

Mississippi River in History

CSHS 357

Fall 2007

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Wednesday 5:45-8:25

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Course Description

This course is a multidisciplinary approach to the history of the Mississippi River Valley. We will investigate the Valley's environmental, cultural, social and material histories. The course will approach the Mississippi River Valley from the perspectives of history, space, environment, architecture, technology, and archaeology.

There are no prerequisites for this course other than a curiosity about one of the world's most important and fascinating rivers.

Course Objectives

My major goal in this course is for you to develop an understanding of the Mississippi River Valley from prehistory to the present. Emphasis will be on the Lower Mississippi River Valley below Cairo but the Upper Valley will also be discussed.

In addition to your reading for this course, I will provide a visual approach to the River through videos and PowerPoint presentations. I hope that you will learn to see the River in a new way.

Please pay close attention to the location of important sites. The spatial dimension is an important part of the history of the Mississippi River Valley. Events and processes do not occur in abstract space, but at specific locations. In other words, history takes place.

Readings

- Walter Havighurst. *Voices on the River: The Story of the Mississippi Waterways*. University of Minnesota Press, 2004 (first published in 1964).
- Ari Kelman. *A River and Its City: The Nature of Landscape in New Orleans*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.
- Mark Twain. *Life on the Mississippi*. New York: Signet Classics, 2001 (first published in 1883).
- Lyle Saxon. *Father Mississippi: The Story of the Great Flood of 1927*. Gretna: Pelican Publishing Company, 2000 (first published in 1927).

Paper

A paper of approximately 10 double-spaced typed pages is required. Illustrations (photos, etc.) will enhance the paper but are in addition to the 10 page written requirement. The paper should be

based on your visit to a historic site related to the Mississippi River Valley. It should integrate your site visit, reading about the site, class notes, and your research into primary/secondary sources into a well-written paper. The paper is due on November 28. You will make an oral presentation of your paper to the class on November 28 or December 5. The format and length of the presentation will depend on the number of students in the class and will be announced later.

The site might be a recognized historic site such as a plantation or it could be a place important in the history of the Mississippi River Valley. Locations in or around New Orleans are acceptable but do not hesitate to visit sites in the Atchafalaya Basin or up the River Road if you prefer. Please discuss your visit and projected paper topic with me before you make your selection.

Your paper should have two major components: a review of the site and placement of it into a broad historic context. A paper lacking one of these elements is not acceptable.

The site review component should describe the site and evaluate it. Your personal reaction could be a part of the evaluation but only a small part of your investigation of the site. Include your appraisal of the site's procedures to communicate with the public, including interpreters, guides, and written material.

Second, you should place the site in a broad context. You should explicitly relate the site to the Mississippi River Valley. Your paper should focus on some theme or problem in the history of the Mississippi River Valley. For example, if you visit a plantation you might investigate the broad topic of the plantation economy or some more specific topic. A visit to Bonnet Carré could be tied into research on floods and flood control. Locks such as the Inner Harbor Navigation Canal Lock or Harvey Lock are important in the themes of navigation and economic development.

Grades

Course grades will be based on:

Midterm exam	30%
Final exam	30%
Paper	40%

Course Policies and Procedures

PowerPoint presentations will illustrate selected elements of the course. Videos may be shown to provide different views of the river.

Attendance. Students should attend each class and be prepared to participate in class discussions.

Late assignments. My desire to give good grades will be reduced if papers are turned in late without good reason.

Academic honesty. I expect that students will follow the requirements of academic honesty stated in the Tulane University catalog.

Schedule of Classes and Reading Assignments

You should complete the reading assignments by the dates specified. The topics listed in the schedule will be covered in the course but not necessarily on the date shown if we move faster or slower than I anticipate.

August 29. Introduction to course

September 5. The Natural Mississippi River Valley

- Twain, chapters 1-21.
- Havighurst, 1-49.

September 12. The Colonial River

- Saxon, 61-121.
- Saxon, 125-205.
- Saxon, 209-276.

September 19. The Antebellum River I.

- Havighurst, 53-166.
- Kelman, 1-17.
- Kelman, 19-49.
- Kelman, 50-86.

September 26. The Antebellum River II.

- Kelman, 87-118.

October 3. War in the Mississippi River Valley

- Havighurst, 169-193.

October 10. Midterm exam.

October 17. The Modern River I.

- Twain, chapters 22-60.
- Havighurst, 247-283.

October 24. The Modern River II

- Kelman, 119-156.
- Kelman, 157-196.
- Saxon, 279-394.

October 31. The Environment, Industrialization, the Environmental Movement, and Environmental Justice

November 7. Preserving the History of the Mississippi River Valley

- Kelman, 197-221.

November 14. Beyond the Mississippi: The Mississippi River in American Culture

November 21. Thanksgiving Holiday

November 28. Paper Presentations

December 5. Paper Presentations and Conclusion

Final Exam