

HIST4725 – Environmental History of the Modern World University of Georgia, Fall 2009

Call # 92-279
TTh 3:30-4:45 pm
323 LeConte Hall

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The course syllabus is a general plan for the course, not a contract. Deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary

Course Description: Welcome to HIST4725: Environmental History of the Modern World. When you signed up for this course, you might have wondered to yourself: what exactly **is** environmental history? In a nutshell, **environmental history is the study of the interaction between humans and nonhuman nature over time.** Ecologists tell us that all things in nature are linked together. Inspired by this idea, environmental historians argue that human history is about more than just “human things” like politics or war or racial conflicts. History has also been shaped by the intimate relationship between the human and nonhuman worlds. Plants, animals, microorganisms, climate, geography, and so on have all influenced human culture. People have returned the favor by affecting nature as well. Meanwhile, humans have also thought, spoken, and written about the natural world, and their relationship to it, in philosophy, religion, art, science and politics, to name only the major venues.

You might also be wondering what “world history” is. World history, like environmental history, concerns itself with connections – in this case, the many links between different peoples, cultures, nations, and geographical regions across the globe, and they way those links have changes over time. Scholars of world history know that history is not something that can be fully contained within simple vessels such as nations or regions: “Japan” or “Western Europe” or “Africa.” History is a global phenomenon as much as it is a local one, and taking a global view is a vital part of historical understanding.

Inspired by the growing presence of both environmental and world history, this class is an intense, upper-division introduction to environmental history as it has occurred in a global context, across cultures, nations, geography and time. It is not meant to be an exhaustive class in which you will be taught everything you will ever need to know about environmental history around the world. Instead, this class is intended to help you to explore some basic issues and themes. Over the next semester we will discuss topics as diverse as the impact of smallpox and wild lettuce on indigenous cultures in North and South America, the impact of colonialism on the global environment, and the rise of the worldwide environmental movement. We will range across the globe from East Asia to Western Europe, from North America to Africa, and across time from the Ice Age to the present day. In the process we will also touch on a wide spectrum of historical approaches: social history, labor history, political and policy history, women’s history, and more – not to mention biology, ecology, anthropology, and a number of other interdisciplinary influences. We’ll approach them through a mixture of readings, lectures, writings and discussion.

Required Readings: The following books are available at the UGA Bookstore, and you should also be able to find them cheaply and easily on the Web. **Used books are perfectly acceptable – indeed,**

I encourage them! Save money and paper! The coursepack may be found at Bel-Jean's on Broad Street. Finally, several of our readings may be found for free on the Internet – three cheers for modern technology!

J. Donald Hughes, *An Environmental History of the World*
Alfred Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism*
Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs and Steel*
William Cronon, *Changes in the Land*
Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*
Coursepack from Bel-Jean [referred to as CP below]

Grade Breakdown: The grade structure for the class will be as follows:

- * **Readings Journals** – 60 percent (4 entries @ 15 percent each)
- * **Term paper** – 30 percent
- * **Attendance** – 5 percent
- * **Discussion Participation** – 5 percent

Class Structure: This semester we meet two days a week – Tuesdays and Thursdays – for 1 hour and 15 minutes at a time. Generally, Tuesdays will be “lecture” days, and Thursdays will be part lecture and part discussion – after I lecture, we will change gears and talk about the week’s readings for 30-45 minutes. Meanwhile, interspersed with lectures will be a number of films, which may or may not take up an entire class period.

GENERAL COURSE REQUIREMENTS: I expect all students to attend **all** classes, to take good notes, to read the assigned readings in their entirety, to turn in all written assignments when they are due, to arrive promptly for tests, etc.

Attendance and excused absences: Your attendance grade will be calculated by dividing the number of classes you attended by the total number of classes. Excused absences **will rarely be given**, and when they are, it will be on a case-by-case basis only. Specific excuses will **require considerable written evidence** to support them, i.e. doctors’ notes, University permission letters, obituaries, and the like. I cannot excuse absences for work, vacation plans, non-varsity sports, over-sleeping, and so on.

Participation in Discussions: It is important that you participate enthusiastically and regularly in class discussions. **Five percent – half a letter-grade - of your class grade depends on your active engagement in classroom conversations – and I will be keeping track. It will be hard to get an A or A-minus without talking regularly!** If you’re shy or petrified of speaking in public, now is the time to conquer your fears. If you don’t speak at all, or only rarely, you will likely receive a ZERO as a discussion grade, or a best a very low score.

Reading Load: the reading load ****will be heavy**** and, as mentioned above, you are expected to read all assigned readings, and come to class **prepared to discuss them on Thursdays**. Look ahead in the syllabus and **plan ahead** – know how much you have to read and when you have to be done, and adjust accordingly.

Readings Analysis and Research Paper: We will have four “readings analysis” papers and a research paper due near the end of the semester.

Readings Analysis: Over the semester you'll write four (4) "readings analysis" papers of approximately five (5) pages, in which you will think about, critique, analyze, and comment **in detail** on the readings contained in a two-to-three-week "bloc" prior to the due date. There are six total "blocs" in the class, ending on September 3, September 24, October 8, October 22, November 5, and November 19, respectively. You will turn in an analysis paper on any FOUR (4) of those dates – which four dates you choose will be up to you. Extensive footnotes are not necessary, although if you make reference to or quote from material from either inside or outside sources I would appreciate an in-text citation. **Thoughtful commentary, nuanced analysis and critique and quality writing** are expected – these analyses form the major part of your grade, so write accordingly! I will provide more information about the analysis papers shortly after the semester begins.

Research paper: You'll read about and discuss many topics in global environmental history in this class, and you will likely discover some place, person or group of people, or issue that particularly interests you. For the paper you will write a 6-8 page environmental history of your particular interest. The paper doesn't have to be the "final word" on your topic, but it should address the major writings (both current and past) about it and any complex issues and controversies surrounding it. Careful selection of your topic will be necessary – make sure you are neither too narrow nor too broad in your view. In the near future I will provide more detailed information about the paper. It will be due on **December 3rd, 2009**.

****Late Papers:** Late papers will be lowered in grade by **10 percent for every day late, beginning immediately after the class period in which they are due**, i.e. a paper turned in between one minute and one day late will be docked 10 percent, a paper turned in the 24-48 hours late will be docked 20 percent, and so on.

A few words on **GRADES AND GRADING STANDARDS:** My grading standards are simple. With modern computers, spell-check, etc, there is little excuse for papers filled with grammatical errors or ones that fail to meet the minimum required length. A typical "C" paper, exam, or essay has few or none of these kinds of weaknesses. On the other hand, while it may be technically solid, typical "C" work does not show much distinction in clarity of argument, creativity, or originality of insight. It may be repetitive, or obvious, or it may simply have no real thesis or "point" to it. It may not support its arguments sufficiently. Severe problems along these lines will result in grades of "D" or "F." On the other hand, a "B" paper or essay shows a good grasp of reading and lecture material, some creativity and "fresh thinking," and uses good evidence and examples. It is well organized, too. *An "A" paper or essay demonstrates deep, penetrating insight and unusually good verbal facility. It is the work of someone who has thought long and hard about the issues, grappled with them, pulled together diverse strands of evidence into a convincing argument, and in general has achieved an impressive level of coherence, clarity, and critical thinking.*

A few words on **MY 24-HOUR WAITING PERIOD, THE TWO-WEEK WINDOW, POINT GRUBBING, CHEATING, and PLAGIARISM:** Students sometimes come up to me with fire in their eyes after I have handed back their exams, angry or upset with their grade and anxious to change immediately. I am a slow and serious grader, and I have definite reasons for the grades I give. Therefore, I have a **24-hour "waiting period"** after handing back graded items, during which I will not entertain questions about grades, giving you the opportunity to think about my comments and corrections. Once that 24-hour period is up, I encourage questions, though you must make an appointment with me to discuss your questions in my office (I don't discuss them in public, for obvious reasons). I encourage you to have precise questions and reasons for requesting any grade changes. Please be forewarned, however, **that I have little patience for "point grubbing" of any kind**, i.e. whining, pleading, groveling, cajoling, arguing, bullying, shouting, or otherwise pressuring

me in an attempt to get a better grade. Finally, **I will no longer reconsider the grade** on any test, paper, journal, or other assignment which has been “handed back” **for more than two weeks.**

In this class we will adhere to UGA’s University Honor Code and Academic Honesty Policy. Plagiarism – **the attempt to pass off another’s written work, from any source, as your own, without adequate reference or citation** — is strictly forbidden, as are cheating on tests, exams, quizzes, etc.****If I discover that someone has committed an act of cheating or plagiarism, I WILL initiate procedures to charge him or her with academic misconduct, and might request punishment which includes failure in the course and/or a permanent transcript notation. I hate to sound vindictive, but these are serious matters and I will not tolerate them. If you have any questions, see me.*

****All academic work must meet the standards contained in "A Culture of Honesty" [available at http://www.uga.edu/ovpi/honesty/culture_honesty.htm.] Each student is responsible to inform themselves about those standards before performing any academic work.****

Okay, everything clear as mud? Here we go...

WEEK ONE – August 18-20, 2009

What is Environmental History? Rethinking History in the Age of Ecology

- **Readings:** Donald Worster, “Doing Environmental History” and “The Vulnerable Earth: Toward a Planetary History,” in *The Ends of the Earth: Perspectives on Modern Environmental History* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 289-308, 3-20 [CP]
Richard C. Foltz, “Does Nature Have Historical Agency? World History, Environmental History, and How Historians Can Save the Planet,” *The History Teacher* 37 (November 2003): 9-28. *This article is available on-line at <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ht/37.1/foltz.html>*
J. Donald Hughes, *An Environmental History of the World: Humankind’s Changing Role in the Community of Life* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 1-11

WEEK TWO – August 25-27, 2009

In the Beginning: Humans and the Environment in the Pre-Modern Era

- **Readings:** Hughes, *Environmental History of the World*, pp. 12-29.
William Denevan, “The Pristine Myth: The Landscape of the Americas in 1492,” in J. Baird Callicott and Michael P. Nelson, eds., *The Great New Wilderness Debate* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), pp. 414-442. *This article is available on-line at <http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~alcoze/for398/class/pristinemyth.html>*
I.G. Simmons, “The Early Cultural Landscapes of England,” in Char Miller and Hal Rothman, eds., *Out of the Woods: Essays in Environmental History* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997), pp. 53-63 [CP].

WEEK THREE – September 1-3, 2009

Humans and Nature, Together and Apart: Civilizations, Religions, Ideas of Nature, and the Birth of Ecological Anthropocentrism

- **Readings:** Hughes, *Environmental History of the World*, pp. 30-82.
Lynn White, Jr. "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," *Science* 155 (1967): 1203-1207. *This article is available on-line at <http://www.zbi.ee/~kalevi/white.htm>.*
Richard C. Foltz, "Is There an Islamic Environmentalism?" *Environmental Ethics* 22 (Spring 2000): 63-72 [CP]

READINGS ANALYSIS due September 3rd

WEEK FOUR – September 8-10, 2009

The Good Old Days?: Environmental Problems on the Eve of Modernity

- **Readings:** Hughes, *Environmental History of the World*, pp. 83-107
Brian Fagan, *The Great Warming: Climate Change and the Rise and Fall of Civilizations* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2008), pp. 1-86, 213-27 [CP]
_____, *The Little Ice Age: How Climate Made History 1300-1850* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), pp. 23-59 [CP]

WEEK FIVE – September 15-17, 2009

Contacts: Exploration, Trade, Travel and the First Great Ecological Upheavals of the Global Age

- **Readings:** Hughes, *Environmental History of the World*, pp. 108-140
Alfred Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900* (Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 1-7, 145-268

WEEK SIX – September 22-24, 2009

Striding the Planet like a Colossus: New Explanations for Europe's Global Influence

- **Readings:** Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), 13-32, 53-66, 131-75, 195-264

READINGS ANALYSIS due September 24th

WEEK SEVEN – September 29-October 1, 2009

Colonization, Part I: Nature and the European Worldview

- **Readings:** William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Colonists, Indians, and the Ecology of New England*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), pp. 3-81
John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, chapter 5, "Of Property," available at <http://www.constitution.org/jl/2ndtr05.htm>

WEEK EIGHT – October 6-8, 2009

The Big Hunt: Furs, Fish, Fowl and Turning Nature "to a Mart"

- **Readings:** Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, 82-170

READINGS ANALYSIS due October 8th

WEEK NINE – October 13-15, 2009

Sugar and Coffee, Blood, Sweat and Tears: Plantation Agriculture, Consumerism and Capitalism

- **Readings:** Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), entire

WEEK TEN – October 20-22, 2009

The Greening of the Globe: The First Stirrings of “Environmentalism”

- **Readings:** Hughes, *Environmental History of the World*, pp. 141-173

READINGS ANALYSIS due October 22nd

WEEK ELEVEN – October 27-29, 2009

Eating Bananas and Drinking Oil: Intensifying Global Resource Extraction in the Twentieth Century

- **Readings:** Richard Tucker, *Insatiable Appetite: The United States and the Ecological Degradation Of the Tropical World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000) pp. 1-11, 226-82 [CP]

WEEK TWELVE – November 3-5, 2009

Our Fragile Modern Planet: Flu Bugs and Communists

- **Readings:** Hughes, *Environmental History of the World*, pp. 174-205
Ray Dominick, “Capitalism, Communism, and Environmental Protection: Lessons From The German Experience,” *Environmental History* 3 (July 1998): 311-32 [CP]

READINGS ANALYSIS due November 5th

WEEK THIRTEEN – November 10-12, 2009

Our Fragile Planet, Part II: The Rise of the Modern Environmentalism

- **Readings:** Rachel Carson, selections from *Silent Spring* (New York: Houghton-Mifflin, 1962) [CP]

WEEK FOURTEEN – November 17-19, 2009

Those Who Refuse to Learn From the Past...: the Green Revolution, Globalization, and the Persistence of Environmental Injustice

- **Readings:** selections from Angus Wright, *The Death of Ramon Gonzalez: The Modern Agricultural Dilemma* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), pp xi-86, 244-85 [CP]

READING ANALYSIS due November 19th

*****Thanksgiving Break – November 23-27, 2009*****

WEEK FIFTEEN – December 1-3, 2009

The Coming Apocalypse? The Global Environment and the Global Future

- **Readings:** No readings – work on your paper!

*******PAPER DUE IN CLASS, December 3rd*******