

Global Environmental History

HIS 350L—Fall 2014

[MEZ 1.102](#) MW 4:00-5:30

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Office Hours: [GAR 0.114](#)
F 2:30-4:30PM
and by appointment



Course Description:

Global Environmental History explores how human societies and natural environments have shaped each other through world history. In order to tackle this formidable subject, the course is divided into three thematic units. We will begin by critically examining “bird’s eye views” of deep human and natural history, discussing historiographic controversies over the role of humans in the ancient extinctions; the origins of agriculture; the Columbian Exchange; and relationships among climate, society, and disease. Next, we delve into a series of comparative and transnational histories of societies’ ways of knowing and making a living in nature. We will survey cultural and economic encounters of colonialism and capitalism in the 19th and 20th centuries, tracing the global flows of commodities, “invasive species,” human migrations, and waste. Finally, we will take a closer look at the ideas that have historically shaped how we think about “the environment,” considering the emergence of ecology, climate science, environmentalist movements around the world.

This course is an upper-division, reading- and writing-intensive seminar. It acts as an introduction to the growing field of environmental history, as well as to a variety of approaches to understanding history at a scale beyond the nation-state. It carries Independent Inquiry and Writing Flag designations:

Independent Inquiry: Independent Inquiry courses are designed to engage you in the process of inquiry over the course of a semester, providing you with the opportunity for independent investigation of a question, problem, or project related to your major. You should therefore expect a substantial portion of your grade to come from the independent investigation and presentation of your own work.

Writing: Writing Flag courses are designed to give students experience with writing in an academic discipline. In this class, you can expect to write regularly during the semester, complete substantial writing projects, and receive feedback from your instructor to help you improve your writing. You will also have the opportunity to revise one or more assignments, and you may be asked to read and discuss your peers’ work. You should therefore expect a substantial portion of your grade to come from your written work.

Readings:

Four required textbooks are available for purchase at the Co-op:

Robin, Libby, Sverker Sörlin, and Paul Warde. *The Future of Nature: Documents of Global Change*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013.

Crosby, Alfred W. *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900*. Cambridge University Press, 2004. (Either first or second edition is acceptable.)

Soluri, John. *Banana Cultures: Agriculture, Consumption, and Environmental Change in Honduras and the United States*. University of Texas Press, 2009.

Guha, Ramachandra. *Environmentalism: A Global History*. New York: Longman, 2000.

Article and chapter-length readings listed in the schedule below will be posted on our course's Canvas site (<http://canvas.utexas.edu>). In addition to accessing course materials, you will also use Canvas to communicate and collaborate online, check grades, submit assignments, and complete online quizzes and surveys. Canvas support is available at the ITS Help Desk at 475-9400, M-F 8:00-6:00.

Assignments and Evaluation:

Your course grade will be based on the following:

Critical Essays	60%
<i>Essay 1 (10%)</i>	
<i>Essay 2 (20%)</i>	
<i>Essay 3 (30%)</i>	
Reflections	20%
<i>On readings, day you lead discussion (10%)</i>	
<i>Others, periodic (10%)</i>	
Participation	20%
<i>Leading 2 discussions (10%)</i>	
<i>Overall involvement in discussion (10%)</i>	

Essays: Each essay is an opportunity to explore questions raised by course material. Essay 2 and 3 will also require some outside research. All three essays allow a large amount of room for you to shape your own inquiry and delve deeper into problems of particular interest to you, as well as to develop your ideas in response to peer feedback. You will submit your essays on Canvas by the beginning of the class period at 4:00PM on the due date. Except under extreme circumstances, which you will negotiate with me at least one week in advance, one half-grade (5 percentage points) will be deducted for each day late. Please see the essay grading criteria attached to the back of this syllabus.

Reflections: You will sign up with a partner to lead two class discussions. For each of those days, you will write a 300-500 word reflection on the assigned readings. (Although you will lead group discussion in pairs, you should each write your own reflection paper.) This should involve a very brief summary of the authors' key arguments and evidence, a larger discussion of what you see as the key issues at stake, and the directions you think the class should explore during discussion. The purpose of this reflection paper is to lay the foundations for class discussion, so the best reflections will treat the readings in connection to each other, and perhaps even link the day's readings to questions and themes explored in previous weeks.

At several other points throughout the course, I will also ask the entire class to reflect on something we have discussed, seen, or read for class; brainstorm about a problem we will be examining over coming weeks; or bring relevant outside material to bear on the course through a short in-class or Canvas writing assignment.

Reflections submitted on Canvas will be *due the day before you lead discussion, by midnight*. Late reflections will earn half-credit.

Participation: This course is a seminar and discussion is at its heart. Everyone in class needs to assume the responsibility of an active participant and learner. Success in this class depends on the time, energy, and commitment you invest. You must arrive at class having read the material assigned for the day and prepared to engage in a thoughtful and constructive conversation that is respectful of others in the classroom and takes seriously the issues and themes presented in the readings. Participation will be evaluated based on your contribution to discussion of course material (including peer writing submissions), both on the days you are a designated discussion leader and on the days that you are not. Please see the participation guidelines attached to the back of this syllabus.

Grading System:

<i>F</i>	<i>D-</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>D+</i>	<i>C-</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>C+</i>	<i>B-</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>B+</i>	<i>A-</i>	<i>A</i>
0-59	60-62	63-66	67-69	70-72	73-76	77-79	80-82	83-86	87-89	90-92	93-100

Office Hours

My office hours are open to all students. I encourage you to meet with me to discuss course material, any concerns you may have about your progress in this class, or strategies for effective studying and writing. If problems arise, either academic or personal, that might jeopardize your performance in this course, you must try to inform me of the problem at the next available office hour. If you wish to dispute a grade, be aware that re-grading may result in a lower grade. If my office hours conflict with your schedule, please ask me about scheduling an appointment at another time.

Documented Disability Accommodations

I strive to make my classroom accessible to everyone. Any student with a documented disability who requires academic accommodations should contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) at 512-471-6259 (voice) or 1-866-329-3986 (video phone). Faculty are not required to provide accommodations without an official accommodation letter from SSD.

Attendance

UT Austin policy requires you to notify me of your pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If you must miss a class or assignment in order to observe a religious holy day, I will give you an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence. If you miss an in-class reflection for a University extracurricular activity, illness, or emergency, it may also be considered an excused absence, and you should discuss with me the possibility of making up the assignment at my office hours. If you miss a lecture, you may consider borrowing notes from a classmate. Although I am always happy to discuss course material with you at my office ours, there is no easy way to make up a lecture; regular class attendance is imperative to success in this course.

Distractions

In order to be fully attentive in class and avoid distracting your classmates, *refrain from using electronic devices during class for purposes other than accessing assigned course material*. If you are found to be doing so, you may lose your privilege to use such devices in our classroom. Using e-readers or a laptop to view assigned pdfs is permitted, but taking notes on paper is a much more effective strategy for active reading. *Turn your phone off and disable wifi unless I explicitly state that accessing the internet is part of a class activity*. Looking material up or sharing ideas online is certainly encouraged after class. If a classmate's use of electronic devices or other behavior becomes distracting to you, politely inform her or him of the problem or please bring it to my attention after class.

Writing Center

Writers are made, not born. Good writers always strive to write better. The Undergraduate Writing Center, located in the [FAC 211](#), phone 471-6222, <http://uwc.utexas.edu> offers individualized assistance to students who want to improve their writing skills. There is no charge, and students may come in on a drop-in or appointment basis.

Academic Integrity

Using the words and ideas of others without giving credit with an appropriate citation is plagiarism and a violation of the University of Texas Honor Code. Whether accidental or intentional, plagiarism will result in a failure of the assignment and could lead to further disciplinary action. *Before the first essay is due, complete the plagiarism tutorial and quiz available on our Canvas site to be sure you understand what plagiarism is and to minimize your risk of committing it*. Please feel free to come talk to me about strategies for effective citation.

Course Schedule

This syllabus represents my current plans. As we go through the semester, these plans may be adjusted to enhance class learning. I will communicate any such changes clearly in class and through Canvas.

Part 1: Grand Narratives

Week 1: Introductions

August 27

Hughes, J. Donald. "Defining Environmental History." In *What is Environmental History*, 1-17. Wiley, 2006.

Corona, Gabriella. "What is Global Environmental History? Conversation With Piero Bevilacqua, Guillermo Castro, Ranjan Chakrabarti, Kobus Du Pisani, John R. McNeill, Donald Worster." *Global Environment 2* (2008): 228-49.

Bayly, C. A., Beckert, Sven, Connelly, Matthew, Hofmeyr, Isabel, Kozol, Wendy, and Seed, Patricia. "AHR Conversation: On Transnational History." *The American Historical Review* 111, no. 5 (2006): 1440-64.

Week 2: Controversies

September 3

McNeill, John Robert. "Global Environmental History: The First 150,000 Years." In *A Companion to Global Environmental History*, edited by John Robert McNeill, and Erin Stewart Mauldin, 3-17. Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley, 2012.

Hughes, J. Donald. "The Ancient World, C. 500 BCE to 500 CE." In *A Companion to Global Environmental History*, edited by John Robert. McNeill, and Erin Stewart. Mauldin, 18-38. Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley, 2012.

Krech, Shepard. "Pleistocene Extinctions." In *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History*, 29-44. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999.

Martin, Paul Schultz. "Models in Collision: Climatic Change Versus Overkill." In *Twilight of the Mammoths: Ice Age Extinctions and the Rewilding of America*, 165-78. Univ. California Press, 2005.

Diamond, Jared. "The Worst Mistake in the History of the Human Race." *Discover* 8, no. 5 (1987): 64-66.

Selections from Diamond, Jared. *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*. New York: Viking, 2005.

Hunt, Terry L., and Carl P. Lipo. "Ecological Catastrophe, Collapse, and the Myth of 'Ecocide' on Rapa Nui (Easter Island)." In *Questioning Collapse: Human Resilience, Ecological Vulnerability, and the Aftermath of Empire*, edited by Patricia Ann McAnany, and Norman Yoffee, 21-45. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Week 3: Geographies*September 8*

Libby, Sörlin, and Warde, "Part 3: Geographies: Are Human and Natural Futures Determined or Chosen?"

Crosby, "Preface to the New Edition," "Prologue," "Pangaea Reconsidered."

September 10

Crosby, "The Norse and the Crusaders," "The Fortunate Isles, Winds"

Week 4: Circulation*September 15*

Crosby, "Within Reach, Beyond Grasp; "Weeds."

McCann, James. "Maize and Grace: History, Corn, and Africa's New Landscapes, 1500-1999." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 43, no. 2 (2001): 246-72.

Carney, Judith. "Landscapes of Technology Transfer: Rice Cultivation and African Continuities." *Technology and Culture* 37, no. 1 (1996): 5-35.

September 17

Crosby, "Animals."

Appuhn, Karl. "Ecologies of Beef: Eighteenth-Century Epizootics and the Environmental History of Early Modern Europe." *Environmental History* 15, no. 2 (2010): 268-87.

White, Sam. "From Globalized Pig Breeds to Capitalist Pigs: A Study in Animal Cultures and Evolutionary History." *Environmental History* 16, no. 1 (2011): 94-120.

Week 5: Agency*September 22*

Crosby, "Ills."

McNeill, J. R. "Yellow Jack and Geopolitics: Environment, Epidemics, and the Struggles for Empire in the American Tropics, 1650-1825." *OAH Magazine of History* 18, no. 3 (2004): 9-13.

Sutter, Paul. "Nature's Agents or Agents of Empire? Entomological Workers and Environmental Change During the Construction of the Panama Canal." *Isis* 98, no. 4 (2007): 724-54.

September 24

Crosby, "New Zealand," "Explanations," "Conclusions."

Part 2: Landscapes and Flows**Week 6: Reading Global Landscapes***September 29***ESSAY 1 DUE.**

Class activity TBA.

October 1

Browse William Cronon's "How to Read a Landscape": <http://www.williamcronon.net/researching/landscapes.htm>.

Lewis, Peirce F. "Axioms for Reading the Landscape: Some Guides to the American Scene." *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays* (1979): 11-32.

Mitchell, Don. "New Axioms for Reading the Landscape: Paying Attention to Political Economy and Social Justice." 29-50. Springer, 2008.

Play a round of <https://geoguessr.com>.

Week 7: Power and Space

October 6

Field trip: Racial Geography Tour with Professor Edmund Gordon. *Meet in front of the [Little Field House](#) at our usual class meeting time.*

October 8

Brown, Kate. "Gridded Lives: Why Kazakhstan and Montana Are Nearly the Same Place." *The American Historical Review* 106, no. 1 (2001): 17-48.

Selections from Scott, James C. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998.

Week 8: Global Cities

October 13

Bestor, Theodore C. "Supply-Side Sushi: Commodity, Market, and the Global City." *American Anthropologist* 103, no. 1 (2001): 76-95.

Selections from Kaika, Maria. *City of Flows: Modernity, Nature, and the City*. Routledge, 2012.

Brownell, E. "Negotiating the New Economic Order of Waste." *Environmental History* 16, no. 2 (2011): 262-89.

October 15

Field trip: Austin Ecology. *Details and reading TBA.*

Week 9: Cultures and Commodities

October 20

Soluri, Introduction, Chapters 1 and 2.

October 22

Soluri, Chapters 3, 4, and 5.

Week 10: Cultures and Commodities, Continued.

October 27

Soluri, Chapters 6, 7, and 8.

October 29

Global Environmental History Roundtable.

Part 3: Knowing the Environment

Week 11: What is Wilderness?

November 3

ESSAY 2 DUE.

Explore the Environment and Society Portal's "Wilderness Babel": <http://www.environmentandsociety.org/exhibitions/wilderness/overview>.

Cronon, William. "The Trouble With Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature." *Environmental History* 1, no. 1 (1996): 7-28.

Guha, Part I: Chapters 1 and 2.

November 5

Guha, Part I: Chapters 3, 4, and Afterward.

Libby, Sörlin, and Warde, "Part 4: "The Environment": How Did the Idea Emerge?"

Week 12: Environmentalisms

November 10

Guha, Part II.

November 12

Libby, Sörlin, and Warde, "Part 8: Diversity: Why Do We Need It, and Can We Conserve It?"

Week 13: People and Planet

November 17

Libby, Sörlin, and Warde, "Part 1: Population: Are We Too Many, or Are We Too Greedy?"

November 19

Libby, Sörlin, and Warde, "Part 7: Climate: How Can We Predict Change?"

Carey, Mark. "The History of Ice: How Glaciers Became an Endangered Species." *Environmental History* 12, no. 3 (2007): 497-527.

Week 14: People and Planet, Continued

November 24

ESSAY 3 DRAFT DUE.

Libby, Sörlin, and Warde, "Part 10: The Anthropocene: How Can We Live in a World Where There Is No Nature Without People?"

Robin, Libby, and Steffen, Will. "History for the Anthropocene." *History Compass* 5, no. 5 (2007): 1694-1719.

November 26

PEER REVIEWS OF ESSAY 3 DUE.

Week 15: History for the Future*December 1*

Selections from Weisman, Alan. *The World Without Us*. New York: Thomas Dunne Books/St. Martin's Press, 2007.

Donlan, C. Josh, et al. "Pleistocene Rewilding: An Optimistic Agenda for Twenty-First Century Conservation." *The American Naturalist* 168, no. 5 (2006): 660-81.

Uekötter, Frank. "What Should We Remember? A Global Poll Among Environmental Historians." *Global Environment* 11 (2014): 184-214.

Selections from Oreskes, Naomi, and Erik M. Conway. *The Collapse of Western Civilization: A View From the Future*. Columbia University Press, 2014.

Nash, Roderick Frazier. "Island Civilization: A Vision for Human Occupancy of Earth in the Fourth Millennium." *Environmental History* 15, no. 3 (2010): 371-80.

*December 3***ESSAY 3 DUE.**