“Environmental history is, among other things, a lengthy account of human beings imagining themselves into a serious pickle.”

-- Elliott West, *The Contested Plains*

**Overview**
Elliot West provides one definition of environmental history. Here is another: environmental history is the study of the relationship between society and the rest of nature over time. This course will introduce you to some of the key works and themes in the field as well as expose you to some promising new work in this area of historical scholarship. Environmental history is an interdisciplinary endeavor. Because of this, we will read works by authors trained as geographers, historians, and ecologists.

After discussing the history of the sub-field and its distinctive approach to society-environment relations, we will read a number of classic and new works on the subject. Along the way, we will examine the methods, questions, and writing styles of practitioners in the field. More than most scholars, environmental historians have sought to reach academic and public audiences simultaneously with their work. We will weigh the opportunities and pitfalls of such an approach as we discuss each text.

This course is not a history of environmentalism. *Environmentalism* is a social movement originating in the 1960s that has varied greatly from country to country. *Environmental history* is the study of the historical relationship between people and the environment. Attention to political movements such as environmentalism is but one facet of this field. However, since I imagine many of you are interested in the movement, we will devote time in the middle of the course to the growth of environmentalism (and anti-environmentalism) in the United States and the legacy of the ‘environmental era’ in this nation and other industrial/post-industrial democracies.

In most of geography, the academic ‘product’ is an article or chapter in an edited volume. In much of historical geography, and in the interdisciplinary sub-field of environmental history, the ‘product’ is a book. Moreover, most of these books are narratives: *stories* about the relationship between
people and the environment. For those of you new to environmental history, this will seem very unusual. In this course will also discuss the authors’ narrative strategies and the strengths and weaknesses of this form of environmental writing.

Evaluation
20% Class participation (includes attendance and short presentations)
30% Two short essays
   • Book review
   • Comparing the Great Famine in Ireland, 1846-49 and Great Famine in China, 1958-1962.
40% Final seminar paper
10% In-class presentation based on final seminar paper

Class Participation:
Students are expected to attend all classes and come ready to participate in class discussions. As many of you know from TAing undergraduate discussion sections, grading participation is a difficult matter. I expect students to read the course texts critically, to develop questions and comments based on those readings, and to be willing to listen to and wrestle with other students’ views.

Each of you will also be expected to give a brief (ten minutes max) introduction to the week’s readings at some point in the course in which you note the key points in the texts and offer some questions and comments to help initiate the discussion.

Seminar Papers
The major requirement for the course is a 15-20 page seminar paper on a topic of your choosing. You might select a particular facet of environmental history to examine in more detail (such as urban environmental history or landscape and disease) or produce a short research paper using primary sources. If you choose the first option, you must develop an argument and critically evaluate the sources you use. I do not want a cursory literature review.

You will also give a 10-15-minute presentation to the class based on this topic. Since the presentations are scheduled before the final paper is due, this will be an opportunity to ‘test run’ your ideas and solicit feedback from myself and the rest of the class.

Books to Purchase/Check-Out from Library


Also…


Or…


**Schedule, Topics, and Readings**

**August 30th - Introduction: What is Environmental History?**


• “Foreword: Environmental History Comes of Age” and “Land of Lincoln”


• Just read p. 94-99.

**Themes in Environmental History (Part I)**

**September 6th - Environmental History of the Modern World**


• Skim. Focus especially on the first 4-5 “turning points.”


**September 13th - Biological Exchange and the Nature of Conquest**


**September 20th - Famine and Colonialism**


**Histories of Environmental Reform and Management (three weeks)**

**September 27th - Environmental Governance and the Environmental Management State**


**October 4th - Postwar Environmentalism**


* Book review due. Email it to me. *

**October 11th - Comparing Environmentalisms**


Or

Themes in Environmental History (Part II)

October 18th - Environmental History and American History


Read these chapters:

- “Foreword: Environmental History Comes of Age” and “Land of Lincoln”
  - Skim. You’ve read these chapters already, but reread to refresh your memories about Fiege’s purpose and approach in this book.
- King Cotton
- The Nature of Gettysburg
- The Road to *Brown v. Board*
- Paths that Beckon
  - Skim this chapter, too. But consider what other “paths” might beckon. What other aspects of American history, or other nations’ histories for that matter, should geographers and historians examine with an environmental history lens?

- *Also, I will assign each of you one additional chapter to read.*

October 25th - War and the Environment

* Chapter by Richard Tucker or J.R. McNeill (Cold War) on war and environmental history. *


November 1st - Urban Environmental History


November 8th - Socialist Natures


November 15th - Toxic Troubles


November 18th (Friday)
** Critical analysis of famines in Ireland and China. Email it to me. **

November 29th
** No Class. Work on presentations and final papers. 

December 6th - Final Paper Presentations

** Final Paper Due **
Friday, December 16, 5:00pm
(email them to me)