

## Instructors

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## HSTR 160D Modern World History An Environmental History Perspective



### Course Overview

This course examines world history from approximately 1492 to the present with an eye to global environmental shifts and their relationship to social, demographic, cultural, and political change. The voyages of Vasco da Gama and Christopher Columbus heralded the age of early globalization with their violent exchange of peoples, microbes, technologies, and colonial politics. With the creation of empires, the world became connected by European capitalism and colonialism, which facilitated the engineering of colossal silver mines, the planting of sprawling sugar plantations, the exploitation of fur-bearing animals, the spread of smallpox to virgin soil populations, the emptying of oceans of their marine life, and the world quest for energy, both in the blubber of whales and seals and in the sands of the Middle East.

You will become world historians in this class, reading and analyzing texts, listening to audio-recorded lectures, watching documentaries, and writing about all of them. You will learn to identify the causal relations between environment, disease, and human events. Environmental historians explore the human interaction with the natural environment in all its complexities, including climate change, interaction with nonhuman animals, agriculture and engineered landscapes, contagions and demographic shifts, oceans and fisheries, and industrial pollution. Along with using social scientific theories, environmental historians also draw on ecological theories, such as biomagnification, ideas about microparasitic relationships and immunity, trophic cascades and industrialized food chains, and other examples of methods of understanding the natural environment. Whether viruses or whales, for the environmental historian nature is an agent of history, a vantage point that decenters

humans from the unfolding story on Earth. History is the ongoing story of the manner in which we shape the environment and the environment shapes us. In turn, this interaction has facilitated the true globalization of the planet, which has had profound consequences for human and nonhuman life.

### **Required readings**

Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900*.

Walker, *The Lost Wolves of Japan*.

Vaillant, *The Golden Spruce*.

McNeill, *Something New Under the Sun: An Environmental History of the Twentieth Century*.

### **Required documentaries**

National Geographic, "Guns, Germs, and Steel."

Louie Psihoyos, "The Cove."

Hubert Sauper, "Darwin's Nightmare."

Aaron Wolf, Curt Ellis, and Ian Cheney, "King Corn."

Rupert Murray, "End of the Line."

### **Course requirements** (all assignments must be completed on time to pass course):

First Paper Assignment: 25%

Second Paper Assignment: 25%

Third Paper Assignment: 25%

Final Examination: 25%

### **Student Conduct**

For the Montana State student conduct code, see:

[http://www2.montana.edu/policy/student\\_conduct/](http://www2.montana.edu/policy/student_conduct/). Any cheating, plagiarism, or other forms of student misconduct in this course will earn an F in the class and a reprimand on the student record.

### **Course Format**

The duration of this online course is Wednesday, January 9 through Friday, May 3, 2013. Broadly speaking, this course is divided into three thematic sections. Each section has a corresponding paper assignment (see separate Paper Assignments and the appropriate drop boxes on the D2L site). You can work on these at your own pace, but you must have the paper assignments in the D2L drop box by their specified due dates. The final examination must be completed during the final week of class, April 29-May 3, and turned in by no later than 5:00PM on Friday, May 3, 2013.

The online course format, with its electronic exchange of papers, is excellent for working on analytical writings skills. For this reason, the first and second paper assignments will be due in stages so that you can revise and resubmit them. *Please pay special attention to these instructions.*

### **Paper Assignment 1**

1. A complete draft of Paper Assignment 1 is due in the drop box by no later than 5:00PM on Wednesday, January 30. It is to be in MS Word format.
2. This draft will be returned to you by no later than 5:00PM on Wednesday, February 13. The paper will have suggested substantive and stylistic revisions, which you are to incorporate into the paper in order to improve it.
3. The final version of Paper Assignment 1 is due in the drop box by 5:00PM on Wednesday, February 20.

### **Paper Assignment 2**

1. A draft of the introductory paragraph, including the thesis statement, for Paper Assignment 2 is due in the drop box by no later than 5:00PM on Friday, March 8. It is to be in MS Word format.
2. This draft paragraph will be returned to you no later than 5:00PM on Monday, March 18. The paragraph will have suggested substantive and stylistic revisions, which you are to incorporate into the paper in order to improve it.
3. The final version of the entire Paper Assignment 2 is due in the drop box by 5:00PM on Monday, March 25.

### **Paper Assignment 3**

1. The completed version of Paper Assignment 3 is due in the drop box by no later than 5:00PM on Friday, April 19. There is no revise and resubmit exercise for the final paper.

### **Final Examination**

1. The final examination is a comprehensive, written examination that is due no later than Friday, May 3. It will be primarily short answers and essays.

### **Documentaries**

Over the course of the semester, I will email on D2L dates and times for public showings of the required documentaries on the campus of Montana State University, Bozeman. Attendance at these public showings is not required, but it is recommended, as I will also use the occasions as an opportunity to discuss major themes in the course. We will watch the documentaries, and then I will spend an hour or so answering questions and discussing the themes in the course. If you do not attend these public showings, it will be up to you to acquire the documentaries and view them on your own.

### **Course Sections**

The first section, ECOLOGIES OF GLOBALIZATION, includes the following lectures:

1. "Climate Change and the Nature of History"
2. "Themes in World Environmental History"
3. "The Nature of National Histories"

4. "Ecology, Imperialism and the Modern World"
5. "The Agricultural Transition"
6. "Legacies of Livestock"
7. "Birth of Civilizations"

It includes the documentary "Guns, Germs, and Steel" and the assigned text, Crosby's *Ecological Imperialism*. On the D2L site, please see Paper Assignment #1 in order to learn how you are to tie these various lectures, documentaries, and academic monograph together. In sum, this section explores the legacies of the most important watershed in world history: the agricultural transition. The turn to agriculture allowed humans to generate surplus food, expand populations, and create city-based civilizations with their cultural experts, such as warriors, writers, and blacksmiths, people who worked in trades other than farming. The agricultural transition allowed Old World populations to develop evolutionary immunities to certain diseases, an epidemiological fact that will, as we shall see, contribute to the shape of the modern world. After 1492, the New World was not so much "conquered" as it was "infected."

The second section, ENVIRONMENTS OF DESIRE, investigates the manner in which human ideas, thought, religion, and culture are made real, or inscribed onto, the environment. See Paper Assignment #2 for your assignment. Most major religions teach a human mastery over nature and, consequently, our naming, engineering, campaigns of species eradication, and other activities reflect such ideas toward the natural world. In this manner, nature becomes an artifact of human culture, much as traditional documents do. Giant, corn-fed beef cattle, dependent on antibiotics, are artifacts of our fast food, industrial culture. Our bodies, plagued by obesity and heart disease, are also artifacts of this industrial culture. This section includes the lectures:

1. "Western Thought and Nature"
2. "Eastern Thought and Nature"
3. "Imperial China and the Great Divergence"
4. "Early Modern Europe and Colonialism"
5. "Early Modern Japan and Forestry"
6. "Animals and the Intimacy of History"
7. "Creating and Killing the Wolves of Japan"
8. "Agriculture and Evolution – Discussion Notes for 'King Corn'"

The documentary "King Corn" is also required, as is Walker's *The Lost Wolves of Japan*.

Section three, GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTS AND THE MAKING OF THE MODERN WORLD, involves the lectures:

1. "Technologies of Empire"
2. "European Imperialism and the Opium War"
3. "Japan, Western Europe, and Modernity"
4. "Asian Ideals: From Social Darwinism to Pan-Asianism"
5. "Emptying the Oceans"
6. "Japanese Whaling – Discussion Notes for 'The Cove'"

7. "Japan's Toxic Archipelago"

8. "Darwin's Nightmare – Discussion Notes for 'Darwin's Nightmare'"

9. "Summing Up"

It also includes the documentaries "Darwin's Nightmare" and "The Cove," as well as the assigned books, Vaillant's *The Golden Spruce* and McNeill's *Something New Under the Sun*. In early lectures, we talked about some of the historical reasons that Western Europe expanded outward to colonize new lands, to exploit new environments, and to open up new markets for trade. This integration of the world into a global economic system, with the Western World at the center, had diverse consequences around the world. For the New World, it meant a complete collapse of existing Amerindian civilizations. This process is depicted in *The Golden Spruce*, where we learn how sea otters and timber became commodities in the European-dominated economy. By the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, this process had transformed the planet, creating new levels of extraction, new levels of energy consumption, mass extinctions, and other impacts on the environment and communities that eventually transformed former European colonies into the Third World. The responses to European colonialism differed around the world. Whereas in China and Africa, it led to varying degrees of local dependency, economic collapse, and colonial subjugation, in Japan it led to the birth of new ideas and major cultural and political shifts. But the key is that the legacies European colonialism, particularly economic globalization, shaped our contemporary world.

Cumulatively, these three sections will present the world from an environmental history perspective. Our domination of Earth has led to the emergence of the Anthropocene Epoch, a true globalization of the planet under human rule.