Instructor: Garrett Washington    garrett.washington@oberlin.edu    Tel: 440-775-6879
Class Time: T/TH 11AM-12:15PM
Classroom: Science Center A155
My Office: Rice 28
Office Hours: W/F 2:30-4:30PM and By Appointment

Course Description:
This history course will borrow from philosophy, economics, political science, geography, and the sociology and anthropology of religion, to introduce students to the study of water. Focusing on the past five centuries, we will explore the ways in which people across the world have sacralized, feared, fought, and harnessed water. Since time immemorial water has represented nature’s ultimate paradox: the “softest” natural element in both classical and eastern thought and yet an element capable of overcoming all the others; an agent of purification, healing, nourishment, and mechanical power and yet an agent of destruction and devastation; the most plentiful natural resource on earth and yet a resource that increasingly proves unobtainable when humans seek it most. Students will examine and draw conclusions about the nature of humankind’s encounter with water using book chapters, scholarly articles, and a wide array of primary sources from religious and philosophical texts to images to mechanical descriptions to water management documents to the wisdom of Bruce Lee. Through lectures, discussion, debate, short essays, and an individual research paper, this course will provide students with the tools to get their heads around the global history of water, from Holy Water to Katrina to the Steam Engine to Evian.

Student Learning Objectives:
• To develop knowledge about the various roles that water has played in human life over the centuries
• To develop knowledge of the ways that water use and thought have changed over time.
• To develop an awareness of commonalities and differences in thinking about and using water across cultural boundaries
• To improve critical reading, analytical writing, and verbal communication skills
• To improve critical and analytical thinking skills, particularly in dealing with difficult questions.

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

Class Topics and Readings:

September 3
Intro to the Course
READINGS : none
ASSIGNMENTS : none
Introducing Themes of the Course

READING(S):
2) William Cullen Bryant “The Hurricane” 1854 and “Green River” 1872
3) Ovid, *Metamorphosis* Book 1: Lines 244-312 (1st Century AD)

ASSIGNMENTS:
None

September 10
Museum Visit
READING(S)
ASSIGNMENT(S)

**WATER AND PURIFICATION**

September 12
Middle Eastern Traditions
READING(S):
2) N’tilas Y’dayim/ Wudu/Baptismal Instructions
ASSIGNMENT(S):
Summary 1

September 17
East Asian Religions
READING(S):
ASSIGNMENT(S):
None

**OF WATER AND GODS**

September 19
India and Egypt
READING(S):
1) Steven G. Darian, *Ganges in Myth and History* (Honolulu:
University of Hawaii Press, 1978), ch. 2

**ASSIGNMENT(S):**

**Summary 2**

**September 24**

Celtic Waters, and Boobera Lagoon

**READING(S)**


**ASSIGNMENT(S):**

none

**September 26**

Holy Water in Catholicism and Daoism

**READING(S):**


**ASSIGNMENT(S):**

**Primary Source Analysis Exercise**

**Summary 2 Rewrite due**

**FEARSOME WATER**

**October 1**

Floods

**READING(S):**


**ASSIGNMENT(S):**

**Synthetic Essay due**

**October 3**

Hurricanes and Typhoons

**READING(S):**

2) *The Hurricane: Mauritius, 1892*

**ASSIGNMENT(S):**

None
October 8  
Drought  
READING(S):  
2) The Great Famine: Report of the Committee of the China Famine Relief Fund (Shanghai, 1879), 5-7, 34-37, 41-48  
ASSIGNMENT(S):  
Synthetic Essay Rewrite due **Oct. 8, 10PM**

**RETHINKING WATER AND MAN**

October 10  
Worldchanging Ideas about Nature in Europe: Enlightenment Thought and Water-Canals  
READING(S):  
1) René Descartes, *Discourse on the Method for Rightly Conducting One's Reason and of Seeking Truth in the Sciences*, Part 6, Methods 35-37 (1637)  
ASSIGNMENT(S)  
1) **Reading Questions 1**  
2) **Topic and Annotated Bibliography due**

October 12  
Field Trip  
READING(S)  

October 15  
Worldchanging Ideas about Nature in Europe: Enlightenment Thought and Water – Swamps  
READING(S):  
Ian Thompson, *The Sun King's Garden: Andre Le Notre and the Creation of the Gardens of Versailles* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2006), ch. 4  
ASSIGNMENT(S)  
1) **Reading Questions 2**

October 16-October 28  
-------------- NO CLASS --------------
READING(S)

MODERN WATER

October 29  
Water Use and Modernization in Europe  
READING(S):  

ASSIGNMENT(S):  
1) **Proposal** due

October 31  
Used Water in a Modernizing Europe  
READING(S):  
2) Salzman, *Drinking Water*, 87-94  

ASSIGNMENT(S):  
**Reading Questions 3**

OF WATER AND CONTROL

November 5  
2nd Museum Visit

November 7  
Managing Waste Water  
READING(S):  

ASSIGNMENT(S):  
None
November 12  
Managing Water Quality  
READING(S):  
1) Agathe Euzen, Jean-Paul Haghe “What kind of water is good enough to drink: The evolution of perceptions about drinking water in Paris from modern to contemporary period” Water History Vol. 4 (2012): 231–244.  
ASSIGNMENT(S):  
Reading Questions 4

November 14  
Controlling Water on the Move  
READING(S):  
ASSIGNMENT(S):  
None

November 19  
Controlling the Water on the Move in the Colonies – Guest Speaker  
READING(S):  
- or -  
ASSIGNMENT(S):  
Reading Questions 5

November 21  
Discussion

DISOBEDIENT WATER

November 26  
Uncontainable Water (Three Gorges Dam/Sindh, Pakistan)  
READING(S):  
2) Fred Pearce, When the Rivers Run Dry: Water—The Defining Crisis of the Twenty-First Century (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006),
ASSIGNMENT(S)

Role Play

December 3  Unavoidable Water
READING(S):

ASSIGNMENT(S):

**Rough Draft Due**

December 5  Water Un-accessible, Water Un-findable—Guest Speaker
READING(S):
1) Pearce, 35-42

ASSIGNMENT(S):

**Reading Questions 6**

December 10  **Discussion:**

December 12  Sharing of Research

December 18  **Final Paper Due at 11AM**

**Grading:**

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<th>ASSIGNMENT</th>
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Assignment Explanations:

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

**Summary:** A concise 300-word summarization of a single reading assignment, meant to allow you to practice expressing yourself clearly and concisely within a limited number of words. All students are required to rewrite **Summary 2** in accordance with and response to the written comments that I will provide.

**Reading Questions:** Respond to the questions provided, and bring them to class. These are meant to help guide you through the longer readings, highlight important themes and information, and give your mind something to hang the reading content upon.

**Synthetic Essay:** (1500 words) An essay based on the readings and classes of weeks 1-4 in which you respond to the following question: How are the perspectives of diverse cultures on the religious and mythological role of water similar? All students are required to rewrite **Summary 2** in accordance with and response to the written comments that the professor will provide.

**Primary Source Analysis Exercise:** Respond to the questions on this worksheet as they relate to printed stories, found in Kaufman's *Consuming Visions*, of miracle healings in late nineteenth century France.

**Role Play:** Prepare both sides of a debate between Chinese Communist Party officials and Chinese scientists over the construction of the Three Gorges Dam in the 1950s. Playing the role assigned at the beginning of the class period, students will engage in a debate moderated by the professor for approximately 45 minutes.

**Final Paper:** (3500-4000 words) Write a research paper on development of any water crisis since 1950 not covered in class. Students may choose from the professor’s list of suggestions, but are also encouraged to find original topics. Over the course of the first half of the semester, students will prepare to write this paper by completing their **Topic and Annotated Bibliography** and **Proposal**.

**Topic and Annot. Biblio:** (300 words, not including sources) Summarize the topic that you have chosen and list and annotate at least 10 sources that you will use to research the topic. The sources must include a mixture of books or scholarly articles, and newspaper articles.

**Proposal:** (500 words) State your research question and why it is important, summarize the literature that you have read thus far, and explain how you plan to go about answering your question.
**Rough Draft** (1700 words or more) Students are expected to make as much progress in writing the Final Paper as possible. A Rough Draft will include a summary of others’ writings on the topic, the student’s research question and argument, and show that the student has written several body paragraphs in which s/he supports and elaborates upon this argument.

**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 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](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.*