HIST 180: Global Environmental History
Fall 2015

Instructor: Willis Okech Oyugi
Class Times: MWF 11:00-11:50AM; King 343
Office: Rice Hall 303
Office Hours: Mon: 1-2 PM; Wed/Fri: 12-1 PM; & by appointment
Instructor’s email: wokechoy@oberlin.edu

Course Description

This course introduces students, in general terms, to one of the fundamental aspects in the history of humanity from earliest times to the present—the continual interactions between humans and their natural environment. We will use historical inquiry to understand how human agencies have shaped the environment and how the environment has shaped human history and culture. We focus on historical interpretations of regional and global environmental issues through close analysis of primary and secondary sources that include cultural artefacts, philosophical underpinnings, literary texts, as well as nature’s role to these environmental developments.

Our discussion will be guided by the fundamental question: Have humans ever coexisted in “balance” with nature? We will first examine how natural factors affected early human activities. Students will then interrogate the concept of ‘primal harmony’ as reflected among early hunter and gatherer societies. Human-environmental interactions will also be explored through topics such as the Rise and Collapse of Early Civilizations (including the evolution of various agricultural and technological innovations), the Columbian Exchange, the Industrial Revolution, Imperialism/Colonialism, Climate Change, Conservationism, and Environmentalism of the Poor.

The course will be in a lecture-discussion format. We will dedicate our Friday class meetings to small group discussions.

Course Goals

By the end of the semester students will be able to:
1. Analyze, speak, and write about the nature and history of human-environmental interactions;
2. Formulate and support plausible historical interpretations of regional and global environmental issues;
3. Question popular and scholarly narratives of environmental determinism, environmental ideologies, and environmental degradation.
Writing Assignments & Other Information

As the deadlines for the primary source and term paper assignments approach, I will give you more detailed information about my expectations. Please keep the following in mind:

- I am happy to discuss your assignments with you as you prepare them, the earlier the better. Email or come see me during office hours to talk about paper outlines, thesis paragraphs, or drafts (sent at least 72 hours before the deadline).
- Late papers will be penalized 1/3 of a letter grade per day and will only be accepted up to one week after the due date. With the exception of the final term paper, I reserve the right to allow extensions on a case by case basis.
- You should complete the weekly readings as scheduled prior to attending lecture. This preparation will facilitate your ability to follow lectures and participate in class discussions.
- Because participation is a significant part of your grade, and since the lectures complement the readings, attendance is mandatory and will be registered.
- I encourage you to take advantage of the writing resources Oberlin offers to you. The writing center located at Mudd Library offers individual assistance at any stage in the writing process.
- You must submit a hard copy of your paper in class. E-mail submissions will only be accepted under certain conditions. The paper must be typed in a 12-point font (Times New Roman), double-spaced, and must be cited appropriately using footnotes following the Chicago Manual of Style (I will give you more information in class).
- Honor Code: Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated. I presume your familiarity with the college’s policies. Consequences can be dire and range from a failing grade on the assignment to expulsion. For more information on academic conduct familiarize yourself with the Student Honor Code available at: http://www.oberlin.edu/students/links-life/rules-regs.html. Accordingly, the College requires that students sign the honor code for all assignments that reads: “I affirm that I have adhered to the Honor Code in this assignment.”
- Cell phones, laptops, iPads and other technological distractions are not welcome in class.
- Appropriate accommodation will always be granted to students with documented disabilities or those who feel they may have physical, psychiatric or learning disabilities. Please let me know early in the semester so that your learning disabilities may be appropriately met. Any questions about the necessary process of documenting disabilities should be addressed to Jane Boomer, Coordinator of Services for Students with Disabilities (Peters Hall).
- It is disruptive to your peers to arrive late to class or leave early. Please be unobtrusive if you really must do so.

Required Texts/Readings/Films*

Other course readings are available on Blackboard (BB) unless otherwise indicated. If for any reason you cannot access any of the reading texts/materials please contact me.

The following movies/documentaries will be shown in class:
- Lost Rivers (2012)
- Mekong in Tibet and China (1996)
- A Fierce Green Fire: The Battle For a Living Planet (2012)

Course Requirements:
- Regular attendance at lectures
- Completion of assigned readings
- One Mid-Term Exam
- One Final Exam
- Two Term Papers

Please note that all work must be completed in order to pass this course.

Evaluation/ Grading:
- Attendance and engagement in class discussions 25%
- Weekly analytical summaries (due Friday in class) 5%
- Mid-Term Exam 15%
- Primary source assignment (2-3 pages) 15%
- Final Exam 20%
- Second Term Paper (5-7 pages) 20%

Exams: The midterm and final examinations will consist of a map quiz, identifications and short essay questions and will be based on material from the course lectures, readings, and discussions. Note that the final will not be cumulative.

Grading will be as follows: A+100-97; A 96-93; A- 92-90; B+ 89-87; B 86-83; B- 82-80; C+ 79-77; C 76-73; C- 72-70; D 65-69, F below 65.

NB: I would prefer to answer questions concerning grades during office hours or by appointment.

NO ONE WILL BE ALLOWED TO TAKE AN EARLY EXAM!!! PLEASE PLAN YOUR TRAVELS ACCORDINGLY.

LECTURE SCHEDULE*¹

¹ Note: Course readings may be subject to change at the Instructor’s discretion. Please check with Blackboard for up-to-date information.
**Week 1: Introductions**

8/31
- Introduction to the Course

9/2 & 9/4
- J.R. McNeil, “Global Environmental History: The First 150,000 Years,” in *A Companion to Global Environmental History*, pp. 4-17. (ER)

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**Week 2: Prehistory to circa 8500 BCE**

9/7
- **No Class (Labor Day)**

9/9
- Shepard Krech III, “Pleistocene Extinctions,” *The Ecological Indian*, pp. 29-43;

9/11
- “Australian Aborigines and Fire”

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**Week 3: c. 8500-2500 BCE: Hunting, Gathering, Fishing, and Early Agriculture**

9/14

9/16

9/18
• “Journey to the Forest of Cedar” in *Epic of Gilgamesh* (BB)

**Week 4: 5000 BCE-500 CE: City States, Empires, & Environments**

9/21


9/23


9/25

- “Trajan’s Column”

**Week 5: The Middle Ages: Migrations, Trade, & the Environment 500-1500CE**

9/28

- J Donald Hughes, “The Middle Ages,” in *An Environmental History of the World*, pp. 85-111. (BB)

9/30


10/2

- **Library Session (Primary Document Search)**

**Week 6: Disease in Environmental History**

10/5


10/7

• Mid-Term Exam in class

Week 7: The Columbian Exchange: Animal, Plant, & Disease transfers
10/12

10/14
• Alfred W. Crosby, “Ecological Imperialism: The Overseas Migration of Western Europeans as a Biological Phenomenon,” in The Ends of the Earth, pp. 103-117.
• Lost Gods of Easter Island (2000)

10/16
• Lost Gods of Easter Island (Discussion)
• Term Paper Proposals 1-2 pp due in class.

Week 8: (Fall Recess, No Classes)

Week 9: The Industrial Revolution, Capitalism, and Ecological Load Displacement
10/26

10/28

10/30
• Primary source paper due in class.

Week 10: Global Environmentalism: The First Wave
11/2; 11/4; 11/6
• George Perkins Marsh, The Earth as Modified by Human Action (1877), [Select readings]
• John Clare, The Village Minstrel and other Poems, pp. 31-38.
• Mahatma Gandhi, “A Humble Village of Birbhum” (1937)

**Week 11: Global Environmentalism: The American Dust Bowl**
11/9; 11/11

11/13

**Week 12: Global Environmentalism: Environmentalism of the Poor**
11/16
• Joan Martinez-Alier, “The Environmentalism of the Poor: Its Origins and Spread,” in *A Companion to Global Environmental History*, pp. 513-529. (ER)
• Rob Nixon, “Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor,” in *Slow Violence and Environmentalism of the Poor* pp. 128-149. (BB)

11/20
• *A Fierce Green Fire*: “Chipka Movement,” & “Chico Mendes and the Rubber Tappers Union.”
• Ide Corley et.al., Ken Sarowiwa, *Silence would be Treason: Last Writings of Ken Saro-Wiwa* (Select Readings). (BB)

Suggested Reading
• Joni Adamson, “Throwing Rocks at the Sun: Environmental Racism Roundtable.” (BB)

**Week 13: Term Paper Reviews/Meeting**
11/23
• *Mekong in Tibet and China* (Film)

11/25
• Term paper meetings/writing

11/27
• Term paper meetings/writing
Week 14: Urbanization, Pollution, and Climate Change  

11/30

- Sam White, “Climate Change in Global Environmental History,” *A Companion to Global Environmental History*, pp. 394-410. (ER)

12/2

- Simone Pulver, “A Climate Leader: The Politics and Practice of Climate Governance in Mexico,” in Held et. al, *Climate Governance in a Developing World*. (BB)

Week 15: Rivers and Cities  

12/7

- *Lost Rivers* (Film)
- **Term Paper (5-7 pages) due in class**

12/9 & 12/11


Week 16: Reading and Finals  

12/16

- **Final Exam: 9:00-11:00 AM (Room TBA)**