

HIST 132
Global Environmental History
Simon Fraser University
Spring 2017



Lectures: Tuesdays 10:30–12:20 pm, SECB 1012
Tutorials: Tuesdays 1:30–2:20 pm, RCB 6122; 2:30–3:20 pm, RCB 8104;
3:30–4:20 pm, AQ 2120
Canvas: <https://canvas.sfu.ca/courses/31202>

Instructor: Dr. Tina Adcock (tina.adcock@sfu.ca)
Office hours: Tuesday 12:30–1:30 pm & Wednesdays 11:00 am–12:00 pm, AQ 6236

Teaching Assistant: Leah Wiener (contact via Canvas)
Office hours: Tuesdays 4:30–5:30 pm and by appointment, AQ 6214D

Course description

Environmental history examines the reciprocal relationships between humans and the non-human world in the past. It brings nature into the study of history, and human culture into the study of nature. This course spans thousands of years of history, from the first human use of fire to the human-induced melting of ice caps and glaciers today. It will ask you to think critically about historical events on the very largest of scales (the planetary), the very smallest of scales (the microbial), and most other scales in between. Finally, it will ask you to consider how non-human actors and factors—including plants, animals, germs, climate, and topography—have shaped the course of human history, and continue to do so today. We will use a handful of specific historical agents and objects to explore how different polities, economies, and cultures have sought to control, exploit, and understand the non-human world, and to understand the accidental as well as the deliberate consequences of such efforts. We'll draw on local case studies to ground our investigations in specific times and places, but we'll also practice placing key environmental historical events and trends in comparative and transnational contexts.

Course objectives

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

- To explain how human and non-human actors and factors have altered local, transnational, and global environments over time, and with what consequences
- To identify some key questions, sources, and approaches that environmental historians use to decipher the past

- To grapple with the interpretive importance of scale and space in global environmental history, especially with respect to historical agency and causality
- To draw connections between historical and contemporary environmental issues
- To practice critically reading and analyzing primary and secondary historical sources in oral and written forms.

Course readings

There are no required texts for this course. All readings are available on, or linked to from the course's Canvas website. Assigned readings should be completed before lecture and tutorial on Tuesdays. The success of our meetings depends on everyone having done the readings.

Course evaluation

Your final grade will be determined as follows:

Participation	15%
Mini-essays	25%
Global-environmental-history- in-an-object book review:	
Essay	25%
Oral presentation	5%
Final exam	30%

Your **participation** will enhance your enjoyment of this course, contribute to a dynamic and mutually profitable classroom environment, and greatly increase your understanding and retention of the material. You should plan to attend every lecture and tutorial. Leah will take attendance weekly in tutorials. Please come to tutorial with the readings in hand or with the files on your laptop or tablet, having read them carefully and thoughtfully.

We expect you to be ready to reflect critically on lectures, readings, and primary sources in written and spoken form, to listen to your peers and engage with their viewpoints, and to practice expressing your ideas and arguments clearly, concisely, and convincingly. Participation grades will be based on your tutorial attendance and preparedness, active participation in large and small group discussions, and an end-of-term self-evaluation of your contributions to lectures and tutorials.

If you have to be absent from a lecture or tutorial unexpectedly, please contact me (if it's a lecture) or Leah (if it's a tutorial) and let us know. If you know in advance that you will have to miss a meeting due to religious observances/practices or another such conflict (e.g. athletic competitions, interviews for professional programs), please let me know as soon as possible.

Course assignments & examinations

Research demonstrates that writing regularly has a number of benefits. In university-level courses, it helps you to engage actively with the ideas and subject matter you encounter, and to find your own language for expressing and discussing important concepts. Accordingly, you will write three **mini-essays** this term of **250–500 words each**. In each mini-essay, you should convincingly connect material from lectures or assigned reading(s) on one of the course's topics to a popular article or blog post that analyzes the same, or a similar topic from a different perspective, either historical or contemporary. I will provide further details on this set of assignments in a separate handout.

Your mini-essays should be submitted according to the following schedule:

- First mini-essay (on a topic from Weeks 2–4): **Tuesday, January 31**
- Second mini-essay (on a topic from Weeks 5–8): **Tuesday, March 7**
- Third mini-essay (on a topic from Weeks 9–11): **Tuesday, March 28**

Leah will provide detailed comments on the first two mini-essays. Your two strongest mini-essays will each count for **10%** of your overall course grade; your weakest mini-essay will only count for **5%**. If you miss handing in one mini-essay, you will receive a zero for **5%** of your overall course grade. Failing to hand in two or three mini-essays will result in a zero for **10%** of your overall course grade for each one that is missing.

For your major assignment in this course, you will **review a book** that tells **the global environmental history of a specific object** (whether animal, vegetable, or mineral, as the old game goes). I will provide a list of 10-15 suggested books for you to choose from; it may be possible for you to choose a different book, but please check with me before doing so. Your review should succinctly describe the book's thesis and key arguments, and assess the extent to which it successfully tells a global environmental historical narrative, through its choice of case studies and engagement with sources, methods, and approaches. Once again, I will provide further details on this assignment in a separate handout. The paper should be **6–8 pages long** and will be due on **Tuesday, April 4**. You will also distill your paper into a **5-minute talk**, which you will present to your peers in tutorial near the end of the term.

This course will conclude with a **closed-book final examination**, which will consist of a mix of short-answer and essay questions. These will test your comprehension and mastery of course material, and will ask you to synthesize this material in order to make broad arguments about the course's overarching themes and approaches. You may use any course materials to answer the questions, including readings, lecture notes, excerpts from primary sources, video clips or films, and so on. The examination will take place at **8:30–11:30 am** on **Wednesday, April 19**.

Policies regarding assignments

All assignments are due by 9:00 am. You must save your assignment as a PDF document and submit it using the Canvas website. Please include your name, the date, 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. All assignments must be word-processed, using standard 1-inch margins, double-spacing, and 12-point font. Please use Chicago style (notes and bibliography) for footnotes or endnotes, and for lists of works cited. If you are not familiar with this style of citation, here is a quick general guide:

http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html

A late assignment will have **5%** of its final mark subtracted for each day it is late, up to a maximum of **four days** or **20%**. After that point, assignments will not be accepted. Extensions must be requested at least 72 hours in advance of an assignment's due date. Please do not request an extension unless serious personal or medical circumstances warrant one.

Academic honesty

By enrolling in classes at SFU, you have consented to a student contract that includes a commitment to academic honesty:

<http://www.sfu.ca/students/calendar/2017/spring/fees-and-regulations/student-contract/academic-honesty.html>

It is your responsibility to ensure that you understand what constitutes academic dishonesty, which includes but is not limited to plagiarism. This guide clarifies what actions are considered academically honest and dishonest at SFU:

<http://www.sfu.ca/students/academicintegrity/resources/academichonestyguide.html>

Communication policies

Leah and I normally respond to messages within 24 hours, except on weekends and holidays.

- To contact Dr. Adcock, please use her SFU email address: tina.adcock@sfu.ca.
- To contact Leah, please use the messaging feature on Canvas. Emails sent to her SFU address are liable to get lost in her inbox.

Classroom etiquette

Please arrive to class in a timely fashion to avoid disrupting our learning environment. Please also do not leave the room during class unless it is absolutely, physically unavoidable.

Please turn your cell phones to silent and refrain from using them during class. Feel free to use your laptop, tablet, or netbook to take notes or look up things, but please don't use such devices in ways (Facebook, YouTube, etc) that will disrupt the attention of other students around you. A little courtesy toward your classmates and me goes a long way.

I may make changes to the syllabus during the term. I will notify you if I do. You will always be able to find the most recent version of the syllabus on the course's Canvas website.

Course schedule: Topics, readings, and due dates

Week 1—Global environmental history: an introduction

Meeting: Tuesday January 10
 Readings: No assigned readings this week.

Week 2—Fire

Meeting: Tuesday January 17
 Readings: Stephen J. Pyne, "Firestick History; or, How to Set the World on Fire" [excerpt], in *World Fire: The Culture of Fire on Earth* (1995), 11-16, 23-26
 Stephen J. Pyne, "Firestick Farmer: Profile of a Pyrophile," in *Burning Bush: A Fire History of Australia* (1998), 85-104
 Polly Wiessner and Lee J. Siegel, "Firelight Talk of the Kalahari Bushmen: Did Tales Told Over Fires Aid Our Cultural and Social Evolution?" *University of Utah News Center*, 22 September 2014:
http://archive.uneews.utah.edu/news_releases/firelight-talk-of-the-kalahari-bushmen/

Week 3—Water

Meeting: Tuesday January 24
 Readings: Daniel Hillel, "Waters of Life" and "Ancient Civilizations" [excerpts], in *Rivers of Eden: The Struggle for Water and the Quest for Peace in the Middle East* (1994),

20-23, 28-33, 41-63

J. Donald Hughes, "Sustainable Agriculture in Ancient Egypt," *Agricultural History* 66.2 (1992): 12-22

Jared Diamond, "The Erosion of Civilization," *Los Angeles Times*, 15 June 2003:
<http://articles.latimes.com/2003/jun/15/opinion/op-diamond15>

Week 4—Wood

Meeting: Tuesday January 31

Readings: Michael Williams, "Dark ages and dark areas: global deforestation in the deep past," *Journal of Historical Geography* 26.1 (2000): 28-46
 J. Donald Hughes, "Deforestation, Overgrazing, and Erosion," in *Environmental Problems of the Ancient Greeks and Romans*, 2nd ed. (2014): 68-87
 Maddie Stone, "Central European Forests Are Regrowing After the Breakup of the USSR," *Gizmodo*, 15 July 2015:
<http://gizmodo.com/eastern-europe-forests-are-red2growing-after-the-breakup-1718094740>

***First mini-essay due**

Week 5—*Yersinia pestis* & the Little Ice Age: The micro and the macro

Meeting: Tuesday February 7

Readings: Sam White, "Climate Change in Global Environmental History," in J.R. McNeill and Erin Stewart Mauldin, eds., *A Companion to Global Environmental History* (2012), 394-410
 Richard Hoffman, "The Black Death," in *An Environmental History of Medieval Europe* (2014), 289-98
 John L. Brooke, "The Little Ice Age and the Black Death," in *Climate Change and the Course of Global History: A Rough Journey* (2014), 380-90
 "A Conversation with Bruce Campbell," *HistoricalClimatology.com*, 29 October 2016: <http://www.historicalclimatology.com/interviews/a-conversation-with-bruce-campbell>

Reading Week—No meeting Tuesday February 14

Week 6—Cattle, sheep, horses: The Columbian Exchange

Meeting: Tuesday February 21

Readings etc: John Green, "The Columbian Exchange" (2012):
<https://youtu.be/HQPA5oNpfM4>
 Megan Gambino, "Alfred W. Crosby on the Columbian Exchange,"
Smithsonian.com, 4 October 2011:
<http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/alfred-w-crosby-on-the-columbian-exchange-98116477/>

One of the following articles:

- a) On sheep: Elinor Melville, "Environmental and Social Change in the Valle del Mezquital, Mexico, 1521-1600," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 32.1 (1990): 24-53

or

- b) On cattle: León García Garagarza, “The Year the People Turned Into Cattle: The End of the World in New Spain, 1558,” in Martha Few and Zeb Tortorici, eds., *Centering Animals in Latin American History* (2013), 31-61
or
- c) On horses: Pekka Hämäläinen, “The Politics of Grass: European Expansion, Ecological Change, and Indigenous Power in the Southwest Borderlands,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 67.2 (2010): 173-208

Week 7—Whale oil & pemmican: Early modern energy regimes

Meeting: Tuesday February 28

Readings: George Colpitts, “Changing Food Energy Regimes in the Northern Fur Trade, 1760-1790,” in *Pemmican Empire: Food, Trade, and the Last Bison Hunts in the North American Plains* (2015), 19-57
 Ed Yong, “American Whalers Killed Way More Than Just Whales,” *The Atlantic*, 19 September 2016:
<http://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2016/09/the-collateral-damage-of-americas-whaling-fleets/500492/>
 Ashley Ahern, “What These Dead Whalers Can Tell Us About Climate Change,” Kuow.org, 24 February 2016: <http://kuow.org/post/what-these-dead-whalers-tell-us-about-climate-change>

Week 8—Mosquitoes

Meeting: Tuesday March 7

Readings: J.R. McNeill, “Yellow Jack and Geopolitics: Environment, Epidemics, and the Struggles for Empire in the American Tropics, 1640-1830,” in Alf Hornborg et al., *Rethinking Environmental History: World-System History and Global Environmental Change* (2007), 199-217
 J.R. McNeill, “Revolutionary Mosquitoes of the Atlantic World: Malaria and Independence in the United States of America,” in Paolo Squatriti, ed., *Natures Past: The Environment and Human History* (2007), 145-171
 Anna Maria Barry-Jester, “Small Island, Big Experiment,” *FiveThirtyEight Science* (2016): <http://fivethirtyeight.com/features/zika-mosquito-florida-vote/>

***Second mini-essay due**

Week 9—Tambora, 1816: The Year Without a Summer

Meeting: Tuesday March 14

Readings etc: Gillen D’Arcy Wood, “The Volcano That Shrouded the Earth and Gave Birth to a Monster,” *Nautilus*, 31 December 2015:
<http://nautil.us/issue/31/stress/the-volcano-that-shrouded-the-earth-and-gave-birth-to-a-monster>
 Sean Munger, “Volcano,” *Second Decade* (podcast), 12 December 2016:
<https://seconddecade.net/2016/12/12/episode-7-volcano/>
 Gillen D’Arcy Wood, “The Seven Sorrows of Yunnan,” in *Tambora: The Eruption That Changed the World* (2014), 97-120

Week 10—Guano

Meeting: Tuesday March 21

- Readings:* Shawn William Miller, "Guano Happened," in *An Environmental History of Latin America* (2007), 147-55
 Gregory Rosenthal, "Life and Labor in a Seabird Colony: Hawaiian Guano Workers, 1857-70," *Environmental History* 17.4 (2012): 744-82
 Matthew Wills, "Are We Entering a New Golden Age of Guano?" *JSTOR Daily*, 4 May 2016: <http://daily.jstor.org/golden-age-of-guano/>

Week 11—Ice

Meeting: Tuesday March 28

- Readings:* Mark Carey, "The History of Ice: How Glaciers Became an Endangered Species," *Environmental History* 12.3 (2007): 497-527
 Quirin Shiermeier, "180,000 forgotten photos reveal the future of Greenland's ice," *Nature News*, 27 July 2016:
<http://www.nature.com/news/180-000-forgotten-photos-reveal-the-future-of-greenland-s-ice-1.20335>
 Victoria Gill, "Endangered glaciers: Alpine ice begins Antarctic voyage," *BBC News*, 5 September 2016:
<http://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-37245768>

***Third mini-essay due**

Week 12—Wrap-up & review

Meeting: Tuesday April 4

***Global-environmental-history-in-an-object book review due**

Final examination: Wednesday, April 19, 8:30–11:30 am, location TBA