History 71900

GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY

Tuesday, 6:30-8:30 p.m.
[Room]

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 5:30-6:30 p.m.

With concern about environmental change at an all-time high, there could not be a more important time to study the history of human interactions with nature. Over the course of the semester, students will explore such topics as ancient ecologies, environmental exchanges, the nature of cities, imperialism and the natural world, climate change, and food production, all within a global context. By the end of the course, students will have developed a firm understanding of the historical forces that have produced modern relationships to nature and gained a better appreciation for their own personal roles in producing, consuming, and preserving the natural world.

Course Objectives

1. To familiarize students with the topic of global environmental history in a theoretical and historical context.
2. To develop in students the ability to think critically about the major historical questions in the field and to articulate their own interpretations.
3. To help students develop good writing and critical reading skills.
4. To help students express their ideas orally in both formal presentations and informal class discussions.

Required Materials

1. Books: All books are on reserve in the library:
   - J. Donald Hughes, Pan’s Travail: Environmental Problems of the Ancient Greeks and Romans (1994).

2. **Film**: The documentary *Food, Inc.* (2008) is widely available for rent or purchase.

3. **Online Sources**: All other sources are available either online or through library databases (unless the syllabus indicates that I will distribute it directly).

Note that the articles and book chapters under “Reports,” which will be the subject of oral presentations, are *not* on reserve and might need to be acquired from other CUNY libraries. So plan ahead!

**Assignments and Grading**

Students will be required to:

- Participate in class discussion (20%).
- Deliver two 6-8-minute, in-class oral reports (10%).
- Maintain a weekly reading journal (10%).
- Prepare a set of discussion questions (5%).
- Complete a paper proposal and a 15-20 page final paper (50%).
- Deliver a final presentation on their paper project (5%)

**Important Course Policies**

- Class attendance and your prompt arrival in class are mandatory. Absences and lateness will hurt your grade.
- I will accept late papers, but at a penalty of 1/3 of a grade for every day they are late (including weekends and holidays).
- I will not accept late journal entries or discussion questions.
- I will not offer bonus credit.

**Schedule of Topics and Readings**

1. **Mapping Out the Field** (January 29)

What are the big themes and questions that define the field of environmental history?

Reading (100 pages):

2. Ancient Ecologies (February 5)

What kinds of environmental challenges existed in the ancient world and how did they compare with those we face today?

Reading (201 pages):
- J. Donald Hughes, *Pan’s Travail: Environmental Problems of the Ancient Greeks and Romans* (1994).

Reports:

3. Climate Change and Human History (February 19)

How has climate change influenced history?

Reading (240 pages):

Reports:

4. Environmental Exchanges (February 26)

To what extent do biology and geography explain world history?

Reading (220 pages):

Reports:

5. The Ecology of Industrialization (March 5)

How did the natural environment shape the origins and development of industrialization?

Reading (145 pages):

Reports:

6. The Nature of Cities (March 12)

What do cities and nature—which seem like such opposites—have to do with one another?

Reading (276 pages):

Reports:
7. **Invasive Species and Biological Nativism** (March 19)

When have efforts to control “introduced” or “invasive” species been justifiable, and when have they simply reflected “biological nativism”?

Reading (4 pages):

No reports this week.

FINAL PAPER PROPOSAL IS DUE IN CLASS. NO JOURNAL ENTRY DUE.

8. **Environment and Empire** (April 2)

What was the environmental dimension of the age of imperialism?

Reading (235 pages):

Reports:

9. **What’s for Dinner?** (April 9)

What is the place of food and food production in human history?

Reading (55 pages):

Films:
- Responses to *Food, Inc.* by the livestock, meat, and poultry industry (SafeFoodInc.com) and Monsanto (http://www.monsanto.com/food-inc/).

Reports:

10. Animals in History (April 16)

What is the place of animals in human history?

Reading (120):
• Sam White, “From Globalized Pig Breeds to Capitalist Pigs: A Study in Animal Cultures and Evolutionary History,” *Environmental History* 16 (January 2011): 94-120.

Reports:

11. The Rise of Environmentalism (April 23)

What were the origins of environmentalism, and how has environmentalism differed across time and space?

Reading (145 pages):
Reports:
- Thomas Robertson, “‘This is the American Earth’: American Empire, the Cold War, and American Environmentalism,” *Diplomatic History* 32 (September 2008): 561-584.

12. A “Prodigal Century” (April 30)

Were environmental interactions qualitatively different in the twentieth century, and if so, why?

Reading (362 pages):

Reports:

13. Presentations (May 7)

14. Presentations (cont.) and the Road Ahead (May 14)

What are the most interesting and useful questions that environmental historians should explore in the future?

Reading (105):
- Paul Sabin, “‘The Ultimate Environmental Dilemma’: Making a Place for Historians in the Climate Change and Energy Debates,” *Environmental History* 15 (January 2010): 76-93.

FINAL PAPER IS DUE MAY 21 BY E-MAIL.

Descriptions of Assignments

**Oral Reports.** During our first class meeting, students will sign up for two oral report dates. On each of those dates, in addition to completing the regular reading for the class meeting, you will read an article or book chapter from that week’s Reports list. The
additional reading will form the basis of a 6-8-minute presentation that should summarize the reading’s argument and evidence, provide your own critique of its ideas, and discuss how it connects with our other reading for the week. Each presentation will be followed by questions from the class. The presentations have the dual benefit of exposing the entire class to additional ideas that are relevant to the week’s topic and helping each of you to hone your critical thinking and presentation skills.

**Reading Journal.** Each week, students will hand in—at the beginning of class—an entry from their Reading Journal. Each journal entry must:

1. Be typed, single-spaced, and include your name and e-mail address;
2. Be at least 400 words and include a calculated word count; and
3. **Respond to** (rather than summarize) the reading for the week. If there is more than one reading, the journal should respond to at least two of them.

You have quite a bit of freedom in choosing what to say in your journal entries. You can argue with the texts, analyze them, evaluate them, connect them to personal experiences, or engage them in any other thoughtful way that you find useful. *Note that your entries will not be evaluated on the strength of your response or the quality of your prose, so feel free to take chances.* This is a journal and is therefore informal and preliminary by its very nature. Don’t spend a lot of time on them, and don’t even bother to fix your typos. The Reading Journal is intended to give you practice connecting your thinking with your writing, so let your fingers do the thinking for you. You will receive full credit if your entries consistently show an attempt to grapple with the readings in a thoughtful way. You will only lose points if it is clear from your entry that you did not do the reading for the week or if your entry has little or nothing to do with the reading. I will not comment on your journal entries or assign them individual grades. If you are taking the journal seriously, then you will not hear back from me about your entries and should assume that you are getting full credit for them. *Late journal entries will not be accepted.*

**Discussion Questions.** During our first meeting, students will sign up for a date on which to distribute a set of 8 original discussion questions to the entire class. The questions should not seek answers that are merely factual in nature. Rather, they should help the class to delve more deeply into the complexities of the week’s readings. *Discussion questions should be emailed to me no later than 5:00 p.m. on the Friday before the class meeting in which we will be discussing the relevant material.* Send the questions as text within your e-mail, and I will forward the questions to the entire class.

**Final Paper.** You can choose either of the following two options for your final paper, which is due by e-mail on May 21. Make sure that your paper contains a clear thesis statement, strong topic sentences, and abundant evidence, all in support of an argument. Work to ensure that your paper is free of typographical and grammatical errors. Papers should be typed, double-spaced, stapled, and include citations and a bibliography formatted using the Chicago Style.
1. **Research Paper**: Write a 12-15 page environmental history of a particular historical place, theme, or process. You can base the paper entirely on secondary sources, although you are welcome to bring in primary sources if you want to. The paper should make a clear and strong argument, connect with course themes, and draw on at least 12 scholarly books and/or academic journal articles.

2. **Historiographical Essay**: Write a 12-15 page historiographical essay exploring some part of the literature on global environmental history. This option provides an opportunity to explore the environmental dimensions of a topic that you might be exploring in your dissertation. The paper should make a clear and strong argument that interprets the body of literature being examined, connect with course themes, and discuss at least 12 scholarly books and/or academic journal articles.

To help you organize your project, a 3-page proposal will be due at the beginning of class on March 19. The proposal should include a discussion of the research question you plan to ask and the answer and evidence you expect to find based on your research up to that point. *In addition* to the 3 pages, the proposal should also include an *annotated* bibliography of sources that you think will be useful to your project.