**HIST 483: Environmental History of the British Empire**

Fall 2014: Wednesdays, 7:00-9:00 PM in King 337  
Instructor: Willis Okech Oyugi  
Department of History  
Office: RICE 303; Office Tel: x56259  
Office Hours: Mon/Wed: 3:30-5:00 & by appointment  
Instructor’s email: wokechoy@oberlin.edu

---

**Course Goals**

This course examines British expansionism from the seventeenth through the mid-twentieth centuries as inseparable from the history of global environmental change. At its zenith between 1860 and the second decade of the twentieth century, the British Empire spanned across all continents and controlled and governed almost a quarter of the world’s area and population. Largely driven by the quest for raw materials, the resultant resource exploitation and consumption had profound regional and global environmental impacts. We seek to understand the nature of these environmental changes as manifested in British political, economic, and cultural impositions on non-European traditional economies, social life, ecologies, and their environments.

We explore among other issues the links between resource exploitation and the antecedents to climate science as well as to the origins of conservationism (e.g. forests, wildlife, and soil). We also seek to understand the nature and extent of deleterious wars of conquest on the environment and the changes occasioned by urbanization among other issues. Throughout the course we interrogate some of the significant scholarly literature pertinent to the relationship between British imperialism and environmental change.

While basic knowledge of the history of the British Empire would be beneficial, there are no formal course prerequisites. Students are, however, expected to have at least been exposed to historical inquiry and methodology, or be engaged in another discipline related to environmental studies/sciences.

By the end of the semester students should be able to: 1) Consider authors’ perspectives and arguments and source materials as well as their intended and unintended audiences; 2).
Understand the relationship between economic, cultural, and political aspects of the British expansionism, and processes of environmental change and human-nature relations and reactions; 3). Familiarize themselves with some of the debates surrounding the origins of environmentalism and conservationism; and 4). Use history as a medium to improve critical thinking, written, and oral communication skills.

**Required Texts/Materials**

The following books are available at the Oberlin Bookstore. These texts have also been placed on print reserve, or are available electronically in Mudd Library. If for any reason you cannot acquire or access any of the reading texts/materials please contact me.

- Additionally, articles, reports, and excerpts from various books are accessible via the indicated URL or else will be placed on Blackboard and will be available as PDF files to students enrolled in the course shortly before the commencement of the Fall Semester.

*Texts/Readings indicated as follows in weekly schedule:

- Blackboard (BB)
- Web (W)
- Print Reserve (PR)
- Purchased text (PT)

**Expectations/Assignments**

As this is a seminar, your active participation is not merely expected but is indispensable in making discussions fruitful and interesting for all. Primarily, each class session will be student discussion supplemented by commentary by the instructor.

The reading for each week must be done in advance of the class meeting. Students should expect about 100-150 pages of reading a week.

In addition to a 1-2 page weekly synopsis of *at least* two of the week’s course readings (*to be emailed to instructor 1-hour before class*), each student will be expected to make a 10-15 minute oral presentation and will lead the class discussion that particular week (To start Week 3). The presentation should not summarize the text, except very briefly, but should rather offer a critical reading of the text(s) and direct the class to important questions for group discussion and research.

Students will also write two research papers: Mid-term (5-7 pages); Final (8-10 pages).
Please be collegial. All colleagues should be treated respectfully, even if one does not agree with their point of view.

Writing assignments

- As the deadlines for the term papers/research assignments approach, I will give you more detailed information about my expectations.
- Papers must be typed in 12-point font (Times New Roman), double-spaced with one-inch margins, and include page numbers and a title.
- Both papers will be graded on originality, structure and style and must be cited appropriately following the Chicago Manual of Style. Footnotes are preferred (although you may use endnotes).
- 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 the paper outlines, thesis paragraph/s, or drafts (sent at least 48 hours before the deadline).
- You must submit a hard copy of your paper in class. E-mail submissions will only be accepted under certain conditions.
- 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.
- I encourage you to take advantage of the writing resources Oberlin offers to you. The writing center located at Mudd Center offers individual assistance at any stage in the writing process.
- **Honor Code: Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated.** Consequences can be dire and range from 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/life/rules-regns.html](http://www.oberlin.edu/students/life/rules-regns.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."

Other Information (Please keep the following in mind)

- I endeavor to answer course-related emails within the shortest time possible. It is, however, my prerogative to respond to student emails between 6pm-9am and on weekends.
- Cell phones, laptops, iPods and other technological distractions are not welcome in section.
- 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).

Evaluation/Grading

Map Quiz (2) 10%
Attendance and engagement in class discussions 20%
Leading class discussion/Weekly analytical summaries 20%
Mid-Term Paper 20%
Final Research Paper 30%

- The grading is 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.
- Please note that I would prefer to answer questions concerning grades during office hours or by appointment.
- All work must be completed in order to pass this course.

Course Reading Schedule*

Week 1 (September 3): Introduction to the Course
- Broad overview of the British Empire

Week 2 (September 10): Empire: Ideology and the Environment
- Beinart and Hughes, “Introduction,” Environment and Empire, 1-21 (PT).
- James Beatie, “Recent Themes in the Environmental History of the British Empire,” History Compass, 10, 2 (2012): 129-139 available at:

Week 3 (September 17): The Empire of Science; The Science of Empire I
- Map Quiz I

Week 4 (September 24): The Empire of Science; The Science of Empire II
- Richard Grove, Green Imperialism: “Introduction,” 1-15; Ch.3: “The English and Dutch East India Companies and the Seventeenth Century Environmental Crisis in the


Week 5 (October 1): Empire & Global Environmentalism


- Ramachandra Guha, Environmentalism: A Global History (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), Chapters 1-3 & 5 (43pp) (BB)


Week 6 (October 8): Imperial Imaginations

- Beinart and Hughes, Ch. 5: “Imperial Travelers,” 76-92.


Week 7: (October 15): Colonialism, Settlers, and the Environment (Forestry)


• *Mid-Term Paper (5-7 pages) Due at the beginning of class.*

**Week 8 (October 22): (Fall Recess, No Class)**

**Week 9 (October 29): Colonialism, Settlers, and the Environment**


**Week 10 (November 5): Commodity Frontiers**

• Beinart and Hughes, Chapters 2-4; 6-7

**Week 11 (November 12): Colonial Science, Exploitation, and Conservation I**


• Tropp, “Forest Species and the Contours of Social and Cultural Life,” in *Natures of Colonial Change*, 125-144 (BB).


• *Map Quiz 2*

**Week 12 (November 19): Colonial Science, Exploitation, and Conservation II**

• Beinart & Hughes, Chapters. 12 & 13, 200-232.

**Week 13 (November 26): Colonial Science, Exploitation, and Conservation III**


**Week 14 (December 3): Disease and Empire**

• Beinart & Hughes, Ch. 11, 184-199

**Week 15 (December 10): Urbanization, Race, and the Environment**

• Beinart & Hughes, Ch. 9 & 10

**Final Paper (8-10 pages) Due December 17 by 9 pm.**

*Course Readings subject to minor adjustments. Always check the Blackboard site for up-to-date information.*