

HIST484: WORLD ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY

Joshua Howe
Montana State University
Fall, 2011

Coordinates:

Class Schedule: Tuesday and Thursday, Gaines Hall 144, 9:30-10:45am

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Office Hours: 2-163 Wilson Hall
Department of History and Philosophy
Tuesday and Thursday, 11:00am-12:30pm
Or by appointment

Course Description:

This seminar approaches the study of “world environmental history” as a fascinating problem of historical methodology. We begin by introducing environmental history at its largest scales of time and space, investigating how climate, biodiversity, natural resources and commodities have affected human history on a global level. Here we will focus on the problems of agency, contingency, and causality that arise when historians attempt to meaningfully incorporate the natural world into broad historical analyses. With these same questions in mind, we will then move on to a series of more specific case studies that complicate our historical analysis. As we visit the pastoral landscapes of Nazi Germany, the toxic waters and fields modern Japan, the denuded countryside of Imperial China, and the socially-stratified villages of northern India, we will see how culture, memory, religion, and power shape reciprocal relationships between humans and their geographically unique surroundings in a number of different ways. Finally, before students branch out into their own research, we will investigate how these different valances of environmental history have informed a 20th century regime of global environmental governance—a regime born of good intentions, but one replete with problems of efficacy, equitability, and justice.

A 400-level seminar, this course is *reading intensive*, and students should be prepared to read on average around 200 pages of material per week. In addition to the reading, students will be asked to complete a number of short reading response paragraphs and informal in-class quizzes, a full-length historical book review, and a detailed and well-written research prospectus.

Required Books:

Brian Fagan, *The Long Summer: How Climate Changed Civilization*

Mark Kurlansky, *Cod: A Biography of the Fish That Changed the World*

Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*

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

Gus Speth, *Red Sky at Morning: America and the Crisis of the Global Environment*

Brett Walker, *Toxic Archipelago: A History of Industrial Disease in Japan*

*Ann Grodzins Gold and Bhoju Ram Gujar, *In the Time of Trees and Sorrows: Nature, Power, and Memory in Rajasthan*

*(Not available at the MSU Bookstore)

Optional Books:

Marc Cioc, *The Rhine: An Ecobiography*

John Soluri, *Banana Cultures*

Joachim Radkau, *Nature and Power*

Assignments and Evaluation:

Students in this class will be evaluated based on three things: 1) active participation, as measured by: attendance, discussion participation, three in-class reading quizzes, and three short reading response assignments; 2) a formal, 3-page historical book review; and 3) a formal, 15-20 page proposal for a hypothetical thesis-level research project on a global environmental history subject of your choice.

Book Review: 20%

Participation Grade: 40%

Research Proposal: 40%

Discussion:

As a seminar, this course is built primarily around discussion. I envision a community of peers freely discussing, questioning, challenging, and learning from both the assigned materials and from each other. During these conversations, I hope that each student will find opportunities to give and take in roughly equal measures. I also encourage all of you to have fun. Above all, I EXPECT AND REQUIRE that students treat each other with kindness and respect, regardless of differences of opinion or divergences in views.

Because this course lives and dies by the active participation of its students, a large portion of your final grade depends upon your attendance at and participation in class discussion. Discussion grades are not scientific, but success in discussion has a few relatively simple components.

1. COME TO CLASS. There is no maximum number of days you can miss and no points-per-day schedule for missing class. You can't participate if you don't show up...so show up. Period.
2. DO THE READING. Attendance is mandatory; so is preparation. It's awfully difficult to have a good discussion on a subject if you don't know anything about it. Do the reading, and you'll know what we're talking about
 - a. READING QUIZZES: To give you some added incentive to read carefully and thoughtfully, I will administer 3 short, unannounced, in-class reading quizzes over the course of the semester. The quizzes will not be difficult...if you have done the reading. So do the reading.
 - b. READING RESPONSES: In order to help you organize your thoughts before class and to help you hone your skills of analytical writing, I ask that you complete 3 of 7 available short reading response exercises during the semester. Each reading response should be between 250 and 500 words; in it, you should clearly and concisely identify the author's intended project, articulate his or her argument, and explain how the

author goes about using evidence to support that argument. The 7 readings eligible for a reading response assignment are marked with an asterix (*). ALL students must complete a reading response for *Toxic Archipelago*; each student must complete a reading response for at least 2 of the other 6 possibilities.

3. LISTEN, ASK QUESTIONS, and SPEAK UP. You are not obliged to speak for the sake of speaking. You can contribute to the class not only by making insightful, intelligent comments, but also by asking good questions and even by listening carefully. When you DO have something to say, though, speak up!

Book Review:

Historical book reviews provide a way for students to work through the argument of a book while honing both their critical thinking and critical writing skills. For this assignment, choose one of the first four books assigned for this course and write a clear and concise 700-900 word (about 2.5 to 3 pages) review. You will be working with Brian Fagan's *The Long Summer*, Alfred Crosby's *Ecological Imperialism*, Mark Kurlansky's *Cod*, or Sindy Mintz's *Sweetness and Power*. Reviews will be evaluated (A-F) based on your engagement with and clear articulation of the main argument of the work and its organization, as well as on the quality of the writing. Note: these are not "book reports"; rather, they are scholarly reviews—a form we will discuss in class during Week 3. Reviews should give a synopsis of the author's thesis and the structure of his or her argument, as well as an evaluation of the work in the context of the issues we discuss in class.

As part of the review process, we will workshop these reviews in small groups during Week 6 of the semester. Workshop Drafts will be due to your group via email (cc me) no later than **11:59pm on Sunday, October 1st**. Final drafts will be due by **5:00pm on Friday, October 7th** on D2L.

Research Proposal:

Over the course of the semester, we will take a look at a number of different methodologies for approaching the slippery field of "World Environmental History." But how would YOU take on this subject? How would you apply the skills and techniques you have been exposed to in this class to a major, thesis-level project in environmental history?

For this assignment, you will choose a topic in environmental history that interests you and produce a comprehensive proposal for conducting high-level research on that topic. Your polished, well-written proposal should run between 15 and 20 pages and include a 1-2 page executive summary, a 7-9 page literature review, a 1-2 page statement of significance, a 3-5 page research plan and statement of method, and a 1-3 page discussion of sources. The proposal should also include a standard bibliography.

Proposals will be evaluated primarily based on the quality of the writing and the depth of research, but also on the creativity and viability of the project and the researcher's approach to it. In addition to the proposal itself, each student will be asked to present a 4-5 minute synopsis of his or her proposal to the class during the last two weeks of the semester. We will discuss the research proposal assignment further in the middle of the semester.

Schedule:

Week 1: Introduction to World Environmental History

8/30: *Welcome, Introduction, and Syllabus*

9/1: *What is "World Environmental History?"*

Readings:

1. Joachim Radkau, *Nature and Power*, pg. 1-35 (E-Reserve)
2. Bruce Mazlish, "Comparing Global History to World History," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (Winter, 1998), pg. 385-395. (E-Reserve)
3. **Optional:** J.R. McNeill, "Observations on the Nature and Culture of Environmental History," *History and Theory*, Vol. 42, No. 4. Theme issue 42: Environment and History (Dec., 2003), pg. 5-43. (**especially pages 5-16**) (E-Reserve)
4. **Optional:** Donald Worster, "Transformations of the Earth: Toward an Agroecological Perspective in History," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 76, No. 4 (Mar., 1990), pp. 1087-1106 (E-Reserve)

Week 2: Climate and History

9/6: *A Paleoclimate Primer*

Reading:

1. John F. Richards, "Climate and Early Modern World Environmental History," in *The Unending Frontier: An Environmental History of the Early Modern World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), pg. 58-85. (E-Reserve)

9/8: *The Long Summer*

Reading:

2. * Brian Fagan, *The Long Summer* (Preface, pg. 1-33, 59-145, 169-212, 229-252)
3. **Optional:** The rest of Fagan.

Week 3: The Biological Unification of the World

9/13: *History and Biology*

Reading:

1. Alfred Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism*, pg. xv-103.
2. Bruce Mazlish, "The Art of Reviewing," *Perspectives* (February 2001), pg. 15-18 (D2L)

9/15: *The Columbian Exchange*

Reading:

3. * Alfred Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism*, pg. 104-216; 269-308.
4. Alfred Crosby, "Reassessing 1492," *Germs, Seeds, & Animals: Studies in Ecological History*, pg. 180-190. (E-Reserve)
5. **Optional:** The rest of *Ecological Imperialism*

Week 4: Commodities, Part 1 (Fish)

9/20: *The Tragedy of the Commons*

1. Garrett Harden, "The Tragedy of the Commons," *Science*, Vol. 162 (December, 1968), pg. 1243-1248 (E-Reserve)
2. **Optional:** Arthur McEvoy, "The Problem of Environment," *The Fisherman's Problem: Ecology and Law in the California Fisheries, 1850-1980*, pg. 3-16. (E-Reserve)

9/22: *A Fish Story*

Reading:

3. * Mark Kurlansky, *Cod: A Biogeography of the Fish that Changed the World*, (recipe pages are *optional*, which leaves about 200 short, easy pages)

Week 5: Commodities, Part 2 (Sugar)

9/27: *Bananas*

Reading:

1. John Soluri, "The Lives and Time of Miss Chiquita," in *Banana Cultures: Agriculture, Consumption, and Environmental Change in Honduras and the United States*, pg. 161-192. (E-Reserve)

9/29: *Sugar, Consumption, Culture, and Power*

Reading:

1. * Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power* (about 230 pages)

Book Review Drafts Due to Groups via Email by 11:59pm, Sunday, 10/1

Week 6: A Little Writing and A Little Religion

10/3: *Book Review Writing Workshop*

Readings:

1. Peer Book Reviews

10/6: *Genesis, and Other Environmental Disasters*

Readings:

1. Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" (E-Reserve)
2. Ismar Schorsch, "Learning to Live with Less: A Jewish Perspective," *Spirit and Nature: Why the Environment is a Religious Issue*, pg. 27-37. (E-Reserve)
3. "Genesis 1" and "Genesis 2." (D2L)

Final Review Due by 5:00pm on Friday, 10/7

Week 7: Nature and the State

10/11: *Seeing Like a State*

Reading:

1. James C. Scott, "Introduction" (*optional*) and "Nature and Space," pg. 11-52; "Authoritarian High Modernism," *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, pg. 87-102. (E-Reserve)

10/13: *The Problem of Nazi Pastoralism*

Readings:

2. Frank Uekoetter, "The Nazis and the Environment: A Relevant Topic?"; "Ideas: Diverse Roots and a Common Cause"; and "Lessons," *The Green and*

the Brown: A History of Conservation in Nazi Germany, pg. 1-43, 202-209. (D2L)

3. Jared Diamond, "One Island, Two Peoples, Two Histories: The Dominican Republic and Haiti," *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*, pg. 329-357. (E-Reserve)

Week 8: Japan's Toxic Archipelago

10/18: *Modernity and Toxicity*

Reading:

1. * Brett Walker, *Toxic Archipelago*

10/20: *A Conversation with Brett Walker*

(Reading Responses due at the beginning of class)

Week 9: Modern India: Nature, Memory, and History

10/25: *Nature and Spirituality in Modern India (with Bart Scott)*

10/27: *Indian Environmental History from the Bottom Up?*

Reading:

1. * Ann Grodzins Gold and Bhoju Ram Gujar, *In the Time of Trees and Sorrows: Nature, Power, and Memory in Rajasthan*, pg. xi-104, Additional pages TBD.

Week 10: Long Term Environmental Change in China

11/1: *Nature in China and the Nature of China*

Reading:

1. Gao Xingjian, "Buying a Fishing Rod for my Grandfather," *Buying a Fishing Rod for my Grandfather: Stories*, trans by Mabel Lee (New York: HarperCollins 2004), pg. 63-88. (E-Reserve)
2. Mark Elvin, "Landmarks and Time-Marks"; "Humans v. Elephants"; and "The Great Deforestation: An Overview," *The Retreat of the Elephants: An Environmental History of China*, pg. 3-39. (E-Reserve)
3. Jared Diamond, "China, Lurching Giant," *Collapse*, pg. 358-377. (D2L)
4. **Optional:** Mark Elvin, "Nature as Revelation," *The Retreat of the Elephants*, 321-368. (D2L)

11/3: *Modern China: The Three Gorges Dam*

Film Screening: Jia Zhang-ke, "Still Life." (1h48m)

Reading:

5. **Optional:** Lyman Van Slyke, *Yangtze*, pg. 1-52; 181-191. (D2L)

Week 11: Nature, Disaster, and Dissent

11/8: *Chernobyl*

Film Screening: Chernobyl Documentary (TBD)

11/10: *Chernobyl*

Reading:

1. David Weiner, "Environmental Activism," "Environmental Struggles in the Era of Stagnation," and "Environmental Activism under Gorbachev," pg. 23-35, 402-439.

Week 12: Environmental Governance

11/15: The Structures of Global Environmental Governance

Reading:

1. * James Gustave Speth, *Red Sky at Morning*, pg. 1-116.

11/17: Sustainability, Empire, and Justice

Reading:

2. George F. Kennan, "To Prevent a World Wasteland," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 48, no. 3 (April, 1970): 401-413. (D2L)
3. Vandana Shiva, "The Greening of the Global Reach," in Wolfgang Sachs (ed), *Global Ecology: A New Arena of Political Conflict* (London: Zed Books, 1993), pg. 149-156. (E-Reserve))
4. Donald Worster, "The Shaky Ground of Sustainability," in Wolfgang Sachs (ed), *Global Ecology*, pg. 132-44. (D2L)
5. Thomas Robertson, "'This is the American Earth': American Empire, the Cold War, and American Environmentalism," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (September 2008), pg. 561-584. (E-Reserve)

Week 13: Race, Gender, and Justice

11/22: Race, Gender, and Justice

Reading:

1. Carolyn Merchant, "Nature as Female," *The Death of Nature*, pg. 1-42. (E-Reserve)
2. TBA

Special Film Screening: TBA

Thanksgiving

Week 14:

11/29: Research Project Workshop

12/1: Student Research Presentations

Week 15: Presentations

12/6: Student Research Presentations

12/8: Student Research Presentations

Research Projects Due by 11:59pm on Friday, 12/9 (Semester Ends 12/16)