

**PRELIMINARY SYLLABUS 8/30/07.** We will review and possibly revise it the first day of class.

## **HIST 723: Topics in Environmental History**

Fall 2007

Thursday, 1-3:15

Pavilion 8, Room 108

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Office hours: W 1-3 and by appointment.

### Goals

This course has two goals: (1) to introduce students to the growing field of environmental history; and (2) to advance essential skills of the historian. The only prerequisite is graduate standing or permission of the instructor. Graduate students from all departments are welcome.

Environmental history is the field concerned with the interaction between people and nature over time. Like most historians, environmental historians have focused their attention mainly on events at the national level or below. A few, however, have looked at developments on the international and global scale. Perhaps prodded by today's increasingly global economy, interest seems to be growing in this area of research and teaching. We will read books that have taken a global perspective and supplement them with works on other regions. We will study them to assess their approaches to the historical craft as well as for content.

### Book Reviews

You will develop skills in reading, writing, and analysis by writing book reviews. Each week, before we discuss a given book, please write a review of up to 500 words. This is a challenging but realistic assignment; 500 words is the typical word limit for book reviews in Environmental History. In the review, please:

- Identify the thesis of the reading
- Summarize the most important ideas and evidence that support the thesis
- Evaluate the reading. Does the author make a convincing case? Do the author's sources, methods, insights, or angle of approach stand out? How does this reading relate to others?

Please send your review as an email attachment (easier to read than email itself) to the whole class by noon on Wednesday (so you are reviewing books before we discuss them). Please read everyone else's reviews before class.

The book reviews take the place of longer papers more typical in these sorts of courses. Doing so brings several advantages. It helps you develop the important professional skill of reviewing others' work. It elevates class discussion (and your discussion grade) by ensuring thoughtful engagement with the reading before class. It enables you to improve your writing (and writing grade) over the course of the semester by learning from earlier efforts. (My comments will have to be brief to turn the papers around quickly, but they will highlight what I see as the most important strengths or weaknesses. At the end of the term, I will drop the lowest two review grades before calculating your overall writing grade.) And it spreads the work out over the whole term, rather than concentrating it at the end when other courses are making their greatest demands.

You may take one bye (that is, not submit a review if you wish) over the course of the semester. You still have to read and discuss the book in class.

You may also substitute writing an entry for the Encyclopedia of American Environmental History for one of the reviews. The editors of the encyclopedia have decided on the entries and their length, so you would choose from that list. The list of available topics is on Toolkit. If you take this option, please send a draft of your entry to the class on Wednesday in the same week we are reading the book whose review the entry replaces. We will critique your entry draft in class. Here, too, you will still have to read and discuss that week's assignment in class.

### Discussion

Class discussion is central to this course. We expect everyone to participate in the discussion each week.

At the beginning of the semester, we will divide responsibility for leading each week's discussion of the required readings. Typically I will sit back for the first twenty minutes or so and then join as a co-leader.

To get a sense of the issues and activities that engage environmental historians, please join the listserv H-Environment at the H-Net site. This is more for your enrichment than for classroom purposes, but some weeks we may identify a specific posting to discuss. If we do, I will announce it on email by Wednesday (so you will always know before class what reading is required).

### Public speaking

One of the most important and least developed skills among historians is public speaking. We present papers at conferences, get hired or rejected for positions based on "job talks," and lecture to students. You will make a formal presentation of up to twenty minutes (a typical length for a conference paper) at least twice—once for peer critique (ungraded), and a second time for a grade (and more peer critique). The default assignment is to present a conference-style paper, based either on your work or that of someone else,

related to environmental history. I am open to adapting the topic or format in ways that would give you the most benefit.

### Credit

35% discussion

5% discussion leading

40% writing

20% oral presentation

### Honor Code

As in all work at the university, the honor code applies to everything you do for this course. My assumption is that all of us are honorable people and will not lie, cheat, or steal. If confronted with evidence to the contrary, and if investigation convinces me that a violation took place, the student will fail the course and the case may go to the honor committee. The failing grade in the course will stand regardless of the outcome of any honor proceedings. The biggest danger in a course like this is plagiarism, so be sure to (1) cite a source for any idea not your own, (2) set off quotations in quotation marks, or by indenting, and cite the source, and (3) use the Chicago endnote style of documentation.

If you do not know Chicago style, it would be a good idea to buy a style manual. The bible is the Chicago Manual of Style, but you can get most of the information you need from a cheaper manual (such as Diana Hacker, A Pocket Style Manual).

I am always happy to answer questions about what is acceptable under the honor code or the professional standards of historians. Please contact me before submitting any work about which you are uncertain.

### Books

You are required to read the books. Owning them is optional, but be prepared to discuss specific passages in class. Copies will be on reserve in the Clark Hall library. Other readings (such as articles) will be available on line. We will average a book a week or its equivalent; some weeks the readings might be more or less.

William Cronon, Changes in the Land

Fernand Braudel, History of Civilizations

John Richards, The Unending Frontier

Alfred Crosby, Ecological Imperialism

Immanuel Wallerstein, World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction

Alf Hornborg, J. R. McNeill, Joan Martinez-Alier (editors), Rethinking Environmental History

Kenneth Pomeranz, Great Divergence

Richard Drayton, Nature's Government

Ian Tyrrell, True Gardens of the Gods

Richard Tucker, Insatiable Appetite (concise edition)

Jeffrey M. Diefendorf and Kurk Dorsey (editors), City, Country, Empire

Edmund Russell, War and Nature

William Strunk and E. B. White, Elements of Style (recommended)

## Schedule

### **August 30.**

- Edmund Russell, “What is Environmental History?” Distributed by email.
- William Cronon, Changes in the Land

### **September 6.**

- Guidelines for Writing Book Reviews (Toolkit)
- Send the first book review to the class by noon the day before class (and each week after this). Read everyone else’s review before class and come prepared to critique.
- Book review workshop I
- Fernand Braudel, History of Civilizations

### **September 13**

- John Richards, The Unending Frontier
- Book review workshop II

### **September 20**

- Paul Edwards, “How to Give an Academic Talk: Changing the Culture of Public Speaking in the Humanities” (Toolkit)
- Alfred Crosby, Ecological Imperialism

### **September 27**

- Immanuel Wallerstein, World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction
- Oral presentation

### **October 4**

- Alf Hornborg, J. R. McNeill, Joan Martinez-Alier (editors), Rethinking Environmental History
- Oral presentation

### **October 11**

- Kenneth Pomeranz, Great Divergence
- Oral presentation

### **October 17**

- No class meeting. Society for the History of Technology meeting in Washington, DC

**October 25**

- Richard Drayton, Nature's Government
- Oral presentation

**November 1**

- Ian Tyrrell, True Gardens of the Gods
- Oral presentation

**November 8**

- Richard Tucker, Insatiable Appetite (concise edition)
- Oral presentation

**November 15**

- Jeffrey M. Diefendorf and Kurk Dorsey (editors), City, Country, Empire
- Oral presentation

**November 22**

- No class. Thanksgiving.

**November 29**

- Edmund Russell, War and Nature
- Oral presentation

**December 6 (last class).**

- Edmund Russell, "Evolutionary History: Prospectus for a New Field," Environmental History 8 (April 2003): 204-228 (on line via Virgo).
- Reading growing out of class interests, TBA.