

Hist 180

Global Environmental History since 1492

Instructor: Garrett Washington garrett.washington@oberlin.edu Tel: 440-775-6879

Class Time: T/TH 11AM-12:15PM

Classroom: TBD

My Office: Rice 28

Office Hours: T/Th 2:30-4PM and By Appointment

Course Description:

This course will examine the impact that interactions between humans and the larger biophysical world have had on the global past. From the late 1400s, new encounters and unprecedentedly lengthy trade networks rapidly transformed the “Old World Web” into the “World Wide Web.” This process has greatly changed the way that nature and humankind interact on a local, regional, and global scale, greatly amplifying the impact that the two have upon one another. We will be asking three key questions: What role has the environment played in major global dynamics? What local and supra-local impacts have major global dynamics had on the environment? How has human thought about the environment developed throughout all these developments? To respond to these questions we will study natural and human-influenced global environmental developments as well as local and regional changes in the relationship between humans and their environment over the past five centuries. We will examine a wide range of fields, from agriculture to disease to transportation to energy to philosophy and beyond, and a wide array of countries stretching from China to Germany to the U.S. to Brazil and beyond.

Required Texts:

John R. McNeill, *Something New Under the Sun: An Environmental History of the Twentieth-Century World* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000)

(All Other Readings will be available electronically via Blackboard, E-Reserves, or J-Stor)

Class Topics and Readings:

Feb. 4 Introduction to the Course
READING(S): none
ASSIGNMENT(S): none

Feb. 6 Introduction to Global Environmental History
READING(S):
J. Donald Hughes *What is Environmental History* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2006), 1-17.
ASSIGNMENT(S): none

- Feb. 11. Environment and 16th century Civilizations
READING(S):
John F. Richards, *The Unending Frontier: An Environmental History of the Early Modern World* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2003), 17-24 (except last paragraph)
ASSIGNMENT(S): none

The Environment and Early Globalization: 1450-1600

- Feb. 13 The Environment and New Human Connections
READING(S):
1) J.R. McNeill and William H. McNeill, *The Human Web: A Bird's Eye View of World History*, 155-178
2) Peter C. Mancall, *Travel narratives from the age of discovery: an anthology* (Oxford University Press, 2006), excerpts
ASSIGNMENT(S):
Primary Source Analysis Worksheet due
- Feb. 18 Moving People and Germs
READING(S):
Richards, Ch. 9 “The Columbian Exchange”
ASSIGNMENT(S): none
- Feb. 20 Moving animals and crops
READING(S):
Alfred Crosby *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), Ch. 3 “Old World Plants and Animals in the New World” and Ch. 5 “New World Foods and Old World Demography”
ASSIGNMENT(S):
Discussion Paper 1 due

The Environment and Early Modern World State-Making

- Feb. 25 Thriving States in Asia: Japan and China
READING(S):
Richards, ch. 4 “Internal Frontiers and Intensified Land Use in China”
-OR-
Richards, ch. 5 “Ecological Strategies in Tokugawa Japan”
ASSIGNMENT(S): none
- Feb. 27 Thriving States in Europe: Holland and England
READING(S):

Richards, Ch. 6 “Landscape Change and Energy Transformation in the British Isles”

ASSIGNMENT(S):

Paper 1 due

The Environment and Early Modern Empire-building

Mar. 4 Thriving Empires: Spanish and Portuguese Colonies
READING(S):
Richards, Ch. 10 “Ranching, Mining, and Settlement Frontiers in Colonial Mexico”
-OR-
Richards, Ch. 11 “Sugar and Cattle in Portuguese Brazil”
ASSIGNMENT(S): none

Mar. 6 Thriving Empires: The British and Dutch East India Companies
READING(S):
Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600-1860* (Cambridge University Press, 19956), Ch. 3 “The English and Dutch East India Companies and the Seventeenth-Century Environmental Crisis in the Colonies”
ASSIGNMENT(S):
Quiz 1

Early Modern Environmental Thought

Mar. 11 Early Modern Environmental Thought
READING(S):
1) Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance* (Ithaca : Cornell University Press, 1989), 210-221.
ASSIGNMENT(S): none

Mar. 13 Early Modern Environmental Thought
READING(S):
Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, excerpts
Descartes: *Discourse on the Method*, excerpts
ASSIGNMENT(S):
Malthus and Descartes Debate

Environment in the Age of Political Revolutions, 1750-1850

Mar. 18 The American Revolution

READING(S):

Honan, William H. "Don't Blame King George III. It Was the Weather!" *The New York Times*. November 29, 1996.

ASSIGNMENT(S): none

Mar. 20 The French Revolution

READING(S):

Noelle Plack, "Environmental Issues during the French Revolution: Peasants, Politics and Village Common Land" *Australian Journal of French Studies* Vol. 47 Issue 3 (Sep-Dec2010): 290-303

ASSIGNMENT(S):

Discussion Paper 2 due

Mar. 25 No Class

Mar. 27 No Class

READING(S):

Brett Walker, *Toxic Archipelago: A History of Industrial Disease in Japan* (University of Washington Press, 2009), Introduction "Knowing Nature" and Ch. 1 "The Agency of Insects"

Global Trends in the 19th Century Environment

April 1 Rural Environments

READING(S):

1) Mark Overton's BBC History summary of his *Agricultural Revolution in England: The Transformation of the Agrarian Economy 1500-1850*
2) Walker, Ch. 2 "The Agency of Chemicals"

April 3 Urban Environments

READING(S):

1) J. Donald Hughes, *An Environmental History of the World: Humankind's Changing Role in the Community of Life*, 133-140
2) Walker, Ch. 3 "Copper Mining and Ecological Collapse"

Apr. 8 Late Colonial Environments

READING(S):

1) John Tully, "A Victorian Ecological Disaster: Imperialism, the Telegraph, and Gutta-Percha," *Journal of World History* Vol. 20, No. 4 (Dec., 2009): 559-579.
2) Gilmartin, David. "Scientific Empire and Imperial Science: Colonialism and Irrigation Technology in the Indus Basin." *Journal of Asian Studies* 53 (1994): 1127-49.

ASSIGNMENT(S):

Discussion Paper 3 due

Environment in the 20th Century World:

- Apr. 10 Air
READING(S)
McNeill, 55-108
ASSIGNMENT(S):
Quiz 2
- Apr. 15 Water
READING(S)
McNeill, 118-148
1) Walker, Ch. 4 “Engineering Pain in the Jinzū River Basin
2) Walker, Ch. 5 “Mercury’s Offspring”
ASSIGNMENT(S):
- Apr. 17 Water, cont.
READING(S): none
ASSIGNMENT(S):
Paper 2 due
- April 22 Forests, Seas, and Fields
READING(S)
1) McNeill, 228-264
2) Richard P. Tucker, "The World Wars and the Globalization of
Timber Cutting" in Tucker, Richard P., and Edmund Russell,
eds. *Natural Enemy, Natural Ally: Toward an Environmental
History of Warfare*. 1st ed. Corvallis: Oregon State
University Press, 2004.
- Apr. 24 Fossil Fuels and Nuclear Energy
READING(S)
1) McNeill, 296-324
2) J.F. Ahearne, “Nuclear Power after Chernobyl” *Science* Vol. 236, No.
4802 (May 8, 1987): 673-679.
ASSIGNMENT(S): none
- Apr. 29 Modern Environmental Thought before 1945
READING(S):
1) J.E. de Steigeur *The Origins of Modern Environmental Thought*
(Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2006), 11-15
2) Aldo Leopold “The Land Ethic”
-OR-
2) John Muir “The Calypso Borealis” and “Save the Redwoods”
-OR-
2) Gifford Pinchot, *The Fight for Conservation*, 1-6 (Ch. 1)
ASSIGNMENT(S): **Discussion Paper 4**

- May 1 Environmental Thought and Activism in the Turbulent 1960s and beyond
 READING(S):
 1) McNeill, 325-340
 2) Mark Hamilton Lytle, *The Gentle Subversive: Rachel Carson, Silent Spring, and the Rise of the Environmental Movement* (Oxford University Press, 2007), Ch. 4 “Winter: The Poison Book and the Dark Season of Vindication”
 ASSIGNMENT(S): none
- May 6 The Environment and Politics
 READING(S):
 1) McNeill, 341-356.
 2) Wangari Maathai, Green Belt Movement,: Sharing the Approach and the Movement, Ch. 2 “The History of the Green Belt Movement”
 ASSIGNMENT(S):
Quiz 3
- May 8 Major Battles and Debates of the 21st Century
- May 15 **Paper 3** due 4PM

Grading Rubric

ASSIGNMENT	PERCENTAGE
Quizzes (x3)	5%
Discussion Papers (x4)	5%
Malthus and Descartes Debate	10%
Primary Source Analysis Worksheet	5%
Paper 1	10%
Paper 2	10%
Paper 3	15%
Participation	15%
TOTAL	100%

Assignment Explanations:

Quizzes: duh.

Discussion Papers: (approximately 1 page, typed, double spaced). Identify and briefly explain issues or respond to assigned questions. Each discussion paper will receive a grade of 2 (clear and well-executed reflection), 1 (minimum/satisfactory work) or 0 (insignificant effort or failure to turn in a paper). In light of the important “participation” component in this course, these papers are meant to facilitate your efforts to satisfy that requirement.

Malthus and Descartes Debate: Prepare both sides of a debate between Thomas Malthus and Rene Descartes, and participate actively in a debate during class.

Primary Source Analysis Worksheet: Complete the worksheet as directed

Paper 1: (500 words) Compare the place of the non-human environment in the development of Japan or China and England based on the assigned readings.

Paper 2: (500 words) Write a 500-word descriptive analysis of Walker's *Toxic Archipelago*, paying specific attention to his arguments and evidence.

Paper 3: (750 words) Write a brief but integrative environmental history of a recent (since 1980) "eco-accident" using the approach demonstrated by Walker. Topics might include pollution, famine, flooding, land degradation, or infectious disease, as well as many others. In addition to the standard writing requirements described below, this paper should be cite sources in the Chicago Style.

Participation: A composite grade comprising attendance (required), participation in class during discussions, activities, and presentations.

Due Dates and Assignment Details:

All Assignments are due **on the day** listed in the syllabus. All written work must be typed in 12-point Times New Roman or Arial font and double-spaced. Grading for all written work will be heavily based on the adherence to instructions, organization and clarity, effective argumentation, grammar and diction, and readability.

FINE PRINT

Syllabus Disclaimer

This syllabus may be altered at any time by the instructor. Any such changes in this course will be posted immediately on Blackboard, and I will e-mail a revised syllabus that replaces the original to all enrolled students.

Late Assignments/Make-Ups

- A. Students must notify me in writing or in person **before** the day of a paper deadline or other major assignment if they intend to turn in late or make up the item. This practice, when used within reason, will allow students to receive full credit.
- B. Any assignments turned in late or exams missed without notification will receive only partial credit.

Working with Honor

Oberlin students are required to write and sign the Honor Pledge on all academic exercises. The pledge reads: "I have adhered to the Honor Code in this assignment." This commits students to not engaging in any type of academic dishonesty, of which cheating and plagiarism are two

important types. For more on the Oberlin College Honor System, visit <http://new.oberlin.edu/dotAsset/3840268.pdf>

Plagiarism : This term essentially refers to copying someone else's work without acknowledging that s/he was the source. This can include using the work of a classmate, a scholar, or even one's own work if it was completed for a different course. The liberal arts education is based on the development of creative and critical thinking skills in students, and plagiarism hinders these goals. If you are unsure about what plagiarism means, hypothetically or in an actual situation, I am happy to discuss it with you at any time during the semester.

Each student is encouraged to help me get to know him/her. Come to class, and come to office hours.