American Regions and Regionalism: Growth and Decline, 01:090:263:01 and 10:762:495:01, Fall 2010, 3 credits

Wednesday, 1:10-4:10, Seminar Room, Brett Hall, College Avenue Campus (except for meeting on Monday, November 22)

Taught by Frank Popper, Room 535, Civic Square Building, College Avenue Campus, 732-932-4009, x689, fpopper@rci.rutgers.edu, fpopper@princeton.edu

Office hours: Wednesday, 9-12, plus before or after class, or by appointment


This course takes a primarily historical approach to explore the origins, effects and implications of American regions and regionalism. The early part of the course consists of presentations and question periods, and ends in two take-home exams. The later part focuses on the preparation of your term papers.

You do an original paper of about 10-15 total double-spaced pages on a topic you choose and I approve. The paper goes through four stages: a proposal, a first draft, a class presentation and a final draft. (In some cases more drafts may be needed.) The goals of the course are to teach you about the far-reaching subject of American regions, have you do high-quality thinking and writing about them, and give you a sense of how to help each other in doing these tasks.

The final draft of the term paper counts for 40% of your grade, the class presentation 10% and the two take-home exams 20% each. Class participation and general conscientiousness, including getting work in on time, count for 10%.

I want your written work to reach advanced collegiate standards of writing and will lower the grade of any that does not. I expect you to attend all classes, do all the reading for them carefully and be prepared to discuss it. The class is relatively small and conversational, so the amount of your preparation will quickly become clear and affect your grade.
I expect you to know, understand and live up to Rutgers’ standards of academic integrity explained at academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/students. If you have questions about them, please ask me. Rules of thumb: if you think you may be violating them, you probably are. If you want to avoid plagiarism, do original work.

Schedule

September 1  Introduction.

September 8  No class: Rutgers schedule adjustment.

September 15  What are American regions?: Zelinsky, Preface-Chapter 3, pp. IX-108.


September 29  The history of American regions: Ayers et al., whole book. First take-home exam distributed.

October 6  No class: first take-home exam due.


October 27  Growth-and-decline regionalism 3: Popper(s) material e-mailed. Second Take-home exam distributed.

November 3  No class: second take-home exam due: no class.

November 10  Student presentations.

November 17  Student presentations.

November 22  No class: first drafts of papers due in instructor’s office.

December 1  No class: individual meetings on first drafts in instructor’s office.

December 8  To be announced.

December 15  Term paper due at noon in instructor’s office.


Government regional actions, primarily federal and often operating at the metropolitan or multistate regional level, go back at least to the 1930s New Deal—for instance, the Tennessee Valley Authority, the Bonneville Power Administration in the Pacific Northwest, or the National Resources Planning Board. There are numerous sources on these and other governmental regional initiatives. In a way the winning of the American West, going back to the time when the nation barely stretched to the Appalachians, is a federal regional development project, the largest of all, and there is a huge literature on it. Look also at the Regional Plan Association in New York City, both its work in the New York-New Jersey-Connecticut area and its national America 2050 project. For a good introduction to the basics of city planning, see Christopher Duerksen, C. Gregory Dale and Donald Elliott, “The Citizen’s Guide to Planning” (fourth edition, 2009).

There are interesting histories of metropolitan regions—for example, Chicago (by William Cronon and Bessie Louise Pierce), Las Vegas (Hal Rothman), Los Angeles (Mike Davis and Edward Soja), Pittsburgh (Joel Tarr) and Portland, Oregon (Carl Abbott), among many other cities and authors. Blogs, on cities or other places or issues, are sometimes vividly useful and other times a complete waste of time. If you have questions about them, ask me.

One can find large literatures on specific issues of regions such as ecological restoration, energy practices, ethical/religious perspectives, environmental justice, the environmental sides of science and engineering, the federal public lands, gender experiences, historic preservation, Native, African and Hispanic American concerns and other ethnic ones, natural resource economics, particular animals, plants and industries, population pressure, and urban and suburban development. Regionalist figures have been subjects of recent book-length studies: for starters, Bernard DeVoto, Marjory Stoneman Douglas, Dorothea Lange, Robert Moses, John Muir, Lewis Mumford, Gifford Pinchot, John Wesley Powell, Theodore Roosevelt (specifically in his conservation work), Wallace Stegner, Frederick Jackson Turner, and my wife and me.

The nation has a vast literature on cherished regional places: the Everglades, the Mississippi and other rivers, the New Jersey Pinelands, the California coast, the Northern and Northwest forests, the Southwest deserts, and on and on. Any number of specialized periodicals can be useful. Look, for instance, at Environmental History, the American

Then there are regional periodicals (such as High Country News, Journal of the West, Pacific Historical Quarterly or Western Historical Quarterly for the West) or disciplinary ones (such as those on air pollution, forestry, hazardous waste, housing, farming, mining or wilderness). Local newspapers can often be enormously helpful. Do not overlook the publications and websites of state, county, local and neighborhood museums and historical societies. Use your imagination to find additional sources.

Specialized encyclopedias are often good places to start research. (One must always go further.) Since 1990 encyclopedias have appeared on, among other places, the Great Plains, the Midwest, the Northeast, the South, the West, New Jersey, New York State, Cleveland, Los Angeles and New York City. Also useful are Carolyn Merchant, “The Columbia Guide to American Environmental History” (2002) and Shepard Krech III, J.R. McNeill and Carolyn Merchant (eds.), “Encyclopedia of World Environmental History” (2003). Wikipedia and other encyclopedias, on-line or off-, are good places to begin research and terrible places to end it. Use them as starting points. But please don’t cite them.