

# HTY 599-1

## Global Environmental History

University of Maine  
Spring 2014



Tuesdays  
6:00 – 8:00 pm  
Stevens Hall 175

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### Course description

Environmental history is an interdisciplinary field that studies the relationship between humans and physical environments in the past. This course will introduce students to the rapidly expanding literature in global environmental history. Of course, the very word “global” is ambiguous, and together we will discuss and explore its many valences. We will look at case studies set in Europe, Africa, Asia, South America, and the Arctic, as well as the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian Oceans. We will also consider comparative and international case studies—for after all, animals, plants, and other organisms don’t always pay human borders much heed. Through engagement with cutting-edge research on climate, evolution, cities, disease, toxicity, and war, as well as the more traditional topics of forests, fishing, rivers, and agriculture, we will encounter the wide array of sources and methodologies that environmental historians use, drawn from the physical and biological sciences as well as the social sciences and humanities. Indeed, the questions and approaches of environmental history can yield fresh perspectives on issues fundamental to our discipline. To that end, the course is structured around several key themes that engage all practitioners of history: scale, frame, and agency.

### Course objectives

By the end of this course, you will be able:

- 🌐 To distinguish between and to critique different conceptual strategies for non-national history writing
- 🌐 To judge when and how it might be useful or necessary to apply different scales, frames, and standards of agency when undertaking historical research
- 🌐 To assess the contributions that the questions, methodologies, and approaches of environmental history make to the discipline of history
- 🌐 To refine your scholarly prose and skills of critical analysis, synthesis, and evaluation through the composition of short essays
- 🌐 To participate, through the use of various social media platforms, in current discussions and exchanges among environmental historians worldwide.

## Course organization

As is usual in graduate seminars, we will use our weekly time together to discuss and analyze the readings assigned for each week. You should bring a copy of all readings—preferably in hard copy, for ease of perusal—to each class, as well as whatever notes you have made on and questions you had about the readings. Students will take turns leading discussions, with the schedule to be agreed upon at our first meeting.

## Course readings

The required books for the course are:

David Biggs, *Quagmire: Nation-Building and Nature in the Mekong Delta*

Julie Cruikshank, *Do Glaciers Listen? Local Knowledge, Colonial Encounters, and Social Imagination*

Gregory T. Cushman, *Guano and the Opening of the Pacific World: A Global Ecological History*

W. Jeffrey Bolster, *The Mortal Sea: Fishing the Atlantic in the Age of Sail*

Richard H. Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600-1860*

J. Donald Hughes, *An Environmental History of the World: Humankind's Changing Role in the Community of Life*. 2nd edition

J.R. McNeill, *Mosquito Empires: Ecology and War in the Greater Caribbean, 1620-1914*

Harold L. Platt, *Shock Cities: The Environmental Transformation and Reform of Manchester and Chicago*

Joachim Radkau, *Nature and Power: A Global History of the Environment*

Edmund Russell, *Evolutionary History: Uniting History and Biology to Understand Life on Earth*

Brett L. Walker, *Toxic Archipelago: A History of Industrial Disease in Japan*

Sam White, *The Climate of Rebellion in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire*

It is also recommended, though not required, that you purchase and read J. Donald Hughes' *What is Environmental History?* early in the semester.

All of these titles, except *Do Glaciers Listen?*, are available at the campus bookstore. You may prefer to source your copies through the usual online purveyors (Amazon, Abebooks, etc.) instead. All books have also been put on hard copy or e-reserve at Fogler Library.

You will be required to read at least one article per week in addition to the main text, as denoted in the reading schedule below. These articles will be made available in PDF form on the Blackboard course website.

A note about reading: This course has a fairly heavy reading load. You are not expected to read every word of every book. You do need to come to class prepared to discuss the thesis and main arguments of each book, its historiographical context and proposed contributions to the literature, its methodological approaches, and its use and deployment of evidence and source material. You must also have prepared some specific comments and questions to bolster our discussion: points of clarification or contention, points of comparison or contrast with other readings, comments on the (in)utility of the author's theoretical and methodological choices, assessments of the overall success of the book's arguments, and so on.

## Course evaluation

Your final grade will be determined as follows:

Participation (in and out of class)	50%
Critical papers	50% (12.5% x 4)

In addition to the preparation for each class outlined above, you are also expected to do the following things as part of your **participation** in this class:

- ✓ Attend every class, unless you have notified me otherwise.
- ✓ Lead two class discussions. Prior to class, you should prepare an agenda or outline for the discussion, so that you have a plan for how to tackle important themes and questions that the book and article(s) raise. During the class, you will moderate and facilitate the discussion. As part of your preparation for assuming this role, you should also skim/read additional relevant material to enhance your leadership of the discussion. I can help you identify suitable readings if need be.
- ✓ No more than 24 hours after each class, write a short reflection on the discussion and post it to the course discussion forum on Blackboard, under the appropriate week's heading. Your reflection could take any (or none) of the following as prompt: What aspects of the discussion did you find most interesting or illuminating? What things did you wish we could have had (more) time to address? How did the discussion enhance your appreciation of other readings in the course, or your growing knowledge about the corpus of environmental history? You may reply to other people's reflections in your own post, but the bulk of it should consist of your own thoughts. Subsequent online discussion is encouraged, but not mandatory.
- ✓ Create an account on Twitter, if you do not already have one, and sign on at least once a week—preferably more often—to look at the tweets tagged with the course hashtag (#umhty599) and with the general hashtag used to denote items of relevance to environmental history (#envhist). You should follow me (@TinaAdcock) and each other as well. I will be using the course hashtag throughout the term to flag material of interest to our discussions, and I hope that you will do so as well. There is a large community of environmental historians active on Twitter. You are expected to follow, and participate, if you like, in their discussions and exchanges, and by this means enter into contact with historians across the globe (albeit concentrated in Europe and North America).
- ✓ Write and upload a blog post of 750-1000 words, with one or two accompanying images, to the course blog on Blackboard by **Friday, May 9** (i.e. the end of the term). The post can be written on any topic or theme connected with the course. You could expand your analysis of a particular reading or readings, reflect on what you have learned about global history or environmental history or both, suggest how your experience in the course may alter your approach to your own research or to your engagement with environmental issues, or something entirely different. I hope that you will be willing to publish your post on some appropriate public blog, and I will introduce you via email to blog moderators, if need be.

Additional note on participation: On **Saturday, April 26**, the History Department is co-hosting a one-day conference at the Darling Marine Center in Walpole. The conference takes as its inspiration W. Jeffrey Bolster's *The Mortal Sea*, which we are discussing on March 26. The day includes a roundtable discussion of the book, in which our own Dick Judd is taking part, and a response by Bolster. I will be attending, and I strongly encourage all of you to do so as well.

In the course of the term, you will also write 4 short **critical papers** analyzing and synthesizing the readings in each course unit. The prompts for the papers, which I will distribute separately, will ask you to think broadly and imaginatively about themes central to

the course: what you consider best choices and practices for writing global environmental histories; the merits and demerits of different scales of analysis; how the selection of geographical frame shapes and alters the historical questions we ask and narratives we write; and how agency might usefully (though not uncontroversially) be extended to non-human beings and forces in our analyses.

Your papers should be submitted to me as a PDF document via email by midnight on the following Fridays: **February 14, March 7, April 11, and May 9**. Please include your name, the date, the course number, and some kind of descriptive title on the first page. A separate title page is not necessary. Please also number the pages of the assignment. Assignments must be word-processed, using standard 1-inch margins, at least 1.5-inch spacing, and 12-point font. You can use informal methods of citation (in-line page numbers, and author's surname/short title if necessary) as long as the referent is clearly identifiable. If you prefer, you may use Chicago style for footnotes/endnotes. A works cited page is not necessary, as you will only be using and citing assigned readings in these papers.

Sloppiness with regard to correct spelling and grammar is not acceptable at the graduate level. Essays that contain a high number of such errors or that have obviously not been proofread will be returned to be corrected and resubmitted before I mark their content.

A late assignment will have 5% of its final mark subtracted for each day it is late. Extensions must be secured at least 72 hours in advance, and will only be granted in exceptional circumstances. The usual standards of academic honesty in force at the University of Maine apply.

### **Miscellaneous matters**

If you have a disability for which you would like to request an accommodation, please contact Ann Smith, the Director of Disability Support Services, at [ann.smith@umit.maine.edu](mailto:ann.smith@umit.maine.edu) or 581-2319 as early as possible in the term. More information about accommodations for disabilities may be found at this website: <http://umaine.edu/disability/>

In the event of an extended disruption of normal classroom activities, the format for this course may be modified to enable its completion within its programmed time frame. In that event, you will be provided an addendum to the syllabus that will supersede this version.

I may make minor changes to the syllabus during the term. I will notify you of whatever alterations are made. You will always be able to find the most recent version of the syllabus on the course's Blackboard site.

### **Course schedule: Topics, readings, and due dates**

#### 1. Introduction (January 14)

Jane Carruthers, "Environmental History for an Emerging World," *Conservation and Society* 11:3 (2013): 16-18.

Alan MacEachern, "The People Test": <http://niche-canada.org/2013/12/29/the-people-test/>  
*Exploring Environmental History* podcast #57: Events in the collective environmental memory of humanity: <http://www.eh-resources.org/podcast/podcast.html>

## I. WRITING GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY

### 2. Environmental history + global history = ? (January 21)

Richard Grove, "Environmental History," in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, ed. Peter Burke (2001), 261-82.

Richard Grove and Vinita Damodaran, "Imperialism and Environmental Change: Unearthing the Origins and Evolution of Global Environmental History," in *Nature's End: History and the Environment*, eds. Sverker Sörlin and Paul Warde (2011), 23-49.

Paul Sutter, "What Can U.S. Environmental Historians Learn from Non-U.S. Environmental Historiography?" *Environmental History* 8:1 (2003): 109-29.

Joseph E. Taylor, III, "Boundary Terminology," *Environmental History* 13:3 (2008): 454-81.

Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses," *Critical Inquiry* 35:2 (2009): 197-222.

Optional: James C. Scott, "Introduction" and "Nature and Space" in *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (1997), 1-52.

### 3. Global environmental history: take one (January 28)

J. Donald Hughes, *An Environmental History of the World* (2009, 2nd ed.)

AHR *Conversation*: "How Size Matters: The Question of Scale in History," *American Historical Review* 118:5 (2013): 1431-72.

### 4. Global environmental history: take two (February 4)

Joachim Radkau, *Nature and Power* (2008)

Special issue of *Social Science History* 37:3 (2013) on Global Environmental History. Read the opening essay (Schwartz, "Scaling Up") and one other essay of your choice. Skim the rest if you have time.

Due date for essay #1: Friday, February 14

## II. SCALE

### 5. Empire (February 11)

Richard Grove, *Green Imperialism* (1995)

Alfred W. Crosby, "Ecological Imperialism: The Overseas Migration of Western Europeans as a Biological Phenomenon," in *The Ends of the Earth: Perspectives on Modern Environmental History*, ed. Donald Worster (1988), 103-117.

### 6. City (February 18)

Harold L. Platt, *Shock Cities* (2005)

Kate Brown, "Gridded Lives: Why Kazakhstan and Montana Are Nearly the Same Place," *American Historical Review* 106:1 (2001): 17-48.

### 7. Nation (February 25)

David Biggs, *Quagmire* (2010)

Sara B. Pritchard, "Prologue" and "Introduction: Nature, Technology, and History," in *Confluence: The Nature of Technology and the Remaking of the Rhône* (2011), xi-xvii and 1-27.

Due date for essay #2: Friday, March 7

\*\*\*SPRING BREAK\*\*\*

### III. FRAME: The Atlantic and Pacific worlds

8. The south Atlantic world (March 18)

J.R. McNeill, *Mosquito Empires* (2010)

Judith Carney, "The African Origins of Carolina Rice Culture," *Ecumene* 7:2 (2000): 125-49.

9. The north Atlantic world (March 25)

W. Jeffrey Bolster, *The Mortal Sea* (2012)

*Environmental History* 18:1 (2013), special forum on marine environmental history. Read the introduction (Chiarappa and McKenzie, "New Directions") and one other essay of your choice. Skim through the other articles.

10. The Pacific world (April 1)

Gregory T. Cushman, *Guano and the Opening of the Pacific World* (2013)

J.R. McNeill, "Of Rats and Men: A Synoptic Environmental History of the Island Pacific," *Journal of World History* 5:2 (1994): 299-349.

Due date for essay #3: Friday, April 11

### IV. AGENCY

11. Toxic bodies (April 8)

Brett Walker, *Toxic Archipelago* (2009)

Gabrielle Hecht, "Introduction: The Power of Nuclear Things," in *Being Nuclear: Africans and the Global Uranium Trade* (2012), 1-46

12. Non-human agency: fire and ice (April 15)

Julie Cruikshank, *Do Glaciers Listen?* (2005)

Stephen J. Pyne, *World Fire: The Culture of Fire on Earth* (1995), 3-26, 299-327.

Linda Nash, "The Agency of Nature or the Nature of Agency?" *Environmental History* 10:1 (2005): 67-69.

13. Climate (April 22)

Sam White, *The Climate of Rebellion in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (2011)

Mike Davis, "The Origin of the Third World," *Antipode* 32:1 (2000): 48-89.

14. Evolution (April 29)

Edmund Russell, *Evolutionary History* (2011)

Stephen Bocking, "Nature's Stories? Pursuing Science in Environmental History," in *Method and Meaning in Canadian Environmental History*, eds. Alan MacEachern and William J. Turkel (2009), 294-310.

Optional: H-Environment Roundtable Reviews 2:3 (2012) on *Evolutionary History*.

Due date for essay #4: Friday, May 9

Blog post due no later than: Friday, May 9