The Conquest of Nature  
His 350L 39350

Instructor: Perrin Selcer  
Office: GAR 0.112  
psselcer@mail.utexas.edu

Office Hours: M 10-11; WF 1-2 or by app.

Course Description
This course explores the ways that state sponsored schemes to improve nature have simultaneously transformed environments and human communities. These schemes include mega-projects like huge dams as well as scientific forestry, plant breeding, and even national parks. We will read exemplary historical studies of national, imperial, and international development programs, paying close attention to metaphors of war and to literal connections with national security; to the ways the conquest of nature has reinforced or altered power relations between and within countries; and to the unintended consequences, both tragic and fortuitous, of attempts to improve nature.

I will give very brief “lectures” most days to provide a historical context for the next class’ readings. The emphasis will be on discussions of the readings and on crafting well written, tightly argued, and insightful responses to the texts.

This is a Writing Flag seminar course built around carefully chosen readings. To improve our writing, we will be editing and responding to each other’s work. You are encouraged to take advantage of the resources provided by the Undergraduate Writing Center: http://www.uwc.utexas.edu.

Grading Policies
Attendance is mandatory. You may miss two classes for any reason without affecting your grade; after that, each absence will result in a 2% reduction in your overall grade. Perfect attendance will be rewarded with a 2% bonus in your overall grade. You must discuss exceptions to this policy for health reasons as soon as the issue occurs.

Reading Response Papers will not be accepted late. Late Project Analysis assignments will be docked a third of a letter grade per day unless you ask for an extension well before the due date.

Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from Services for Students with Disabilities: 471-6259.

University policies on plagiarism and academic dishonesty will be enforced.

Texts

All other readings are in the course packet available at Abel’s Copies, 715 West 23rd St # North; (512) 472-5353.
Assignments and Grades

Participation: 25%
Includes quality of contributions to discussions, participation in small groups, peer-editing, evidence of intellectual engagement, completion of in-class writing exercises, and performance on reading pop quizzes. Does not include attendance (see above under grading policy).

Reading Response Papers: 25%
These are one-page essays analyzing a specific reading. You will write 4 RRPs (one per unit). Students will share their RRPs in groups three. Each Monday one member of the group will bring three copies of his/her RRP to discuss. After three weeks, new groups will be assigned.

Project Analysis Project: 50%
This semester-long project requires you to independently research a development project not covered in the class. This could be a completed project (e.g. the Panama Canal) or a project under construction or in the planning phase (e.g. the Xayaburi Dam on the Mekong). The project includes the following tasks:

*Project Analysis Proposal and Annotated Bibliography: 5% (Due Oct. 3)*
A one page description of the project you propose to analyze. The proposal must describe the basic facts (e.g. time and place, cost and size, objectives, etc.) and explain what makes it a particularly interesting and important subject of analysis in the context of this course. The annotated bibliography describes the key sources you will use to analyze the project. These must include at least five scholarly studies, and can also include documentaries, newspaper and magazine articles, project reports, speeches, etc. After the bibliographic citation, two sentences should describe the content and usefulness of the source.

*Stakeholders Analysis: 10% (Due Oct. 31)*
This project asks you to identify the major groups that have a stake in the project and analyze their interests. This is an opportunity to be creative. For example, you could create posters or design a web page presenting key arguments of each stakeholder group; you could write a short skit dramatizing a debate between the stakeholders; or you could write a policy memo for a politician or NGO that has to formulate a position on the project.

*Project Presentation: 15% (Last 2 weeks of class)*
During the last few two weeks of the semester, students will brief the class on their project. This presentation must include visual aids (e.g. a PowerPoint presentation). It should resemble a briefing given to decision-makers at a development agency or to an interest group that would be impacted by the project, and must describe the project’s political, social, economic and ecological contexts, as well as assess costs and benefits.

*Project Analysis Paper: 20% (Rough draft Nov. 19, Final draft, Dec. 14th by 7pm)*
The capstone of the project, this 10-12 page paper places the development project in historical context—paying attention to political, social, economic, and ecological factors—and assess its costs and benefits. It will be modeled on analyses we read in class.
Unit 1: Narratives and State Power

Week 1

Aug. 29: Class orientation

Week 2

Sep. 3: Labor Day

Sep. 5: Wars against Nature and Thin Simplifications

Week 3

Sep. 10: The Good, the Bad, and the Complex

Sep. 12: A Force of Nature

Unit 2: The Imperial Estate

Week 4

Sep. 17: The Garden of Eden

Sep. 19: Nature and Empire
*Preliminary (ungraded, one paragraph) project analysis proposal due.*
Drayton, excerpts from “Part II: Nature and Empire,” 221-238, 248-274.
Week 5

**Sep. 24: Imperialism of Nature**

**Sep. 26: Constructing Imperial Wilderness**
“Convention Relative to the Preservation of Fauna and Flora in their Natural State,” 1933.

Week 6

**Oct. 1: Large Scale Colonial Development Schemes**

**Oct. 3: Research Project Workshop**
Proposal and annotated bibliography for project analysis due.

**Unit 3: Transformation, Domination, Conservation**

Week 7

**Oct. 8: Capitalist Transformation I**

**Oct. 10: Capitalist Transformation II**

Week 8

**Oct. 15: Conservation**
Oct. 17: Dominating Land and People

Week 9

Oct. 22: The Green Revolution
Mrs. Aase Lionaes, Nobel Peace Prize Award Ceremony Speech, 1970 and Norman Borlaug Acceptance Speech.

Oct. 24: Creating Legible Lands

Unit 4: Hydropower

Week 10

Oct. 29: Remaking the River, Making the State

Oct. 31: Research Project Workshop II
Stakeholders Analysis due.

Week 11

Nov. 5: The Organic Machine

Nov. 7: Despotic Power
Week 12

**Nov. 12: Cold War Calculations**
“Address by President Gamal Abdel Nasser at the Popular Rally held by the Arab Socialist Union in Aswan, February 18, 1965 and attended by President El Habib Bourguiba,” 3-21.

**Nov. 14: Transnational Resistance**

Week 13

**Nov. 19: Perfect Order**
Rough drafts of Project Analysis papers due.
In-class documentary, Stephen Lansing and Andre Singer, *The Goddess and the Computer*.

**Nov. 21: Sustainable Development**
The Rio Declaration and summary of Agenda 21

**Class Presentations**

Week 14

**Nov. 26: Student Presentations**

**Nov. 28: Student Presentations**

Week 15

**Dec. 3: Student Presentations**

**Dec. 5: Student Presentations**

**Final Date (Final Draft of Project Analysis Paper Due): Fri., Dec. 14, 7pm**