Environmental History of Modern Europe  
HIST 294-05/ENVI 294-04  
Fall 2014  
Old Main 011  
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:40-11:10

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Office hours: Wednesdays 1:30-3:30

COURSE DESCRIPTION and TOPICS

From Chernobyl radiation to London smog, we can tell the environmental history of modern Europe as a series of dangers and disasters created by both capitalist and communist economies. It is also possible to tell a counter-history, one of (sometimes surprising) environmental protection legislation by states and environmentalist movements by citizens, within and across national borders. Through course readings, intensive discussion, and a variety of individual writing assignments, students will build enduring understandings and perspectives for contextualizing these histories of environmental problems, protests, and protection within deeper histories of human interaction with the earthly infrastructures of modern European states.

We will be reading about water, microbes, food, and trash; animals as diverse as the tsetse fly in British Africa and the reindeer in the Soviet Arctic; ways in which rivers, forests, sands, soils, and carbon shape human geographies in war and peace; gender roles and ethnic divisions in the management and exploitation of natural resources; and changing scientific and spiritual attitudes towards humans’ relationship with the physical world in the last three centuries of European history. Though most of our discussions will be based on the European continent, we will also address imperial conquest and management of territories in South and Central Asia, North and Central Africa, and other parts of the world that have shaped European environmental history.

COURSE GOALS and OUTCOMES

From the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries, the European state has developed in tandem with certain ways of managing disease and hygiene, human sexuality and population size, along with forests, rivers, and non-renewable energy sources. When we talk about environmental history, we are talking about power, and students are encouraged to relate our class discussions to others in their humanities and social sciences courses. Some of the goals of this course are identical to those of many other history courses: we will regularly discuss how historians present arguments about causality, and evaluate how different historians formulate and respond to historical questions. Particularly in our treatment of the role of empire in modern European exceptionalism, we will ask, what are the political stakes of posing a historical question in one way rather than another? In order for students eventually to create their own research questions and identify the interests inherent to that question, we will model identification and analysis of textual, numerical, and visual primary sources in class. As in any history course, it is impossible to formulate analytical questions in the absence of a knowledge base of key trends and how they change over time, so the most fundamental goal of this class is for students to acquire a narrative overview of an environmental history of modern Europe.
By the end of the course, you will be able to

- discuss ways in which human interaction with non-manmade things shapes history, and articulate what we learn about the history and present of Europe by studying the environment that we would not learn by studying politics, society, or culture
- recall major events and developments in European history since the eighteenth century in which humans’ changing roles in the physical world were central, or which we can identify as key points in modern states’ developing relationship to the environment (e.g. Napoleonic Europe and riverscapes; World War I and chemical fertilizer; World War II and insecticides)
- explain how political power in the modern European state has developed in relation to environmental management, and appraise arguments about causality in the relationship between state power and the environment, particularly in relation to the topics of European imperialism, and of similarities and differences among democratic capitalist, fascist, and communist regimes
- examine how and why certain groups have disproportionate access to natural resources while others have disproportionate proximity to environmental risk, either economic or physical
- interpret and analyze different kinds of sources, approaches, and arguments in environmental history
- examine the reasons for your (and your professor’s) own attitudes and convictions about the global environment, and assess intended and unintended consequences of our beliefs and actions
- situate environmental history as a field of historical inquiry in relation to the history of science, technology, and medicine; economic history; and diverse approaches to the history of racial, sexual, religious, and cultural difference
- formulate your own research questions in relation to an existing body of background information, and construct persuasive research proposals based on what interests are in play in seeking answers to their particular research questions
- “denaturalize” the concept of Nature as a unitary thing existing outside of human emotions and ideologies and historicize humans’ place as part of the material world, rather than separate from nature; while articulating the reasons why human emotions about nature remain politically important for environmental citizenship in the world today, and exploring the possible consequences of human impact on the earth
- apply the conceptual frameworks from this class to ongoing events and discussions in world news or to other coursework in the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences

ASSIGNMENTS and GRADING

Participation – 25%
Approximately one third of this class will be in the form of an interactive lecture or media viewing. That means that the majority of class time will be spent in intensive discussion of assigned and in-class readings. It is therefore essential to complete the reading, underlining important passages and jotting down thoughts or questions, and to come to class and participate productively. Productive participation means not just answering my questions but also: posing your own questions; listening
to your fellow students and responding to their comments and questions; having specific passages in the assigned reading underlined or highlighted in order to illustrate your points when you speak in large- and small-group discussions; and bringing that assigned reading with you to class. There will be opportunities for students with different personalities to participate in different ways.

As you begin in mid-November to compile ideas and sources for final papers, you should post these on the course’s Zotero bibliography. Adding to this collective bibliography for further research will also be part of your participation grade.

Response papers – 20% (5% each)
Over the course of the semester you will write two-page, low-stakes response papers on any four readings of your choice. These papers should offer general reactions as well as open up questions, and must offer thoughts about how the material connects to other texts, discussions, or course themes and objectives. You should also offer one or two concept-oriented discussion questions for class. For full credit, email your paper to me by 9 p.m. the evening before the text will be discussed. Your responses should be in paragraphs with transitions that I can follow – no bullet points or individual paragraphs on disjointed topics – but beyond that will not be assessed on style.

You must complete all four of these response papers in order to pass the class. You may write additional response papers for extra credit: if you complete eight in total, your entire grade for the class will be out of 1200 rather than 1000, with a higher percentage of that grade coming from low-stakes writing.

Midterm paper – 25%
There will be a five-page analytical paper due by midnight on October 19. No later than ten days before the deadline, you will receive further information about what is expected in the assignment, along with a choice of two or three paper prompts of which you will choose one. Each question will ask you to combine selections from two or three class readings in order to elaborate and defend an argument about the environmental history of Europe between the eighteenth century and World War I. The purpose of this paper is to show that you can execute on your own the kind of close reading and analytical thinking that we will be modeling in class discussion. You may use primary sources that we examine in class in addition to the readings listed below, but you should not seek out additional materials for this paper.

These papers, unlike the response papers, will be graded as high-stakes writing assignments. A ‘B’ or ‘B+’ represents a competent completion of the task, demonstrating that you have absorbed the ideas discussed in class and are able to communicate them clearly. An ‘A-’ or ‘A’ paper will show that you have taken the kinds of thinking modeled in class discussion and applied them to topics in the readings beyond what we have explicitly said in class. In order to write the most successful midterm paper possible, you are encouraged to underline/highlight your readings copiously but also very selectively. This not only forces you to think through what is important in the readings before coming to class discussion, but when it comes time to write your formal analytical paper you will find that your ideas are likely to be more organized, not to mention that you already have a wealth of textual evidence at the ready to use in your writing. I am happy to comment on introductory paragraphs and/or outlines through lunchtime on October 17, but I will not give feedback on entire drafts.

Final project: mock research proposal – 30%
The final project and largest single component of your grade for this class will be an eight- to ten-page paper written as a research proposal to a real or imaginary person or agency. You will formulate a research question around a topic relating to the class that you would like to explore further, and articulate how your proposed research is of interested to your imagined
reader/potential funder. This reader can be anyone from a real Macalester alum who works in environmental policy or law to a local history club in Hitler’s Germany. The important thing is that you identify and elaborate on the potential political or economic stakes of your research topic. You may submit one draft and/or outline to me for comments and advice prior to midnight on December 12. The final version is due to my office by noon on December 17.

For purposes of designing your research methodology, you may assume knowledge of languages and access to places and sources that you do not in fact have. However, you must choose a subject on which it is possible to conduct the background research in languages that you know – if you have reading skills in a European language or language of a former imperial domain of a European country, you are encouraged to use them! – and with books that you can access. You should have no fewer than six sources for the background section of your proposal (not including texts on the course syllabus), at least three of which must be full-length books. You and I will meet individually to discuss your project in the middle of the semester, and then you will present your work-in-progress to the class and receive feedback on November 25. These presentations should be about eight minutes in length and should acquaint the class with the general topic, research question(s), how your research question(s) will lead you to certain primary sources, and possible findings of interest. One sixth of the grade for your final project will be based on this presentation combined with your feedback – in the role of the potential funder of the research – on classmates’ presentations.

On November 20 you will receive a tutorial in Zotero from Fritz Vandover, the Academic Information Associate for the Humanities. This should last approximately half of the class period on that day. You are encouraged to use the rest of the time to make an appointment with Ginny Heinrich (librarian for History), Dave Collins (librarian for Environmental Studies), or Johan Öberg (librarian for Digital Humanities).

POLICIES and SUPPORT

I ask that you arrive on time to each class and refrain from consuming food or gum (beverages are fine). In addition to this, it is expected that each student will know and use the preferred names and gender pronouns of everybody in the class. This is essential for creating the community of civility that is part of a liberal arts learning environment. Attentive participation (as described above), punctuality, and attendance will have an impact on your grade. Even if you complete all assignments, you may have no more than three unexplained absences in order to pass the class.

Your mobile phone should be on silent (not vibrate) or switched off and out of sight during class. Especially in a small class, it is obvious when someone is using a computer or tablet for something other than taking notes or looking at digital readings. If you are using your computer or tablet for something other than class purposes, you also will not be participating productively, so your grade will be affected.

When the length of an assignment is given in page numbers, you should use one-inch margins all around, double-space your writing, and use a font equivalent in size to Times New Roman 12 or Cambria 11.5. If you prefer to write in Calibri 12 or another font, your paper should be longer than the number of pages stated. I will not accept late response papers. For the high-stakes writing assignments, I will accept late submissions with a penalty of half a grade for each twelve hours that the assignment is late.

If you are struggling in the class, you should first consult me and/or one of your classmates. I am available in 20-minute appointment blocks on Wednesdays between 1:30 and 3:30, but you may also arrange to meet in my office or at Café Mac (I enjoy institutional dining) or the Grille on another day of the week. While it is important that you let me know if you feel you are struggling, you may wish to go directly to the Macalester Academic Excellence (MAX) Center, located in Kagin Commons. The MAX Center has peer tutors available for students in all stages of their writing. Hours are 9:00 a.m. to 4:30
p.m., Monday through Friday, and 7:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m., Sunday through Thursday. You may drop in or call 651-696-6121 during the day or 651-696-6193 in the evening to schedule an appointment.

Students with disabilities are protected from discrimination. To ensure accommodation in this and other classes, please work with Macalester’s Disability Services office.

Learning what is entailed in maintaining academic integrity and abiding by the rules of scholarly inquiry are central to the college experience. This class will follow Macalester’s policies and procedures for dealing with plagiarism or other breaches in academic integrity.

WELCOME!

**SCHEDULE and READING ASSIGNMENTS**

**September 2.** Introduction to environmental history and to the European environment

- James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition have Failed*, 11-24 and 33-63

**September 9.** Values of environmental history


**September 11.** Environmental limitations to growth in early modern Europe

- “Fuel Resources and Wastelands in the Netherlands around 1800,” *Northern Europe: An Environmental History*, 165-175

**September 16.** Using nature to make nations and regions


**September 18.** European networks of nature and science

- Donal McCracken, *Gardens of Empire: Botanical Institutions of the Victorian British Empire*, vii-x, 1-3, 132-154, 159-162, 176-177

**September 23.** Interpreting climate change and erosion in Europe’s Eurasian land empire

- David Moon, *The Plough that Broke the Steppes: Agriculture and Environment on Russia’s Grasslands, 1700-1914*, 1-10, 89-93, 116-172

**September 25.** Interpreting weather, vegetation, and economies in Europe’s overseas empires

- Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World*, 1-16

**September 30.** Environmental history as explanatory of European exceptionalism

October 2. Gender and economic change in the forest

- Peter Sahlins, *Forest Rites: The War of the Demoiselles in Nineteenth-Century France*, 1-24, 29-34, 48-60, 103-110

October 7. Modernizing England

- James Winter, *Secure from Rash Assault: Sustaining the Victorian Environment*, read a total of two chapters: either “Upland Moors” or “The Hungry Ocean”; and either “Holes” or “Heaps” *on reserve at DeWitt Wallace Library*

October 9. Climate and health in urban southern Europe


October 14. Oil and water at war

- Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil*, 44-65 and 144-158

October 16. The environment in World War I, the Russian Revolution and Russian Civil War

- Marco Armiero, “Nationalizing the Mountains: Natural and Political Landscapes in World War I,” *Nature and History in Modern Italy*, 231-245
- Stephen Brain, *Song of the Forest: Russian Forestry and Stalinist Environmentalism, 1905–1953*, 54-78

* OCTOBER 19. MIDTERM PAPER DUE AT 5 PM BY EMAIL TO ME (BRING STAPLED HARD COPY TO CLASS ON TUESDAY)

October 21. Interpreting and producing animals in interwar European peripheries


* Professor Andy Bruno will be on campus on October 24-25 for the Midwest Russian History Workshop, where he will be presenting recent work

FALL BREAK and MIDTERM GRADES

October 28. Nitrogen, peasants, and food

- Vaclav Smil, *Enriching the Earth: Fritz Haber, Carl Bosch, and the Transformation of World Food Production*, 199-222

October 30. Assessing Hitler and Stalin in environmental history

- *Turksib* (silent documentary film, 1929)

November 4. Wetlands and World War II: landscape, violence, and DDT

- Marcus Hall, “Environmental Imperialism in Sardinia: Pesticides and Politics in the Struggle against Malaria,” *Nature and History in Modern Italy*, 70-84
November 6. Nuclearity and national identity
- Gabrielle Hecht, The Radiance of France: Nuclear Power and National Identity after World War II, 1-17 and 241-270

November 11. Soviet nuclearity and the end of the Cold War

November 13. Fire in Europe’s past and present
- Cathy Frierson, All Russia is Burning! A Cultural History of Fire and Arson in Late Imperial Russia, 15-39
- Stephen Pyne, World Fire: The Culture of Fire on Earth, 310-319, 322-327, and read one additional chapter as selected/assigned in class on Sweden, Greece, Russia, or Iberia

November 18. Trash and socialism in Central Europe

November 20. Zotero tutorial with Fritz Vandover and individual library consultations

November 25. Presentations of final projects-in-progress to mock grant board

THANKSGIVING BREAK

December 2. Food and nature
- Melissa Caldwell, Dacha Idylls: Living Organically in Russia’s Countryside, 74-100
- GMOs – Will Europe Ever Agree? (short documentary)

December 4. Sustainable consumerism in urban Europe
- Timothy Beatley, ed., Green Cities of Europe, read either “Copenhagen” or “Helskinki,” and either “Venice” or “Vitoria-Gasteiz”

December 9. Contemporary perspectives of a transnational Europe: elemental and political

December 17. Final paper due at noon

* THIS SYLLABUS IS SUBJECT TO MINOR CHANGES *