

## **HSSC 565: Environmental History**

Graduate Seminar, Spring 2014

Wed. 2-5pm

Classroom: Cohen 337

Instructor: Etienne Benson, ebenson@sas.upenn.edu

Office: Cohen 325

### **Overview**

This course is a survey of recent research in environmental history, the subfield of history that focuses on relationships between humans and the nonhuman world, including the history of ideas about those relationships. Although the readings cover a range of places, themes, and time periods, the course is not structured as a chronological or thematic survey. Instead it is designed to explore the questions and methods used by environmental historians working today.

More specifically, the readings will focus on (1) long-format arguments, i.e., books, although most weeks also include an article that offers background or an alternative perspective to the main reading; (2) recent works, which means that some classics in the field will be left for independent reading (if you haven't read Cronon's *Changes in the Land*, you should); (3) the historical period from roughly the seventeenth century to the present; (4) a mix of U.S.-oriented and non-U.S.-oriented scholarship. Through these works we will try to get a sense of the abiding questions of the field and the ways they are being answered today.

### **Assignments**

Each week one participant will be responsible for introducing the week's readings and suggesting key questions for discussion. Depending on our numbers, participants may be responsible for presenting readings for more than one week. The person(s) responsible may find it helpful to read published reviews, if available, to get a sense of the reactions of readers from various disciplines.

All participants are responsible for writing short (200-400 word) responses to the readings, which are due each week 24 hours before the beginning of class (i.e., Tuesday at 2:00 p.m.). These should be posted to the weekly discussion threads on the Canvas site. Please peruse all of the posted contributions before each week's meeting.

The first of two longer written assignments is a book review of about 1000 words of a single book of your choice from among the readings, due on March 7. Books from later in the semester are fair game. Your review should be written as if for publication in a specific scholarly journal of your choice, such as (but not limited to) *Environmental History* or the *American Historical Review*.

The second longer assignment is a historiographical paper of 6000-7000 words on a topic of your choice within the scope of the course; the environmental impact of colonialism, the origins of environmentalism, the use of natural science by

historians, environmental histories of health, etc. You are also welcome to propose a paper based on original research with primary sources, but it must have a significant historiographical component. A proposal describing the subject and tentative argument (400-500 words) and bibliography (>15 items) are due on April 4. This paper itself is due on May 9.

### **Grading Guide**

10% Discussion Introduction(s)  
20% Weekly Responses  
20% Book Review  
10% Paper Proposal/Bibliography  
40% Paper

### **Required Readings**

See schedule below. PDFs of articles and excerpts will be posted at Canvas→Files. Books will be on reserve at Van Pelt. In a few cases, indicated below, readings are accessible as e-books via the Penn Libraries catalog (<http://franklin.library.upenn.edu/>).

### **Schedule of Readings**

#### **Jan. 22: Introduction**

#### **Jan. 29: Narratives of Progress, Decline, and Recovery**

William Cronon, "A Place for Stories"

Diana Davis, *Resurrecting the Granary of Rome: Environmental History and French Colonial Expansion in North Africa*

#### **Feb. 5: Ecological Revolutions**

Carolyn Merchant, *Ecological Revolutions*, pp. 1-16

Brian Donahue, *The Great Meadow: Farmers and the Land in Colonial Concord*

#### **Feb. 12: Enlightenment Environmentalism**

Richard Grove, "The Island and the History of Environmentalism: The Case of St. Vincent"

Fredrik Albritton Jonsson, *Enlightenment's Frontier: The Scottish Highlands and the Origins of Environmentalism*

#### **Feb. 19: The Conquest of Nature**

Joachim Radkau, "Germany as a Focus of European 'Particularities' in Environmental History," 2005

David Blackbourn, *The Conquest of Nature: Water, Landscape, and the Making of Modern Germany*

#### **Feb. 26: The Nature of Industrialization**

Sara Pritchard and Thomas Zeller, "The Nature of Industrialization"

Daniel Schneider, *Hybrid Nature: Sewage Treatment and the Contradictions of the Industrial Ecosystem*

**Mar. 5: The Nature of Work**

Richard White, "Are You an Environmentalist, or Do You Work for a Living?"

Thomas Andrews, *Killing for Coal: America's Deadliest Labor War*

March 7: Book Review due

— Spring Break —

**Mar. 19: Ecologies of Disease**

Gregg Mitman, Michelle Murphy, and Christopher Sellers, "A Cloud over History"

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

**Mar. 26: Nature and Nation**

James Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, pp. 1-52

David Biggs, *Quagmire: Nation-Building and Nature in the Mekong Delta*

**Apr. 2: Consumption/Production**

Donald Worster, "Transformations of the Earth: Toward an Agroecological Perspective in History," 1990

John Soluri, *Banana Cultures: Agriculture, Consumption, and Environmental Change in Honduras and the United States* (e-book)

April 4: Proposal/Bibliography due

**Apr. 9: Urban Environments**

Martin Melosi, "The Place of the City in Environmental History"

Dawn Biehler, *Pests in the City: Flies, Bedbugs, Cockroaches, and Rats*

**Apr. 16: No class – individual meetings to discuss paper proposals**

**Apr. 23: Modern Environmentalism**

Samuel P. Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence*, pp. ix-xv, 1-70

Christopher Sellers, *Crabgrass Crucible: Suburban Nature and the Rise of Environmentalism in Twentieth-Century America*

**Apr. 30: Climates of Disaster**

Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History"

Mark Carey, *In the Shadow of Melting Glaciers: Climate Change and Andean Society*

May 9: Historiographical Paper due

## **Background Readings**

In addition to the required readings, the following historiographical articles and collections are recommended for getting a sense of the development of environmental history as a field. They are available for download on the course Canvas site.

- Richard White, "American Environmental History: The Development of a New Historical Field," *Pacific Historical Review*, 1985; "Afterword: Environmental History: Watching a Historical Field Mature," *Pacific Historical Review*, 2001; "From Wilderness to Hybrid Landscapes: The Cultural Turn in Environmental History," *The Historian*, 2004
- Donald Worster, "Transformations of the Earth," *Journal of American History*, 1990, and responses; "The Two Cultures Revisited: Environmental History and the Environmental Sciences," *Environment and History*, 1996
- Mart Stewart, "Environmental History: Profile of a Developing Field" (1998); "If John Muir Had Been an Agrarian: American Environmental History West and South" (2005)
- J.R. McNeill, "Observations on the Nature and Culture of Environmental History" (2003); "The State of the Field of Environmental History" (2010)
- Regional survey articles in 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Issue of *Environment and History* (2004, Vol. 10, no. 4)
- Special issue of *Environmental History*, "What's Next for Environmental History?" (2005, Vol. 10, no. 1)
- J. Donald Hughes, "Global Dimensions of Environmental History," *Pacific Historical Review*, 2001
- Richard Grove and Vinita Damodaran, "Imperialism, Intellectual Networks, and Environmental Change: Origins and Evolution of Global Environmental History, 1676-2000" (2006, in two parts)
- Sverker Sörlin and Paul Warde, "The Problem of the Problem of Environmental History: A Re-reading of the Field" (2007)
- Paul Sutter, "What Can U.S. Environmental Historians Learn from Non-U.S. Environmental Historiography?" (2003); "The World with Us: The State of American Environmental History" (2013), and accompanying "State of the Field" articles in the *Journal of American History*
- "AHR Conversation: Environmental Historians and Environmental Crisis," *American Historical Review*, 2008