HIST 180: Global Environmental History

Spring 2015

Instructor: Willis Okech Oyugi
Class Times: MWF 9:00-9:50AM; King 323
Office: Rice Hall 303
Office Hours: MWF 10-11 AM & by appointment
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Course Description

This course is designed to introduce you, in general terms, to one of the fundamental aspects in the history of humanity—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 will compare, contrast, and seek interconnections across geographical regions that reflect the history and nature of these interactions.

Our discussion will be guided by the fundamental question: Have humans ever coexisted harmoniously 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-gatherer societies and following the evolution of various agricultural and technological innovations. Human-environmental interactions will also be explored through topics such as the Rise and Collapse of Early Civilizations, 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. At least two lectures will be presented on each topic that will incorporate broad generalizations and regional or thematic case studies. The course will also involve weekly group discussions to reflect upon broad or specific historical and theoretical environmental issues the course readings and class lecture.

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 book review 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-reg.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***

The following books are available at the campus bookstore. These texts have also been placed on print reserve, or are available electronically (ER) in Mudd. All other readings are available on Blackboard (BB) unless otherwise indicated. If for any reason you cannot acquire or access any of the reading texts/materials please contact me.


The following movies/documentaries will be shown in class
- *Animate Earth* (2012)

**Course Requirements**
- Regular attendance at lectures
- Completion of assigned readings
- One Mid-Term Exam
- One Final Exam
- One Book Review (*The Future of Life*)
- One Term Paper

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

**Evaluation/ Grading**
- Attendance and engagement in class discussions  **20%**
- Weekly analytical summaries (due Friday in class)  **10%**
- Mid-Term Exam  **15%**
- Book Review (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 all the 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

Week 1: Introductions
2/2
- Introduction to the Course
2/4 & 2/6

Week 2: Prehistory to circa 8500 BCE
2/9
- J.R. McNeil, “Global Environmental History: The First 150,000 Years,” in A Companion to Global Environmental History, pp. 4-17. (ER)
2/11
- Shepard Krech III, “Pleistocene Extinctions,” The Ecological Indian, pp. 29-43; Chapter 4; “Fire” pp. & Chapter 5 “Buffalo.”
2/13
- Animate Earth (Film)

Week 3: c. 8500-2500 BCE: Hunting, Gathering, Fishing, and Early Agriculture
2/16
2/18

1 Note: Course readings may be subject to minor changes. Please check with Blackboard for up-to-date information.


2/20


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

2/23

• J. Donald Hughes, “The Great Divorce of Culture and Nature,” in *An Environmental History of the World*, pp. 30-51. (BB)


2/25


2/27


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

3/2

• Daniel Headrick, “The Medieval World, 500-1500 CE,” in *A Companion to Global Environmental History*, pp. 39-78. (ER)

• J Donald Hughes, “The Middle Ages,” in *An Environmental History of the World*, pp. 85-11. (BB)

3/4


3/6


**Week 6: Disease in Environmental History**

3/9


3/11


• Alan Mikhail, “The Middle East in Global Environmental History,” in *A Companion to Global Environmental History*, pp. 167-181. (ER)

3/13

• **Mid-Term Exam in class**

**Week 7: The Columbian Exchange: Animal, Plant, & Disease transfers**

3/16


3/18


• Alfred W. Crosby, “Ecological Imperialism: The Overseas Migration of Western Europeans as a Biological Phenomenon,” in *The Ends of the Earth*, pp. 103-117.

3/20

• **No class meeting. I will be attending a conference in D.C.**

• **Term Paper Proposals 1-2 pp due by 5pm (email).**

**Week 8: (Spring Recess, No Classes)**

**Week 9: The Industrial Revolution, Capitalism, and Ecological Load Displacement**

3/30


Lost Rivers (Film)

April 3, Book Review (2-3pp) due in class

Week 10: Colonialism, Natural Resources, & Commoditization


Week 11: Global Environmentalism


4/17


**Week 12: Environmentalism of the Poor**

4/20


4/22

- Rob Nixon, “Slow Violence, Gender, and the Environmentalism of the Poor,” in *Slow Violence and Environmentalism of the Poor* pp. 128-149. (BB)

4/24

- *A Fierce Green Fire*: “Chipka Movement,” & “Chico Mendes and the Rubber Tappers Union.”

**Week 13: Term Paper Reviews/Meeting**

4/27

- *Mekong in Tibet and China* (Film)

4/29 & 5/1

- Term paper meetings/writing

**Week 14: Urbanization, Pollution, and Climate Change**

5/4

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

5/6

5/8

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

Week 15: Reading and Finals
5/14

- *Final Exam (Room TBA)*