

GEO 754
Seminar in Environmental History
 Fall 2016

Bob Wilson
 Department of Geography

Tuesdays, 5:00-7:45 pm
 Eggers 155

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 or by appointment.

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“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

- Dikötter, Frank. *Mao's Great Famine: The History of China's Most Devastating Catastrophe, 1958-1962*. New York: Walker & Company, 2011.
- Fiege, Mark. *The Republic of Nature: An Environmental History of the United States*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012.
- McNeill, J. R., and Peter Engelke. *The Great Acceleration: An Environmental History of the Anthropocene since 1945*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016.
- Nally, David. *Human Encumbrances: Political Violence and the Great Irish Famine*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011.
- Rome, Adam. *The Genius of Earth Day: How a 1970 Teach-In Unexpectedly Made the First Green Generation*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2013.

- Walker, Brett. *Toxic Archipelago: A History of Industrial Disease in Japan*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010.
- Wilson, Robert M. *Seeking Refuge: Birds and Landscapes of the Pacific Flyway*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010.

Also...

Bess, Michael. *The Light-Green Society: Ecology and Technological Modernity in France, 1960-2000*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

Or...

Uekötter, Frank. *The Greenest Nation?: A New History of German Environmentalism*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2014.

Schedule, Topics, and Readings

August 30th - Introduction: What is Environmental History?

Andrews, Thomas and Flannery Burke. "What Does It Mean to Think Historically?" *Perspectives* January (2007): 10–13.

Steinberg, Ted. "Down to Earth: Nature, Agency, and Power in History." *American Historical Review* (2002): 798–820. (BB)

Fiege, Mark. *The Republic of Nature: An Environmental History of the United States*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012.

- "Foreword: Environmental History Comes of Age" and "Land of Lincoln"

Sutter, Paul S. "The World with Us: The State of American Environmental History." *Journal of American History* 100, no. 1 (June 2013). (BB)

- Just read p. 94-99.

Themes in Environmental History (Part I)

September 6th - Environmental History of the Modern World

McNeill, John. "The First Hundred Thousand Years." In *The Turning Points of Environmental History*, edited by Frank Uekötter, 13–28. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010. (BB)

- Skim. Focus especially on the first 4-5 "turning points."

Richards, John. *The Unending Frontier: An Environmental History of the Early Modern World*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003, 1-14, 17-24, 55-57. (BB)

McNeill, J. R., and Peter Engelke. *The Great Acceleration: An Environmental History of the Anthropocene since 1945*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016.

September 13th - Biological Exchange and the Nature of Conquest

Crosby, Alfred W. "Ecological Imperialism: The Overseas Migration of Western Europeans as a Biological Phenomenon." In *The Ends of the Earth: Perspectives on Modern Environmental History*, edited by Donald Worster, 103-17. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988. (BB)

Anderson, Virginia de John. "King Philip's Herds: Indians, Colonists, and the Problem of Livestock in Early New England." *William and Mary Quarterly* 51, no. 4 (1994): 601-24. (BB)

Hämäläinen, Pekka. "The Politics of Grass: European Expansion, Ecological Change, and Indigenous Power in the Southwest Borderlands." *William and Mary Quarterly* 67, no. 2 (2010): 173-208. (BB)

McCann, James C. *Maize and Grace: Africa's Encounter with a New World Crop, 1500-2000*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007. (BB)

September 20th - Famine and Colonialism

Nally, David. *Human Encumbrances: Political Violence and the Great Irish Famine*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011.

Histories of Environmental Reform and Management (three weeks)

September 27th - Environmental Governance and the Environmental Management State

Sutter, Paul S. "The World with Us: The State of American Environmental History." *Journal of American History* 100, no. 1 (2013), *Environmental-Management State, 100-105*.

Wilson, Robert M. *Seeking Refuge: Birds and Landscapes of the Pacific Flyway*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010, xii-131.

Wilson, Robert M. "Mobile Bodies: Animal Migration in North American History." *Geoforum* 65 (2015): 465–72. (BB)

October 4th - Postwar Environmentalism

Zelko, Frank. "Challenging Modernity: The Origins of Postwar Environmental Protests in the United States." In *Shades of Green: Environmental Activism from Around the Globe*, edited by Christof Mauch, Nathan Stoltzfus, and Douglas R Weiner. New York: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006. (BB)

Rome, Adam. *The Genius of Earth Day: How a 1970 Teach-In Unexpectedly Made the First Green Generation*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2013.

*** Book review due. Email it to me. ***

October 11th - Comparing Environmentalisms

Bess, Michael. *The Light-Green Society: Ecology and Technological Modernity in France, 1960-2000*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

Or

Uekötter, Frank. *The Greenest Nation?: A New History of German Environmentalism*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2014.

Themes in Environmental History (Part II)

October 18th - Environmental History and American History

Fiege, Mark. *The Republic of Nature: An Environmental History of the United States*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012.

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. *

Brown, Kate. *Plutopia: Nuclear Families, Atomic Cities, and the Great Soviet and American Plutonium Disasters*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.

November 1st - Urban Environmental History

Sutter, Paul S. “The World with Us: The State of American Environmental History.” *Journal of American History* 100, no. 1 (2013), *The Human-Built World, 113-118*

Rawson, Michael. *Eden on the Charles: The Making of Boston*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010. (BB)

Colten, Craig. *Unnatural Metropolis: Wrestling New Orleans from Nature*. Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2005. (BB)

Scheider, Daniel. *Hybrid Nature: Sewage Treatment and the Contradictions of the Industrial Ecosystem*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2011. (BB)

November 8th - Socialist Natures

Wemheuer, Felix. “Collectivization and Famine.” In *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Communism*, edited by Stephen A Smith, 407–23. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Dikötter, Frank. *Mao’s Great Famine: The History of China’s Most Devastating Catastrophe, 1958-1962*. New York: Walker & Company, 2011.

November 15th - Toxic Troubles

Sutter, Paul S. "The World with Us: The State of American Environmental History." *Journal of American History* 100, no. 1 (2013). *The Environmental History of Disease and Health, 110-113 *

Walker, Brett. *Toxic Archipelago: A History of Industrial Disease in Japan*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010.

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)