**NB: This syllabus is provisional. Always check the course Blackboard site for up-to-date information.

Hist 180: Global Environmental History

*Mon/Wed/Fri - 10:00-10:50*

*Room: AJLC 120*

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Rice 303  
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(440)775-8337

*Office Hours: Mon. and Wed. 3:30-5:00 or by appointment*

**Course Goals:**

In this course, we will look at how humans have shaped the environment and how the environment has shaped human history from earliest times to the present. Students are expected both to learn the basic facts and chronology of environmental history and also to explore major debates and theories about the interaction between people and the environment over time. This is a very large topic, so we will not cover every region in every period. Instead, we will proceed thematically and chronologically, covering the major issues in the present historiography. This will not be a course on environmentalism or environmental ideas, but on history and the environment itself.

*For students in environmental science:* Think of this class as a way to apply information and perspectives from the natural sciences to the study of history and to develop writing and critical thinking skills used in the humanities and social sciences.

*For students in the humanities and social sciences:* Think of this class as a way to acquire historical perspective on contemporary environmental issues, and to think environmentally about economic and social issues. Be prepared to learn (yes, that means memorize!) some basic facts and perspectives about environmental processes. However, don’t worry—this is not a science class and does not assume any prior knowledge.

**Format:**

The course will be in a lecture-discussion format. Most classes will begin with a broad introduction to a topic, followed by specific case studies and then the broader historical or theoretical questions they raise. Depending upon the topic, some weeks will involve more student discussion and participation than others.

**Course Policies:**

*Attendance:* Attendance will be taken each class. Students are expected to participate in class and complete the short discussion readings each week. Much of the material in the lectures may not be covered in the readings but could still be on the quizzes, and so students should obtain notes for any missed classes.
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 me in advance of the due date. Further information about the honor code will be posted along with instructions for particular assignments.

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 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 I have, the better the feedback.

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

Submitting Work: All written work must be submitted by e-mail. I will mark off 8 points every 24 hours late, weekends included, no exceptions unless you can bring in a note from your class dean explaining that you could not submit the assignment. If you know in advance that you will not be available to submit work on a given day, please contact me well ahead of the deadline.

Assignments:
Participation: Participation will be 20% of the final grade, based on students' attendance and class discussion. Students may also earn their participation grade by posting written discussions and current news and journal articles relevant to the class on the course Blackboard site.

Quizzes: There will be four in-class quizzes worth 10% of your grade each (40% total). At each quiz, you may bring in up to two single-sided pages of notes, but everything in this outline must be entirely of your own creation: Any reproductions from any handouts, web sites, books, or classmates will be a violation of the honor code. The outline may be hand-written or typed (minimum 10-pt font). Bear in mind that writing an outline is one of the best ways of reviewing material. However, it is probably not in your best interest to try to fit as much as possible onto the page, because you may not have the time to find it all during the quiz.

Essays: In each half of the semester, you will submit one essay of around 1500 words worth 20% of your grade (40% total). You will choose from a list of several topics for each essay (see below), each on a broad theme. Detailed instructions will be posted on Blackboard. Please see the schedule below for dates.

Reading:
Short weekly readings for in-class discussion will be posted in PDF on Blackboard in the “Weekly Reading” section. Many of these will come from current news and research in order to build discussion on the contemporary relevance of or debates about historical topics covered in class.

The main course books you read will depend on which essay topics you choose (see the essay topics below). The following books should be available at the bookstore and on reserve loan at Mudd
(except Unending Frontier, which is always available as an e-book through OBIS). If for any reason you cannot get the book you need, please contact me:

(*Everyone should buy these two books regardless of essay topic.)


All other reading for essays will be posted in PDF on Blackboard under “Essay Reading.”

**Course Outline:**

**Week 1 - Introduction**
9/6: (Labor Day – No Class)
9/8: Introduction
9/10: Historiography and overview

**Week 2 - Prehistory**
9/13: Regions and Geography
9/15: Fire
9/17: Hunting and Extinctions

**Choose your first essay topic and submit a 1-page summary of your thoughts by Fri 8PM.**

**Week 3 – The Neolithic Revolution**
9/20: Crops
9/22: Animals
9/24: Diseases

**Week 4 – Pre-Modern Civilizations and the Environment**
9/27: The Ancient World
9/29: The Classical World
10/1: The Medieval World

**Week 5 – Collapse**
10/4: Quiz
10/6: The Maya and Anasazi
10/8: Greenland and Easter Island

**Essay outline or rough draft due by Fri 8PM.**

**Week 6 – The Columbian Exchange**
10/11: The Guns Germs and Steel Theory
10/13: Invasive Species
10/15: Ecological Imperialism

**Week 7 – Crisis and Transformation**
10/18: The Little Ice Age Crisis
10/20: Diverging Ecological Paths in Early Modern Eurasia
10/22: Quiz

**First essay due by 8PM Tuesday.**

**Week 8**

**Fall Break**

**Week 9 – Extracting Nature**
11/1: The Industrial Revolution and the Commodification of Nature
11/3: The “Neo-Europes”
11/5: Tropical Commodities

**Week 10 – Nature and Power**
11/8: Environment and Imperialism
11/10: Re-ordering Rivers and Wetlands
11/12: High Modernist Disasters

**Choose your second essay topic and submit a 1-page summary of your thoughts by Fri 8PM.**

**Week 11 – Industrial Pollution**
11/15: The Atmosphere
11/17: The Pedosphere and Hydrosphere
11/19: Quiz

**Week 12 – Upending the Biosphere**
11/22: Industrial Food Production
11/24: Public Health and the “Biological coup d’état”
11/26: (Thanksgiving – No Class)

Week 13 – The Acceleration of Change
11/29: Population and “Overpopulation”
12/1: Urbanization and Suburbanization
12/3: Globalization

Week 14 – Prospects
12/6: Consumption and Energy
12/8: Global Warming in Historical Perspective
12/10: Quiz

Week 15 – Conclusion
12/13: Past and Future

**Second essay due 12/20 by 4PM (as your “final project”). Late papers will not be accepted.**
Essay Topics:
Please choose one of the following topics for each essay. The essay must be approximately 1500 words, typed, and submitted by e-mail. Essays should be well structured, include a clear thesis statement, and conform to the standards of a formal history paper. Citations should conform to the Chicago Manual of Style 15a (see http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html). I strongly encourage you to read the writing guidelines and links posted on the course Blackboard site. When writing on the topic, you may include other outside reading. However, you must complete the reading listed below and address the ideas and information contained in the listed books and articles.
If you have any questions or concerns about the assignment, please contact me well in advance of the deadline.

First Essay Topics:

1) Do geography and natural resources determine the fate of civilizations? Did they in the past? Do they still today?
   - J. Diamond, Guns Germs and Steel (all)
   - F. Fernandez-Armesto, Civilizations (introduction and at least four other chapters)

2) Does the collapse of past civilizations related to environmental causes hold any lessons for the present day? Why or why not?
   - J. Diamond, Collapse (Parts I, II, and IV)
   - J. McNeill, “Diamond in the Rough”

3) Did humans ever live in harmony with nature? If so, what happened? If not, why not? Either way, what difference does it make for contemporary responses to environmental problems?
   - J. Hughes, Environmental History (chapters 2 and 3)
   - S. Krech, Ecological Indian (all)

4) How have culture and religion made a difference in human interaction with the environment? Do past examples offer any lessons for present environmental concerns?
   - White and Tuan articles (from weekly reading)
   - J. Hughes, Environmental History (chapter 4)
   - J. Diamond, Collapse (chapters 6-9)
   - J. Richards, Unending Frontier (chapters 4-7)

Second Essay Topics:

1) Can we ascribe some or all modern environmental problems to “overpopulation”? Why or why not?
   - J. McNeill, Something New Under the Sun (chapters 1, 7, 9, and 10)
   - J. Diamond, Collapse (chapters 10 and 11)
   - M. Connelly, “To Inherit the Earth”
2) Does the industrialization and development of China (and other large Third World countries) herald a new era in global environmental history? If so, why and how? If not, why not?  
-J. McNeill, *Something New Under the Sun* (chapters 1, 9, and 11)  
-E. Economy, *The River Runs Black* (*all except* chapters 5 and 8)  
-J. Diamond, *Collapse* (chapter 12)

3) Have science and technology been more a cause of environmental problems or a solution to them? Either way, what lessons might past technological successes or failures have for contemporary environmental problems?  
-J. McNeill, *Something New Under the Sun* (chapters 3-7, 10-11)  
-J. Scott, *Seeing Like a State* (chapters 1, 6, and 8-10)

4) Write an essay explaining what the history of one of the following commodities can tell us about modern environmental history. Be sure to formulate and defend a clear thesis statement. You may wish to consider one or more of the following factors: the commodity's role in imperial expansion and imperial economies, tropical versus temperate commodities, the degrees of vertical and horizontal integration in production and sales, the length and complexity of the supply chain, the distance between producers and consumers, the social and economic role of the good, and the political situation of the exporting countries.

*For all commodities, start with:*  
-J. McNeill, *Something New Under the Sun* (chapter 10)  
-S. Topik, *From Silver to Cocaine* (introduction)

**Timber**  
-W. Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis* (chapter 4)  
-W. Beinart, *Environment and Empire* (chapter 7)

**Rubber**  
-W. Beinart, *Environment and Empire* (chapter 14)

**Sugar**  
-R. Tucker, *Insatiable Appetite* (chapter 1)  
-S. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power* (chapter 4)

**Bananas**  

**Beef**
- W. Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis* (chapter 5)

**Coal**

B. Freese, *Coal* (all)