Course Overview
For Thomas Jefferson the Mississippi was vital to the American prosperity, the lifeblood of the American commerce. To Ma-ka-tai-me-she-kia-kiak, or Black Sparrow Hawk, it was the site of his people’s slaughter by the United States Army and the Illinois militia. To thousands of enslaved African-Americans it signaled the route of those “sold South”, the path of the internal slave trade. To Mark Twain it was “the very body of the nation” and the setting for his most seminal work, “The Adventures of Huck Finn”. Today, many see the Mississippi as the cause of floods that endanger their lives and livelihoods, a force to be controlled and contained, while to the Houma people the river has been the sustainer of their homeland, a world now threatened by upriver dams. Named with an Ojibwa word meaning “Great River” the Mississippi River is 2,320 miles long, its drainage basin covering 31 states and roughly 40 percent of the United States landmass.

In light of these historic cultural geographies, this course will consider the river as both a historical and imaginative site, a place where a diversity of peoples have lived, worked, loved, fought and died, and also as a geographic space and place that has played a central role in the imaginations of those peoples. We will focus especially on the ways in which Americans have constructed and reshaped the river, and the cultural and environmental repercussions of those actions. This course will also offer students from all majors an opportunity to be part of an interdisciplinary field team that will explore the Mississippi River firsthand. We will embark on a 9-day field visit and service-learning project with Living Lands and Waters, and as such we will spend the majority of our time on the legendary Mississippi River.
This course covers several student learning objectives (SLOs):

- Students will gain a comprehensive knowledge of the social, cultural, political and environmental geography of the Mississippi River.
- Students will understand aspects of the popular representations of the river both past and present.
- Students will research and present a contemporary environmental issue using critical thought.
- Students will make disciplinary connections, be active in research and field work and be able to communicate findings verbally, geo-spatially, in writing and using other media formats.

Upon completing the course, students will be expected to:

- Develop a geographic research question that addresses a nature-society issue in the Mississippi River Delta as well as potential solutions using geospatial data.
- Link major geographic concepts and tenets to the current field setting.
- Write critically about geographic issues central to the Mississippi River.
- Illustrate how civic engagement projects link to environmental & social issues in Tennessee.

Required Books and Readings


The Program

This course will involve face to face meetings, online discussions & assignments, and nine days in Memphis, Tennessee over Spring Break. The fieldwork portion of the class will include visits to local cultural sites in Memphis as well as five days working on a Mississippi River barge with Living Lands and Waters. Learning as much about the Mississippi River as possible before traveling will make the trip more enjoyable and rewarding. Points are earned as follows:

1. Participation in all field activities: 20 %
2. Participation in all online activities: 20%
3. Assignments: 50%
4. Presentations: 10%

Participation

Participation in all online, face to face, and field activities is mandatory. When we are in the field, students are expected to follow the UNC code of conduct which includes rules regarding drug and alcohol use. **Students who do not follow the rules of the class will be sent home at their own expense and receive a zero for the class.**

Assignments/Assessments:

1. **Reflections on the River** - This first assignment asks students to reflect upon their own knowledge/understanding/relationship to the Mississippi River. What do you know about it? Has it played a role in your life? If not, what are the impressions you maintain of this space, if any? (2-page paper)
2. **Issues of the Mississippi River:** You will work in small groups to complete this assignment, which asks you to locate one news report related to the Mississippi River and to read three additional secondary sources related to one of the issues it raises. This can be focused on any geographic issue including tourism, river flooding, plastic pollution, Memphis’s economy, or historic problems with the damming of Atchafalaya. Our purpose will be to familiarize ourselves with the contemporary issues confronting the river and its people. (5-page paper)
3. **Cultural Representations of the Mississippi River:** The Mississippi River has long been an important subject for the American imagination. In class we will discuss Mark Twain’s work and view other popular representations of the river to explore how Americans have conceptualized the river as a space and made meaning out of this. Then,
to allow us a much broader understanding of American cultural representations, students will write a paper on a cultural artifact of your choice, investigating the particular representations of a river and its peoples. (5-page paper)

4. **Environmental History of the River**: For this project we will explore the history of the river. This is an enormous subject, and one to which we cannot do complete justice. As a result, it will be important for you to explore one aspect of history - especially cultural or environmental - that you find interesting. Your job will be to locate three primary sources about a particular event or issue related to the MR and explore what you can learn about its history and geography. More details will be provided on Canvas. (5-page paper)

5. **Contemporary Mapping of the Mississippi River**: Learning the geography of the MR is integral to our understanding of its history. For this assignment you will create your own story map of the MR, one that is factually accurate and reflects contemporary circumstances. More details are provided on Canvas. (5-page paper)

**Presentations:**
All students will be required to give a professional presentation in class on their experiences working in the field in Tennessee. Projects must focus on environmental issues related Mississippi cleanup and abatement and link to some of the foundational concepts we learned about in class in terms of the region’s history. More details will be provided on Canvas.

**Grading Scale**

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**Tentative Field Course Itinerary (Spring Break 2020: March 14-22)**

Day 1: Students fly to Memphis, Tennessee - overnight in Memphis hotel
Day 2: Tour: Visit Rhodes College, Orpheum Theater, Elvis Presley’s Graceland
Day 3: Meet up with Living Lands and Waters
Day 4-8: On the river - working on LLW barge for environmental cleanup and analysis
Day 9: Tours: Plantation visit, Haunted Memphis ghost tour
Day 10: Return to Colorado

*All lodging will be shared (2-3 people per room) in downtown Memphis.

**Honor Code**
All members of the University of Northern Colorado community are entrusted with the responsibility to uphold and promote five fundamental values: Honesty, Trust, Respect, Fairness, and Responsibility. These core elements foster an atmosphere, inside and outside of the classroom, which serves as a foundation and guides the UNC community’s academic, professional, and personal growth. Endorsement of these core elements by students, faculty, administration, and trustees strengthens the integrity and value of our academic climate.
UNC’s Policies
UNC’s policies and recommendations for academic misconduct will be followed in class. Any field trips are considered part of the class and the same rules apply. For additional information, please see the Dean of Student’s website, Student Handbook link [http://www.unco.edu/dos/handbook/index.html](http://www.unco.edu/dos/handbook/index.html).

Short Term Courses:
Special Term Courses do not meet during a typical semester (begin or end earlier or later). These courses have different add/drop/withdrawal dates. It is the responsibility of the student to be aware of these dates. Please refer to “special term/short course deadlines” from this link: [http://www.unco.edu/registrar/current-students/course-add-drop.aspx](http://www.unco.edu/registrar/current-students/course-add-drop.aspx), to learn the dates for this course. To drop or withdraw, you must contact the Registrar’s Office at 970-352-2231.