

History/Environmental Studies 355
Global Environmental History
Fall 2012

TTH, 3:00-4:30, Sage 3218

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Course Themes: Environmental history is the study of changing relationships between humans and nature over time. In this seminar, we will explore the way that the natural environment intersects with major themes in world history, including industrialization, colonialism, frontiers, and globalization. The central theme of the course will be a comparison between the imperial expansion of Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with the imperial expansion of the United States in the twentieth century. We will investigate the environmental context and consequences of these subjects, with the understanding that the natural world can shape human history and that the events of human history have played—and continue to play—key roles in shaping the environment.

A primary purpose of this class is the exploration of the term “sustainability” in a historical context. Although we typically think of sustainability as a forward-thinking concept, in this course we use it as a lens of inquiry to help us understand human/environmental interactions in the past. As a lens of inquiry, sustainability requires us to investigate the intersections of environmental change, economic activity, and social organization, and how these intersections have changed over time.

An additional goal of this class is to further your liberal arts education. What does this mean? The liberal arts education focuses on general learning, intellectual ability, and critical thinking rather than technical or professional skills. The goal of this class, then, is not just to convey specific information about global environmental history (although you will learn much about this) but to teach you how to interpret this information critically, how to understand environmental history in its social, historical, and political context, and how to draw lessons from this history that might be applicable today. A liberal arts education provides the tools we need to be active citizens of our communities. As we will learn this semester, active citizenship plays a key role in resolving the environmental dilemmas that have faced humanity for centuries.

Learning Outcomes: In 2008, UW Oshkosh adopted a set of Essential Learning Outcomes to help define the meaning of a liberal education. This course will help students progress towards three of these outcomes: Knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world; critical and creative thinking; and knowledge of sustainability and its applications. Upon completing this course, students will be able to:

- 1.) Have a basic understanding of the field of environmental history, its goals and methods.
- 2.) Recognize and understand large patterns of social and environmental change that have shaped global environmental history.
- 3.) Critically analyze the intersections among environmental change, economic activity, and social structures from a variety of time periods and cultures.
- 4.) Effectively communicate complicated ideas about environmental history in written and oral formats.

Attendance, Discussion and Participation: Your participation in discussions and other class activities is essential. The class will be run in seminar format, meaning there will be very little lecture. Come to class each day prepared to discuss the reading assigned for that day. Attendance will be taken every class meeting; your grade will begin to drop with each absence after second one. If you have more than five unexcused absences, you will fail the course. An “unexcused absence” is any absence for which you cannot provide a note from a doctor, another professor, or some other documented explanation of your absence. If you simply cannot make a class, please get in touch with me before the class meets; perhaps an arrangement can be made to ensure that you are not penalized for missing class for legitimate reasons. There will be no opportunity to make up short assignments. Your active participation is the key to your learning the material and to the success of the course—both for you as an individual and for the class as a whole.

Readings: A note on the readings: the amount of reading fluctuates from week to week. Sometimes you are asked to read well over 100 pages of a single source. Try to keep your eye on the syllabus so that you can tell when a week of heavier

reading is coming, and plan ahead. The following books are available at the University Book Store, as well as on reserve at the library:

John Soluri, *Banana Cultures: Agriculture, Consumption, and Environmental Change in Honduras and the United States* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006)

Ramachandra Guha, *Environmentalism: A Global History* (New York: Longman, 2000)

Michael Lewis, *Inventing Global Ecology: Tracking the Biodiversity Ideal in India, 1947-1997* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2003)

Electronic Reserve Readings—in an effort to save students the cost of a reading packet, a variety of course materials have been placed on the Polk Library’s Electronic-Reserve. These are REQUIRED readings, and students are encouraged to print them out and bring them to class for each day’s discussion.

Course Policies and Conduct: All of us must do our best to be intellectually honest and tolerant of personal differences. Environmental topics are often controversial, and we all have our own beliefs. I hope that everyone will feel safe to express an idea, even if that idea is not a popular one. There are some university guidelines for behavior that I expect all of us follow. One of these has to do with plagiarism, or taking credit for the work of others. This is a serious offense and will be treated according to university guidelines; failure of the course is a potential outcome of academic dishonesty. This doesn’t mean you shouldn’t talk with other students about what you are thinking or writing; but when you write something on a paper, it must be in your own words, not copied from someone else. We will discuss what plagiarism means more fully during the semester. If you have any questions about academic honesty, and what might or might not be considered plagiarism, please ask, rather than taking a risk with grave consequences.

Grading Breakdown and Course Requirements: Students will be evaluated on the following components, each of which will be discussed in more detail during class:

- Attendance and participation: 20%
- Reading responses, quizzes, and in-class assignments: 5%
- Commodity paper & presentation: 5%
- First paper, 5-6 pages: 20%
- Second paper, 5-6 pages: 20%
- Final paper, 10-12 pages: 25%
- Final paper presentation: 5%

Grading Scale

A 93-100	B- 80-82	D+ 67-69
A- 90-92	C+ 77-79	D 63-66
B+ 87-89	C 73-76	D- 60-62
B 83-86	C- 70-72	F 59 and below

Course Calendar

Wk 1: Thursday, September 6 – Introduction & Course Themes

Wk 2: Tuesday, September 11 – Introduction to Global Environmental History

Reading: Richard C. Foltz, “Does Nature have Historical Agency?” ER

William Cronon, “Kennebec Journey,” ER

John R. McNeill, “Environmental History Suggests Paths to Sustainability,” ER

Thursday, September 13 – Environmental Determinism

Reading: Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, & Steel*, excerpts, ER; read through p. 321 only, not pp. 376-401

J.R. McNeill, “The World According to Jared Diamond,” ER

W.H. McNeill, “History Upside Down,” ER

Wk 3: Tuesday, September 18 – Ecological Imperialism

Reading: Alfred Crosby, “Ecological Imperialism” and “New Zealand,” ER

Reading response (1-2 typed pages): Who offers a more persuasive interpretation of history, Crosby or Diamond? Why? What are the differences between their interpretations?

Thursday, September 20 – Imperial Colonialism & Environmental Change

Reading: David Lowenthal, “Empires and Ecologies,” ER
Timothy C. Weiskel, “Toward an Archaeology of Colonialism,” ER
Primary source readings, as discussed in class

Wk 4: Tuesday, September 25 – Causation and Environmental History

Reading: J.R. McNeill, “Yellow Jack and Geopolitics,” ER
Nancy Jacobs, “The Colonial Ecological Revolution in South Africa,” ER

Thursday, September 27 – Empire, Economy & Ecology 1

Reading: Warren Dean, *With Broadax and Firebrand*, ER
Elinor G. K. Melville, “Global Developments in Latin American Environments,” ER

Tentative paper topic & 5 item bibliography due

Wk 5: Tuesday, October 2 – Empire, Economy & Ecology 2

Reading: Richard C. Tucker, “Depletion of India’s Forests under Colonialism,” ER
James C. McCann, *Maize and Grace*, ER

Thursday, October 4 – Empire, Ecology & Inequality

Reading: Nancy Jacobs, *Environment, Power, Injustice*, ER

Reading Response: What is the relationship between environmental change and social structure?

Wk 6: Tuesday, October 9 – Empire & Conservation

Reading: C. Ford, “Reforestation, Landscape Conservation, and the Anxieties of Empire,” ER
M. Musemwa, “Contestation over Resources,” ER

Thursday, October 11 – The Power of Ideas: Capitalism & High Modernism

Reading: James Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, ER
Kate Brown, “Gridded Lives: Why Kazakhstan and Montana are Nearly the Same Place,” ER

Wk 7: Tuesday, October 16 – **First Paper Due**, electronic copy only in D2L dropbox

No Reading

Thursday, October 18 – Agriculture & the Green Revolution

Reading: Vandana Shiva, *The Violence of the Green Revolution*, ER
Thomas Perkins, *Geopolitics & the Green Revolution*, ER

Wk 8: Tuesday, October 23 – Exporting Science & Nature 1

Reading: Lewis, *Inventing Global Ecology*, 1-53

Final Paper Topic (1 paragraph) and 5-item annotated bibliography due

Thursday, October 25 – Exporting Science & Nature 2

Reading: Lewis, *Inventing Global Ecology*, 54-108

Wk 9: Tuesday, October 30 – Exporting Science & Nature 3

Reading: Lewis, *Inventing Global Ecology*, 109-158

Thursday, November 1 – Exporting Science & Nature 4

Reading: Lewis, *Inventing Global Ecology*, 159-239 (skim ch.7)

Wk 10: Tuesday, November 6 – Consumerism & Global Trade 1

Reading: Soluri, *Banana Cultures*, 1-74

10-item annotated bibliography due in class

Thursday, November 8 – Consumerism & Global Trade 2

Reading: Soluri, *Banana Cultures*, 75-127

Commodity paper (1-2 pages) & presentations

Wk 11: Tuesday, November 13 – Consumerism & Global Trade 3

Reading: Soluri, *Banana Cultures*, 128-192

Commodity paper (1-2 pages) & presentations

Thursday, November 15 – Consumerism & Global Trade 4

Reading: Soluri, *Banana Cultures*, 193-245

Final paper outline due

Wk 12: Tuesday, November 20 – Environmentalism 1

Reading: Guha, *Environmentalism: A Global History*, 1-62

Thursday, November 22 – **No Class**

Wk 13: Tuesday, November 27 – Environmentalism 2

Reading: Guha, *Environmentalism: A Global History*, 63-97

Thursday, November 29 – Environmentalism 3

Reading: Guha, *Environmentalism: A Global History*, 98-145

Wk 14: Tuesday, December 4 – Student Presentations

Second Paper Due

Thursday, December 6 – Student Presentations

Wk 15: Tuesday, December 11 – Student Presentations

Thursday, December 13 – Student Presentations

Final papers due—electronic copies only, in D2L dropbox