

# Introduction to Global Environmental History

HIST 194-02 / ENVI 194-01  
MWF 09:40 am-10:40 am Old Main 111

This course will introduce the main themes, methods, and conclusions of global environmental history. We will explore how different societies used and transformed the natural world, how they responded to the challenges of growth and environmental sustainability, and how different political, cultural, and religious world-views affect land and resource use. We will cover a global survey of environmental history in the first part of the semester, looking at the larger themes and patterns in human interactions with the rest of the natural world. We'll follow this with several week-long comparative case studies to see to see how these common themes played out in vastly different environmental and historical contexts. No prerequisites.

In nature's infinite book of secrecy / A little I can read.  
--William Shakespeare Antony and Cleopatra, act 1, sc. 2, l. 10-11.

Nature is, after all, the only book that offers important content on every page.  
--Goethe, *Italian Journey*, part I, "Naples"

## Contacting Me:

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Office Hours: M and W, 11:00-12:00, W 2:30-3:30 and by appointment

## Required books:

Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Civilizations: Culture, Ambition, and the Transformation of Nature*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001). **CIV**

Alfred W. Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900*. (You can get either the first edition from 1986 or the second edition from 1994) **EC IMP**

J. R. McNeill, *Something New Under the Sun: An Environmental History of the Twentieth-Century World* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001). **SUN**

## Course Grade:

Component	% of Final Grade	Due Date
Participation	25%	Daily
Reading Reflections	20%	See schedule. First due Feb 9
Fernández-Armesto Essay	10%	Feb 23
Crosby Essay	10%	March 13
McNeill Essay	15%	April 13
Final Paper (see below)	20%	May 7, noon

## Reading

“We confess that we have risen from reading this book with enlarged ideas, and grander conceptions of our duties in this world. It did expand us a little.”  
--Henry David Thoreau “Paradise (To Be) Regained” (1843)

This is a reading-intensive course. We are covering a lot of ground in this course, and will be discussing complicated and interconnected historical and environmental ideas; this means that we will have to read a wide range of interconnected sources. However, I will be giving you help and assistance along the way; as in writing-intensive courses intended to train you to practice and develop writing skills, this course has built-in discussions and assignments that will train you to practice and develop your reading skills. By the end of the semester, you will be familiar with an exciting and still-developing way of thinking about the human past and present. You will also be better and more thoughtful readers, able to consciously (and hopefully more easily) think and talk about things that you read.

## Participation (25%)

One of the ways to become a more skilled reader is, quite simply, to practice. You will be expected to come to class prepared, having read the assignments for that day. Another skill that will help you become a more effective and efficient reader is to talk about what you read—about the ideas, the content, and the questions you have. Regular and on-time attendance is essential to quality participation, but it is only the first step! You will be expected to take an active role in both larger class discussions and smaller group work, and to actively participate in other in-class activities and assignments. Remember, participation is not about just how often you speak, but also what you have to say. Asking an intelligent and thought-provoking question can be as much of a contribution as answering one.

## Reading Reflections (20%)

Most Mondays, you will hand in a typed response of no more than 1 single-spaced page. For these assignments, you will discuss and reflect on the ways that the previous week’s readings connect to each other, to previous readings, to class discussions, or to larger themes in environmental history. These weekly reflections are intended to help you engage with the reading in relation to the larger course themes. These are not to be “book reports” or factual summaries of the readings—I don’t need you to prove to me that you did the reading. Instead I want to see you thinking about how what you read about connects to other readings, ideas, concepts, environments, or peoples.

There will be a total of **8** reading reflections, and they will be graded on a five point scale, with 5 for outstanding work, 4 for work that exceeds expectations, 3 for work that meets expectations and fulfills the assignment, and 2 or 1 for work that either fails to meet expectations or needs to be substantially improved upon in subsequent weeks.

## **Guided Reading Essays (10 - 15 % each)**

At three points in the course (after we have finished discussing and working with major reading units), I will give you guided questions that ask you to think about the authors' main goals, objectives, and arguments. The weekly reflections are to help you be aware of your response to readings; these guided reading essays are intended to help you be conscious of the goals of the authors. Both author and audience are important parts of the writing/reading dynamic, and you need to be able to think about both parts of this. These essays will be 3-4 double-spaced pages in length, and will need to concentrate on directly addressing the question. You will write guided essays about each of the three books we are working with.

## **Final Essay (20%)**

### Option 1: Responding to the Discipline

This is your opportunity to reflect on the broader goals of this young and emerging discipline. You have now read both book-length attempts to understand global environmental history and four comparative case studies. You've also been asked (in the reading reflections and guided essays) to find connections between the readings and to analyze the methods and goals of the authors. For this final essay, you will build on those skills and use them to answer the following question in a structured, 6-7 page essay (1500-1750 words):

Global environmental history is a new and emerging approach to history. As a critical reader, what do you see as the opportunities and challenges posed by a global approach to environmental history? How can scholars (readers and authors) best compare and integrate global scope and local detail?

### Option 2: History as Dialogue

Imagine that Alfred Crosby, John McNeill, and Felipe Fernández-Armesto were invited to participate in a moderated forum on "The Goals of Global Environmental History." You will also choose to "invite" one other author whose work we've used in class. Using your knowledge of these four authors and their goals and arguments (and the forum from the AHR as a model) you will create a dialogue between them, responding to questions that I (as the moderator) pose. I will provide these questions later in the semester. The finished project should be 1500-1750 words (excluding the moderator questions).

**Writing Support:** The Macalester Academic Excellence (MAX) Center, located in Kagin Commons, has peer tutors available for assisting students in all stages of their writing. Hours are 9:00 A.M. – 4:30 P.M., M-F and 7 P.M. – 10 P.M., S-Th. Becky Graham and Jenny White also provide writing assistance to students during the daytime hours, M-F. You may drop in for help or call x6121 (daytime) or x6193 during evening hours to schedule an appointment.

**Academic dishonesty** will not be tolerated. All of your written work should reflect your own ideas, and should properly attribute the work of others who you engage. For help on how to avoid plagiarism, see <http://www.macalester.edu/max/fym>.

# Class Schedule

## Unit 1: Global Environmental History

M Jan 26      Introductions

W Jan 28      Why “Environmental History”?

Donald Worster, “Nature and the Disorder of History” *Environmental History Review*, 18: 2 (Summer, 1994), 1-15.

William Cronon, “The Uses of Environmental History” *Environmental History Review*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (Autumn, 1993), 1-22.

F Jan 30      History as Dialogue

“AHR Conversation: Environmental Historians and Environmental Crisis” *The American Historical Review*, 113:5 (December 2008), 1431-1465.

M Feb 2      Meet “Our” Historians

*Felipe Fernández-Armesto:*

- 1) CIV, “Preface,” 3-9 and table of contents.
- 2) Alfred Crosby, “A Good Try at Organizing World History Environmentally,” *History and Theory* 41 (May 2002), 218-24.

*Alfred Crosby:*

- 1) EC IMP, “Prologue,” 1-7 and table of contents.
- 2) William Cronon, review of EC IMP, *The Journal of American History* 74: 1 (June 1987), 150-51.
- 3) Richard M. Douglas, review of EC IMP, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 18:3 (Winter, 1988), 489-91.

*John McNeill:*

- 1) SUN, “Foreword” xv-xvi; “Preface,” xxi-xxvi, and table of contents.
- 2) Thomas R. Dunlap, review of SUN, *Environmental History* 5:4 (October 2000), 557-58.
- 3) John Soluri, review of SUN, *Journal of Social History* 36:1 (Autumn 2002), 183-85.

W Feb 4      Environment and Human Divergence

Video: *Guns, Germs and Steel* pt. 1

Readings: J.R. McNeill, “The World According to Jared Diamond,” *History Teacher*, 34:2 (February 2001) 165-174.

EC IMP 2, “Pangaea revisited, the Neolithic Reconsidered,” 8-40

F Feb 6      Towards a New “World History”

I.G. Simmons, “ ‘Not the Sweet Home that it Looks’: A History of the World in Only Five Chapters” in *Environmental History: A Concise Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 1-47.

**Unit 2: The Pre-Modern World—Setting the Stage**

M Feb 9      Fertile Environments: Early River Valley Civilizations      (Reflection Due)

CIV, “Introduction: The Itch to Civilize,” 11-35.  
CIV ch. 8, “Of Shoes and Rice,” 201-25.

W Feb 11      Harsh Environments: Deserts and Ice

CIV ch. 1, “The Helm of Ice,” 40-52; ch. 2, “The Death of Earth,” 57-72.

F Feb 13      Early Ocean Empires

CIV ch. 13 “Chasing the Monsoon,” 323-46.  
CIV ch. 15 “Almost the Last Environment,” 379-90.

M Feb 16      Empires and Environment in the Americas      (Reflection Due)

CIV ch 9 “The Gardens of the Clouds: The Highland Civilizations of the New World,” 229-246.

W Feb 18      TBA

F Feb 20      Reflections: Thinking about People and Nature in the Past

M Feb 23      Ecological Imperialism: Crosby’s Thesis

EC IMP 1, “Prologue,” 1-7; 6, “Within Reach, Beyond Grasp,” 132-44; and 11, “Explanations,” 269-93.

W Feb 25      Environmental Connections and Colonies      (Fernández-Armesto Essay Due)

EC IMP 3 “The Norse and the Crusaders,” 41-69

Jared Diamond, “Norse Greenland’s Flowering,” in *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*, 211-47.

F Feb 27      No Class (read Crosby!!)

M March 2 Europe's Ocean Expansion (Reflection Due)

EC IMP 4 "The Fortunate Isles" 70-103; and 5 "Winds," 104-131.

W March 4 Agents of Empire

EC IMP 7 "Weeds" 145-170; 8 "Animals" 170-194; and 9 "Ills" 194-216.

F March 6 Case Studies: New Zealand and New Guinea

EC IMP 10 "New Zealand" 217-268.

Jared Diamond, "Yali's People: The Histories of Australia and New Guinea" in *Guns, Germs, and Steel* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1997), 295-321.

M March 9 Transitions

EC IMP 11 "Conclusion"  
SUN 1 "Prologue"

### **Unit 3: The Twentieth Century--Upping the Ante**

W March 11 Setting the Stage

SUN 2 "The Lithosphere and Pedosphere: The Crust of the Earth"

F March 13 The Global Environment (Crosby Essay Due)

SUN 4 "The Atmosphere: Regional and Global History" and 5 "The Hydrosphere: The History of Water Use and Water Pollution"

### **SPRING BREAK**

M March 23 The Biosphere (Reflection Due)

SUN 8 "The Biosphere: Forests, Fish, and Invasions"

W March 25 Urbanization and Environment

SUN 3 "The Atmosphere: Urban History" and 9 "More People, Bigger Cities"

F March 27 The Age of Fossil Fuels

SUN 10 "Fuels, Tools, and Economics" and 12 "Epilogue: So What?"

M March 30 Reflections on Doing Global History (Reflection Due)

## **Unit 4: Comparative History—Thinking across Time and Space**

### **Case 1      Water Technology and Power**

W April 1      Ancient  
CIV ch. 7 Lone and Level Sands

F April 3      Medieval

Richard C. Hoffmann, "Economic Development and Aquatic Ecosystems in Medieval Europe," *American Historical Review*, 101 (1996), 631-69.

William H. Tebrake, "The Reclamation and Settlement of Rijnland's Peat Bogs," in *Medieval Frontier: Culture and Ecology in Rijnland*, 185-220.

M April 6      Modern **(Reflection Due)**

Donald Worster, "Empire: Water and the Modern West" in *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 257-326.

W April 8      Global

SUN 6 "The Hydrosphere: Depletions, Dams, and Diversions"

F April 10      School Holiday—No class

### **Case 2      Approaches to 19<sup>th</sup> Century Forests**

M April 13      Culture **(McNeill Essay Due)**

Simon Schama, excerpts from *Landscape and Memory*, 37-60; 185-214.

W April 15      Science

Richard W. Judd, "A 'Wonderfull Order and Balance': Natural History and the Beginnings of Forest Conservation in America, 1730–1830." *Environmental History*, 11:1 (January 2006), 8-37.

F April 17      States

James C. Scott, "Nature and Space" in *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 11-33



