Hist 382 – Climate Change and Disaster in World History

Wed. 2:30-4:20PM
King 121

Prof. White
Office Hours: Mon, Th. 2-4PM
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Goals:
This course explores past climate changes and their impact upon history. Each week will examine a different case of natural climate events and their consequences, from ancient to modern times. Throughout this course, we will look at how climate can bring about disasters, why some societies suffer collapse, why others persevere, and above all what we can learn from historical examples as we face global warming in the years ahead. Throughout this course, students will learn about major climate systems and different tools for analyzing past climates and their effects. No background in climatology or other environmental sciences is required. However, students must be willing to try and work with technical articles on climate, ecology, and archaeology. Be prepared to look at some articles with a lot of funny numbers and squiggly lines: I promise they’ll make more and more sense each week.

Structure:
This will be a seminar class. I may give some brief lectures for historical background, but otherwise the class will be based on student discussion of the readings. I will hand out reading guides and discussion questions each week for the following week’s discussion.

Assignments:
1) Students should prepare brief written answers to any two of the questions on each week’s study guide. These answers do not have to be polished essays, but they should demonstrate that you have finished and understood the reading. During week 5, when I will be away at a conference, the class will watch a documentary on the Little Ice Age, and you will answer some questions about popularizing climatology and climate history for the following week’s meeting.

2) Students will each make one 15 minute presentation on a particular topic, preferably using notes and PowerPoint. I expect these presentations to be well-prepared, engaging, and concise.

3) Students will write a substantial research paper (~3000 words) that either (1) integrates climate and historical data to offer an original interpretation of some historical event; or (2) makes an original comparison of two or more climate-related disasters which draws substantial conclusions about how societies can or cannot adapt to climate changes; or (3) compares a contemporary case study of a country or region suffering the effects of global warming with a historical example of...
natural climate events and explains what we can or cannot learn from history. I will be glad to offer suggestions and help develop topics throughout the semester. Students must submit a prospectus for my approval by Friday, April 9.

Grades will be:
30% participation
20% presentation
50% essay (including preliminary outlines, drafts, etc.)

Course Policies:

Attendance: Students are expected to complete the assigned readings and participate in class discussion each week.

Honor Code: All course work is governed by Oberlin's Honor Code. If you have a question about how the Honor Code applies to a particular assignment, you should ask the professor in advance of the due date.

Turning in Assignments: Discussion questions must be brought to class, the presentation must be in class on the date scheduled, and the essay must be submitted by e-mail in an MS Word format by 8PM Friday, April 30. Late papers will be penalized 10 points each day, including weekends, no exceptions unless I have a note from your class dean explaining why you could not turn in your paper.

E-mail: I will answer short e-mails Mon-Fri 9-5. If you have any questions that require a long answer, please come by my office during office hours instead. I will be happy to give feedback on any draft or outline of your class work provided you send it in at least 48 hours before the deadline—the longer in advance, the better the feedback.

Grading: A(90-100), B(80-89), C(70-79), D(60-69), F (below 60), with plus and minus grades within two points of the next letter grade.

Reading:
This class has the following course books, available at the student book store:
- B. Fagan (2000). The Little Ice Age
- M. Davis (2001). Late Victorian Holocaus ts
- D. Worster (2004). Dust Bowl

All other articles and chapters not in the course books will be posted to ERes or Blackboard. All students need to complete the required readings. The "other readings" are for presenters and those
looking for more information on a topic, especially for those writing essays. This is a new field, so there are no basic reference works or textbooks yet. The closest thing is: Neville Brown (2001) *History and Climate Change: A Eurocentric Perspective*, which is available as an e-book through OBIS, or Wolfgang Behringer (2009) *Cultural History of Climate*, which will be on reserve at the main library soon.

**Week 1: Introduction (2/10)**

Abate (1994). "Climate and the Collapse of Civilization" (in-class handout)

**Week 2: The Ancient World (2/17)**

**Required Reading:**
- P. DeMenocal (2001). "Cultural Responses to Climate Change During the Late Holocene" *Science* 292:667-73

**Other Readings:**
- H. Weiss (2000). "Beyond the Younger Dryas" *Environmental Disasters and the Archaeology of Human Response*

**Week 3: The Maya and Anasazi (2/24)**

**Required Reading:**
- J. Diamond (2005). *Collapse* (chapters 4 and 5)
- L. Benson et al. (2007). "Anasazi (Pre-Columbian Native-American) Migrations During the Middle-12th and Late-13th Centuries – Were They Drought Induced?" *Climatic Change* 83: 187
Other Readings:
- Anasazi:
  - T. Jones et al. (1999). "Environmental Imperatives Reconsidered: Demographic Crises in Western North America during the Medieval Climatic Anomaly" Current Anthropology 40:137-70
  - C. Herweijer et al. (2007). "North American Droughts of the Last Millennium from a Gridded Network of Tree-Ring Data" Journal of Climate 20:1353-76

-Maya:
  - Richardson Gill (2000). The Great Maya Droughts
  - David Webster (2002). The Fall of the Ancient Maya

Week 4: Greenland and Iceland (3/3)

Required Reading:
- J. Diamond (2005). Collapse (chapters 6-8)

Other Readings:
- J. Byock (2001). Viking Age Iceland

Week 5: Popularizing Climate History: "The Big Chill" (3/10)

**Movie: The Little Ice Age

Required Reading:
- B. Fagan, The Little Ice Age (p.1-166)

Week 6: Climate and Social History: The LIA and the Early Modern World (3/17)

Required Reading:

**Other Readings:**
- W. Behringer et al., ed. (2005). *Kulturelle Konsequenzen der "Kleinen Eiszeit"* (some chapters in English, others in German)

**Week 7: Climate and Political History: The LIA and the "General Crisis" (3/24)**

**Required Reading:**
**Including:**

**Other Readings:**
- D. Zhang et al. (2006). "Climatic Change, Wars and Dynastic Cycles in China over the Last Millenium" *Climatic Change* 76:459-477

**Week 8: **Spring Break**

**Week 9: ENSO and "Late Victorian Holocausts" (4/7)**

**Required Readings:**
- M. Davis (2001). *Late Victorian Holocausts* (chapters 1-5, 9-10)

**Essay prospectus due Friday 4/9**

**Week 10: The Dust Bowl [4/14]**

*Required Readings:*
- D. Worster (2004). *The Dust Bowl* (chapters 1-5, 12, 14)
- M. Glantz (1994). *Drought Follows the Plow* (selections)

**Week 11: Climate History and the Future [4/21]**

*Required Reading:*

**Essay drafts due Thursday 4/22**

**Final essays due by 8PM on Friday, April 30.**