periodically, I will e-mail you to request a copy of your journal so that I can share my feedback with you; these occasional reviews of your work are required but will not be graded.

Final Project

Twenty percent of your final grade will be based on a video documentary project that you will create during the semester. That project should reflect one (or more) of the theoretical perspectives that we discuss early in the course, and it should either explore a landscape familiar to you or examine in some way your service-learning project.

If you have no prior experience working with video, don't worry! You will receive *extensive* training in using iMovie software, and both Alex and I will be available to help you with technical and conceptual questions.

You will present a “rough cut” (a good-quality but incomplete) version of your documentary to the class near the end of the semester, and your “final cut” (completed documentary)—along with your script—will be due during finals week, as noted in the Course Calendar, below. The rough cut will count for 5 percent of your final grade, the final cut and script 15 percent.

Class Participation and Attendance

Class participation is vital to this course and will count for 15 percent of your final grade. Your class participation grade will be based on three factors: (1) your attendance, (2) your involvement in class discussions and small group analyses and assignments, and, most important, (3) the quality of what you have to say and of your interactions with your peers in class and in small groups.

As a seminar, this class will be small, and that size opens up a lot of opportunities—opportunities for you to be heard and for you and us, collectively, to work with your ideas. So, come to class prepared to participate. Stay on top of the readings—*never* get behind, because doing so will make it more difficult to catch up, and you will lose out on class participation credit as a result (not to mention losing out on the opportunity to grasp what others who have completed the reading are talking about!). As you read, jot down at least one question for each reading and look for an opportunity to ask it in class—questions are lots more important than answers, since we’re exploring ideas and seeking out knowledge much more than we are “taking it in.”

Please note that simply speaking a lot will not satisfy the class participation requirement; what you say should contribute to the class discussion, and you should avoid dominating the discussions as well. The same is true for just showing up; a warm but silent body in class does not further our mutual goal of learning from one another.

Each time you are absent from this class beyond your first two absences, I will deduct one point from your class participation grade (and, thus, 1 percent of your final grade will be an “F”). Should you miss more than five classes, I may award you a failing grade *for the course* on that basis alone.

Events Attendance

To encourage you to take advantage of the exceptional speakers and other events that the College brings to campus each year—many of them specifically related to the First Year Experience—I am requiring that you attend *two* lectures, films, performances, exhibits, or similar offerings during the term. I will announce the week’s relevant events each Monday. Hand in a brief response paper (150 to 250 words) within one week of your attendance at an event for credit; together, these papers will be worth 5 percent of your final grade. You will find guidelines for your response papers following the course calendar, below.

Field Trips

We will take two field trips as part of this class, and your participation in them is required. All field trips will be held on Saturdays. We will visit the nearby town of Schuylerville, the Albany Institute of History and Art, and we will travel to the mid-Hudson Valley to view sites of important historical and ecological significance. For attendance purposes, missing a field trip is equivalent to missing *two* classes.

Grade Calculation

Papers	40 percent (20 percent each)
Reflection journal:	20 percent
Final project:	20 percent (5 percent rough cut, 15 percent final cut and script)
Class participation:	15 percent of your final grade
Events attendance:	5 percent

Course Calendar

Wednesday, September 9 Course Introduction
..... *President's Reception, 5:30-5:30 p.m.—Meet at Haupt Pond (South Park/fountain) at 5:25*

Theories of Places and Landscapes

Monday, September 14..... Jacobson
Wednesday, September 16 Olwig
Monday, September 21..... Spirn
Wednesday, September 23 Kleppel (to be e-mailed to you)
Monday, September 28..... *No Class—Yom Kippur*
Wednesday, September 30 Greider & Garkovich
..... *First Paper Assignment Distributed*

Hudson Region History: The Beginning?

Monday, October 5..... Lewis, Chapter 1; *Preliminary Final Project Description Due*
Wednesday, October 7 Dankers and Sluyter; Grant; Weld; Peer Editing of First Papers

Monday, October 12..... *First Papers Due*

Hudson Region Ecological and Social Interactions

Wednesday, October 14 Swaney (PDF to be e-mailed to you)
Monday, October 19..... Boyle, Chapter 1 (handout)

Hudson Region Literature and Art: Emergence of an American Landscape Vision

Wednesday, October 21 Irving (handout)
Monday, October 26..... Lewis, Chapter 6
Wednesday, October 28 Bryant, Poe (handout)
..... *Second Paper Assignment Distributed*
Monday, November 2..... Whitman and Willis (handout)
Wednesday, November 4..... Lewis, Chapter 7
Monday, November 9..... Heiman; Peer Editing of Second Papers

Wednesday, November 11..... *Second Papers Due*

Defending the Landscape/A Defensible Landscape

Monday, November 16..... Lewis, Chapter 5; Colonial Archives (handout)
Wednesday, November 18..... Lewis, Chapter 8
Monday, November 23..... Boyle Chapter 8 (handout)
Wednesday, November 25..... *Thanksgiving Break*
Monday, November 30..... Cronin and Kennedy (handout)

Hudson Landscape III: Change and Constancy

Wednesday, December 2 Lewis, Chapter 9; Glennon and Porter

Final Presentations

Monday, December 7Final Project Rough Cut Presentations

Wednesday, December 9Final Project Rough Cut Presentations

FINAL REFLECTION JOURNALS (VIA E-MAIL) AND DVDs OF FINAL CUT DOCUMENTARIES DUE NO LATER THAN WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 16, AT 5 P.M.

Response Paper Guidelines

As you know, you are required to attend a minimum of two lectures, films, performances, exhibits, or similar events on campus during this semester as a way of exposing you to what Skidmore has to offer and of broadening the intellectual challenges and opportunities that you take-on. *You must submit one response paper prior to October 23 and the other prior to December 4.*

I especially want to encourage you to confront some of the boundaries that you brought with you to campus. For example, if you have never attended a public lecture or have only rarely been to an orchestral performance, go for it! Ideally, you will attend some of these events with friends who understand the topic or the composer's outlook or, in the case of a dance performance, who can help you interpret what's happening on stage. Talk with them, compare notes, ask questions, and then decide how to respond.

Your response should be brief (150 to 200 words). I will evaluate your papers by asking myself:

- was the event much of a challenge to you—was there an opportunity for you to be intellectually pushed, or was it generally familiar territory for you?
- what sorts of questions did you come away from the event with?
- as you attempt to address some of those questions, are you drawing from your emerging liberal arts background?
- how well is your response written?

Please e-mail me with questions about events, either beforehand or afterwards, and let me know how I can clarify the guidelines above.

Finally, though I'm a sports nut, your attendance at athletic events may not be used to satisfy these assignments.