



NATURAL AND UNNATURAL DISASTERS

American Studies 103W, section 002
Tisch Learning Center 204

Professor M.C. Lynn
Spring 2010
M, W, 2:30-3:50

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

An interdisciplinary analysis of American natural and unnatural disasters, this course will examine floods, fires, earthquakes, epidemics, and other disasters to explore the development of American culture. The course will emphasize writing and research, reading critically, thinking historically, practicing interdisciplinarity, acknowledging diversity, and making connections. The class will study the Revolutionary War Smallpox Pandemic, the Chicago Fire, the Galveston Hurricane, the San Francisco Earthquake, the 1910 Big Burn Forest Fire, the 1918 Influenza Pandemic, the Great Boston Molasses Flood of 1919, the 1927 Mississippi Flood, and the New England Hurricane of 1938, among others.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Mary Lynn Rampolla, *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History*, 7th edition
Kevin Rozario, *The Culture of Calamity: Disaster & the Making of Modern America*
Elizabeth A. Fenn, *Pox Americana: the Great Smallpox Epidemic of 1775-1782*
Erik Larson, *Isaac's Storm: A Man, A Time, and the Deadliest Hurricane History*
Simon Winchester, *A Crack in the Edge of the World: America and the Great California Earthquake of 1906*

BLACKBOARD RESOURCES

Scholarly articles

Jonathan Bergman, "Disaster: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *History Compass* 6 (2008) 1-13

Alice Kessler Harris, "Cultural Locations: Positioning American Studies in the Great Debate," *American Quarterly*, vol. 44, no. 3, September 1992, 299-312

Gene Wise, "Paradigm Dramas" in American Studies: A Cultural and Institutional History of the Movement, " *American Quarterly*, XXXI, 3, 1979, 293-337

Books

John Barry, *The Great Influenza: The Epic Story of the Deadliest Plague in History*, New York: Penguin, 2005, excerpts

John Barry, *Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and How It Changed America*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997, excerpts

Timothy Egan, *The Big Burn: Teddy Roosevelt & the Fire That Saved America*, New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2009, excerpts

Kai Erikson, *Everything in Its Path: Destruction of Community in the Buffalo Creek Flood*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1976, excerpts

Stephen Puleo, *Dark Tide: The Great Boston Molasses Flood of 1919*, Boston: Beacon, 2003, excerpts

R.A. Scott, *Sudden Sea: The Great Hurricane of 1938*, New York: Little, Brown, 2004, excerpts

Additional material will be posted on Blackboard during the course of the semester

FILMS (We'll be watching excerpts of most of these)

Influenza 1918

The Great San Francisco Earthquake

The Johnstown Flood

Surviving the Dust Bowl, The Plow That Broke the Plains

Fatal Flood (1927)

FINDING ME:

My office is TLC 329, my extension is 5025. (Messages can be left at the American Studies office, extension 5021.) I check my e-mail daily; my username is mcl. My office hours are on Mondays and Wednesdays from 9:00 to 10:00 am, and on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 1:30 to 3:00 pm. If you have classes at these times, please talk to me to arrange another time, as I am normally on campus all day Monday through Friday. (In an emergency, you can reach me at home at 587-0193.)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

1. Regular class
attendance, on-time completion of assigned readings, and informed participation in class discussion. Your class work will be graded, and will constitute approximately 20% of your final grade; more than three absences, for whatever reason, will have a negative impact on that grade. EXCEPTION! H1N1 influenza. If you develop symptoms of the flu, please do not come to class. (H1N1 absences will not count toward the three-absence limit.)
2. Writing
assignments: During the course of the semester you will write a series of short (3 page) essays, each of which will be graded and then revised and resubmitted. Each pair of essays will count for 10% of your final grade (first draft 5%, second 5%). A separate assignment sheet will be distributed for each of these assignments, and students will work in teams to learn to critique each other's work.
3. Research
paper: Each student will choose an American disaster and research and write an 8-10 page

interdisciplinary analysis of that event. The first draft of the research paper will count 10% of your final grade, while the final draft will count for 20% of your final grade.

4. Oral
 presentation: Learning how to prepare and deliver an oral report is a useful skill which you are likely to use for the rest of your college career, to say nothing of how this will help your post-Skidmore life. Students will report on the topic of their research papers, and will be graded according to the quality of their delivery, organization, content, and analysis. The oral presentations will count for 10% of the final grade.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

According to the Dean of Studies website, “Skidmore not only promotes intellectual honesty vigorously but severely punishes such offenses as plagiarism and cheating on exams.” http://cms.skidmore.edu/dean_of_studies/integrity/index.cfm

If you use someone else’s ideas or words without properly citing them, you are committing plagiarism – the academic equivalent of theft. If you quote more than three consecutive words from someone else’s work, you must put those words in quotation marks and properly footnote them. If you paraphrase someone else’s words, or use their ideas, you need to carefully footnote your borrowing. If you borrow from a website (see above) you need to put the borrowed language in quotation marks, include the url for the appropriate page, and indicate the date you visited the page in question. If you fail to do this, you may receive a failing grade on your paper; if your offense is severe you may fail the course.

American Studies papers generally require bibliographies of all works consulted (as opposed to works cited) and use footnotes rather than in-text citations; please visit the department web page to see how to do this – here is the url:

http://www.skidmore.edu/academics/american_studies/writingpaper-footnoting.html

If you have any questions about how to use footnotes (or endnotes) I will be happy to work with you to show you how to show your sources properly.

One exception to this footnote policy is in book reviews (see below) where the only quotes and paraphrases are from the book you are reviewing. In that one case, you may use in-text citations – simply list the author’s surname and the page you are quoting. If, however, you decide to quote other reviews of the book, or other texts which are relevant, you should use the standard footnote formula.

The Dean of Studies webpage includes explicit about the ethics of academic integrity at: http://cms.skidmore.edu/dean_of_studies/integrity/ethics.cfm

The same website includes this useful checklist to be used before turning in a paper or essay:

http://cms.skidmore.edu/dean_of_studies/integrity/checklist.cfm

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES AND ASSIGNMENTS

Monday, January 25 Introduction; Disaster and American Studies

- Wednesday, January 27 The Golden Age As Catastrophe, Rozario, intro.
FIRST ESSAY WRITTEN IN CLASS
- Monday, February 1 The People of Calamity, Rozario, ch. 1;
What is American Studies? Wise & Kessler-Harris
(Blackboard)
FIRST ESSAY RETURNED
- Wednesday, February 3 Smallpox & the North America, Fenn, Intro, ch. 1 & 2
- Monday, February 8 Smallpox and the Revolution, Fenn, 3 & 4
REVISED DRAFT OF FIRST ESSAY DUE
- Wednesday, February 10 Epidemics in Canada & Mexico, Fenn, 5 & 6
- Monday, February 15 Connections & Passages, Fenn, 7, 8, & epilogue
REVISED DRAFT OF FIRST ESSAY RETURNED
- Wednesday, February 17 Fire in Chicago (Blackboard)
FIRST DRAFT OF SECOND ESSAY DUE
- Monday, February 22 Isaac's Storm, Larson: Intro, part 1
FIRST DRAFT OF SECOND ESSAY RETURNED
- Wednesday, February 24 The Serpent's Coil, Larson, parts 2 & 3
- Monday, March 1 Cataclysm, Larson, parts 4 & 5
REVISED DRAFT OF SECOND ESSAY DUE
TOPIC OF RESEARCH PAPER DUE
- Wednesday, March 3 Larson, Consequences, parts 5 & 6
BIBLIOGRAPHIC INSTRUCTION SESSION
- Monday, March 8 California Dreaming, Winchester, prologue, ch. 1-3
BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE
REVISED DRAFT OF SECOND ESSAY RETURNED

Wednesday, March 10	Plate Tectonics, Winchester, ch. 4 & 5 FIRST DRAFT OF THIRD ESSAY DUE
SPRING BREAK	
Monday, March 22	San Francisco the City, Winchester, ch. 6, 7, & 8 FIRST DRAFT OF THIRD ESSAY RETURNED
Wednesday, March 24	Earthquake! Winchester, ch. 9 & 10 OUTLINE OF RESEARCH PAPER DUE
Monday, March 29	Aftermath; Winchester, ch. 11 & epilogue; Rozario, pp. 67-74, ch. 2 & ch. 3 REVISED DRAFT OF THIRD ESSAY DUE
Wednesday, March 31	Big Burn (excerpts on Blackboard) OUTLINES RETURNED
Monday, April 5	Influenza in 1918 and in 2010 (Barry on Blackboard) REVISED DRAFT OF THIRD ESSAY RETURNED
Wednesday, April 7	Molasses Flood (no kidding!) Puleo on Blackboard
Monday, April 12	Rising Tide 1927 (Barry 2 on Blackboard) FIRST DRAFTS OF RESEARCH PAPER DUE CONFERENCES ON RESEARCH PAPER
Wednesday, April 14	The Great Humanitarian (Barry 2 on Blackboard) CONFERENCES ON RESEARCH PAPER
Monday April 19	1938 Hurricane (Scott on Blackboard) ORAL PRESENTATIONS ON RESEARCH PAPER
Wednesday, April 21	Modern disasters: Rozario, ch. 4 ORAL PRESENTATIONS ON RESEARCH PAPER

Monday, April 26 Sociology of Disaster: Erikson (Blackboard excerpts)

Wednesday, April 28 Modernization of Disaster Rozario, ch. 5 & epilogue

Monday, May 3 New Orleans & Haiti : Race, Politics, & Poverty
(American Quarterly, September 2009, excerpts on
Blackboard)
FINAL DRAFT OF RESEARCH PAPER DUE