

History BC3379
Water Histories
Society, Environment, and Power in Global History

Course Description

This class explores the relationship between water and society in history. How did water shape human and environmental histories around the globe? On one hand, oceans and rivers affected the characteristics and resources of different civilizations. Throughout history, every community depended on access to water resources, developed local practices of water management, and produced cultural and scientific understandings of “water.” On the other hand, human attempts at regulating water flows aimed at controlling life itself, as water is essential for life. Hydro-power, before being a renewable source energy, required exerting political power over humans and nature alike.

Grounded in the interdisciplinary approach of the environmental humanities, this class will explore the politics of water management thanks to a wide range of case studies. Starting with the first environmental history of the Mediterranean in the early modern period, we will focus on the last two centuries to examine the roots of the current environmental crisis. By following the politics of water flows, the class will introduce students to key themes in global environmental history, such as the role of geography, climate, race, energy, labor, technology, cities, animals, diseases, and empires in the transformation of human societies. Finally, the class provides foundational historical knowledge to understand the importance of water in contemporary debates about environmental justice and climate change.

Learning Objectives

- **GER Thinking with Historical Perspective:** students will gain an appreciation for the history of ecological transformation in different societies. Students will learn how different water-society interactions reshaped natural environments globally, scientific forms of knowledge, and power relations.
- **GER Thinking through Global Inquiry:** students will gain a global and diverse perspective through the lens of environmental history. The class is grounded on thematic case studies from all continents.
- **GER Thinking about Social Difference:** students will learn how the historical legacies of colonialism, industrialization, capitalism, and other political projects (nationalism, fascism) still determine differences in access to water resources among people of different socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds.
- **Reading and writing goals:** students will learn how to examine historiographical debates, compare and contrast different arguments, and position their writing in a larger scholarly conversation. The readings are organized to facilitate class discussion, as students can pick a case study in addition to a preliminary background reading.

- **Presentation goals:** students will develop presentation skills to facilitate class discussion with the help of a speaking fellow.

Class info

Wednesday 10:10 am - 12:00 pm

Class BC3379

4 pts.

Office Hours: Wednesday 2:00 - 4:00 pm (acagliot@barnard.edu)

Textbook:

Terje Tvedt, *Water and Society: Changing Perceptions of Societal and Historical Development*. I.B. Tauris, 2021 (available online).

Class schedule

1) Introduction: Water and Environmental History

January 18

Readings:

- Terje Tvedt, *Water and Society: Changing Perceptions of Societal and Historical Development*. I.B. Tauris, 2021, Chapter 1 “The Need for a Paradigm Shift”: <https://doi.org/10.5040/9780755606511>.
- Hamlin, Christopher. “‘Waters’ or ‘Water’? — Master Narratives in Water History and Their Implications for Contemporary Water Policy.” *Water Policy* 2, no. 4–5 (2000): 313–25.

2) Water, the environment, and historical time: The Mediterranean

January 25

Readings:

- Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), vol, 1, excerpts.
- Moore, Jason W. “Capitalism as World-ecology: Braudel and Marx on Environmental History” *Organization & Environment* 16, no. 4 (2003): 431–58 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26162055>

3) Water as Energy: from hydropower to fossil fuels in Europe and North America

Speaking Fellows workshop

February 1

Readings:

- Andreas Malm, “The Origins of Fossil Capital: From Water to Steam in the British Cotton Industry.” *Historical Materialism* 21, no. 1 (March 2013): 15–68. <https://doi.org/10.1163/1569206X-12341279>.
- Theodore Steinberg, *Nature Incorporated: Industrialization and the Waters of New England*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991, excerpts.
- Stefania Barca, *Enclosing Water: Nature and Political Economy in a Mediterranean Valley, 1796-1916*, Cambridge: White Horse Press, 2010, Chapters 1, 3 and 5.

4) **Water and the Great Divergence between Europe and Asia**

February 8

Readings:

- Terje Tvedt, *Water and Society: Changing Perceptions of Societal and Historical Development*. I.B. Tauris, 2021, Chapter 2 “Water-Society systems and the success of the West.”
- Donald Worster, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West*, New York: Oxford University, 1992, Chapter 1 “Taxonomy: the Flow of Power in History”
- Sunil Amrith, *Unruly Waters: How Rains, Rivers, Coasts, and Seas Have Shaped Asia’s History*, New York: Basic Books, 2018 Chapters 1-2 “The Shape of Modern Asia” and “Water and Empire.”

5) **Water and Technology: Engineering the Nation in France**

February 15

Readings:

- Sara Pritchard, *Confluence: The Nature of Technology and the Remaking of the Rhône*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2011 <https://clio.columbia.edu/catalog/14050641?counter=2> Introduction
- Chandra Mukerji, *Impossible Engineering: Technology and Territoriality on the Canal Du Midi*. Princeton University Press, 2009. <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb31547.0001.001>, Introduction, Chapters 1 (“Impossible Engineering”), 3 (“Epistemic Credibility”) 9 (“Powers of Impersonal Rule”).
- Sara Pritchard, *Confluence: The Nature of Technology and the Remaking of the Rhône*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2011

<https://clio.columbia.edu/catalog/14050641?counter=2>, Chapters 2 (“Imagining the Nation’s river”) and 3 (“Rethinking the Rhône”).

6) Water and Empire I: Colonial ecologies in in Egypt and India
February 22

Readings:

- Terje Tvedt, *Water and Society: Changing Perceptions of Societal and Historical Development*. I.B. Tauris, 2021, Chapter 3 “Rivers and Empire.”
- Jennifer Derr, *The Lived Nile: Environment, Disease, and Material Colonial Economy in Egypt*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019.
- Debjani Bhattacharyya, *Empire and Ecology in the Bengal Delta: The Making of Calcutta*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108348867>

7) Water and Empire II: Irrigation in the American West and Central Asia
March 8

Readings:

- Terje Tvedt, *Water and Society: Changing Perceptions of Societal and Historical Development*. I.B. Tauris, 2021, Chapter 6 “Water, Sovereignty, and the Myth of Westphalia”
- Donald Worster, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West*, New York: Oxford University, 1992, Chapter 4 “Florescence: The state and the desert” and Chapter 5 “Florescence: the Grapes of Wealth”.
- Maya Peterson, *Pipe Dreams: Water and Empire in Central Asia’s Aral Sea Basin*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019, Introduction, Chapter 1 “The Land beyond the Rivers” and Chapter 2 “Eastern Eden: Irrigation and Empire on the Hungry Steppe”: <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108673075>.

Midterm paper due

Spring Break March 13-17

8) Water and Animals: Fishing Ecologies in North America
March 22

Readings:

- Margaret Beattie Bogue, *Fishing the Great Lakes: An Environmental History, 1783-1933*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000, Chapter 1, “Legacies from the Wilderness.”

- Bathsbeba Demuth, *Floating Coast: An Environmental History of the Bering Strait*. First edition. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2019, Prologue, Chapters 1-2.
- Richard White, *The Organic Machine*, Introduction, Chapter 1 “Knowing Nature through Labor”, Chapter 2 “Putting the River to Work” and Chapter 4 “Salmon”: New York: Hill and Wang, 1995.

9) Water and cities: From New York to Australia’s five cities

March 29

Readings:

- Terje Tvedt, *Water and Society: Changing Perceptions of Societal and Historical Development*. I.B. Tauris, 2021, chapter 5 “Between the Hydrological and hydro-social cycle: the history of cities
- Koepfel, Gerard T. *Water for Gotham: A History*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2000, Chapters 1 “Give us cold water”, 2 “Manahata goes Dutch”, 3 “English well-being”, 7 “Fools of Gotham” and 8 “Catching the Croton Bug”.
- Margaret Cook, Lionel Frost, Andrea Gaynor, Jenny Gregory, Ruth A. Morgan, Martin Shanahan, and Peter Spearritt, *Cities in a Sunburnt Country: Water and the Making of Urban Australia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108917698> Chapters 1 “Prologue”, 3 “Domesticating Water” and 6 “Watering Suburbia”.

10) Water disasters: flooding and environmental justice in the US and China

April 5

Readings:

- Theodore Steinberg, *Acts of God: The Unnatural History of Natural Disaster in America*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2006, Introduction: <https://clio.columbia.edu/catalog/14018387?counter=1>
- Chris Courtney, *The Nature of Disaster in China: The 1931 Yangzi River Flood*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108278362>, Introduction, Chapters 2-3-6.
- Andy Horowitz, *Katrina: A History, 1915–2015*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2022, Introduction, Chapter 1 (“How to sink New Orleans” 1927-1965), Chapter 3 (The New New Orleans), Chapter 4 (“Do you know what it means to miss New Orleans?”)

11) Modernization and pollution

April 12

Readings:

- Mark Cioc, *The Rhine: An Eco-Biography, 1815-2000*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002. <http://www.columbia.edu/cgi-bin/cul/resolve?clio14165838>.
- Holleran, Michael. "Water Qualities and Usage in the Zanjias of Los Angeles, 1781–1904." *Environmental History* 27, no. 3 (July 2022): 491–518. <https://doi.org/10.1086/719684>.
- Hamilton, Sarah. "Hidden Depths: The Wicked Problem of Groundwater Management in a Spanish Aquifer, 1964–1990." *The Journal of Modern History* 94, no. 2 (June 2022): 363–403. <https://doi.org/10.1086/719491>.

11) Water Wars in the Middle East and beyond

April 19

Readings:

- Terje Tvedt, *Water and Society: Changing Perceptions of Societal and Historical Development*. I.B. Tauris, 2021, chapter 7 "Water and International law"
- Mark Zeitoun, *Power and Water in the Middle East: The Hidden Politics of the Palestinian-Israeli Water Conflict*. London; New York: New York: I.B. Tauris, 2008.
- Brahma Chellaney, *Water, Peace, and War: Confronting the Global Water Crisis*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013.

14) Conclusion – Water and the Climate Crisis

April 26

Readings:

- Terje Tvedt, *Water and Society: Changing Perceptions of Societal and Historical Development*. I.B. Tauris, 2021, chapter 9 "Water and climate change."
- Catherine Gautier, *Oil, Water and Climate: An Introduction*, New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2008. <http://www.columbia.edu/cgi-bin/cul/resolve?clio14140024>.

Final paper due

EVALUATION

Assignment #1: Presentation and short paper (20%)

Assignment #2: Midterm paper (25%)

Assignment #3: Final (35%)

Participation: (10%)

Weekly Assignment: (10%)

- **Assignment #1:** At the beginning of the semester, students will be requested to sign up for a week to facilitate the discussion of the reading and introduce them briefly at the beginning of class. Presenting students will have to do both optional readings, as opposed to just one case study. In order to prepare for the presentation, they should submit as first assignment a short paper (5-6 pages double spaced maximum) summarizing the key concepts of the readings, historiographical questions, and environmental background of the area that they will have selected. A short Power point is encouraged but not mandatory. The student should consult with the instructor ahead of the presentation. Working in teams of two is highly encouraged.
- **Assignment 2#:** In the middle of the semester, students will have to submit a short paper (about 6-7 pages long) answering a prompt concerning key themes in environmental history analyzed in the first class of the semester.
- **Assignment #3** is a longer final paper (about 10 pages) on a key topic of environmental history or on a specific geographical area of interest. The paper can build on the presentation topic of assignment #1, but it requires additional research of secondary and – if possible – primary sources.
- **Participation** consists of in person class discussions.
- **Weekly Assignment:** Students that are not presenting will post a couple of short paragraphs on Courseworks at noon the day before class. They are required to choose only one of the two weekly case studies. In the Courseworks post, they should briefly summarize the argument of the reading and post any questions, reactions, and observations.

POLICIES

- **Academic Integrity and Honor Code:**

Please make sure to familiarize yourself with Barnard's Honor Code and respect it at all times. Approved by the student body in 1912 and updated in 2016, the Code states:

"We, the students of Barnard College, resolve to uphold the honor of the College by engaging with integrity in all of our academic pursuits. We affirm that academic integrity is the honorable creation and presentation of our own work. We acknowledge that it is our responsibility to seek clarification of proper forms of collaboration and use of academic resources in all assignments or exams. We consider academic integrity to include the proper use and care for all print, electronic,

or other academic resources. We will respect the rights of others to engage in pursuit of learning in order to uphold our commitment to honor. We pledge to do all that is in our power to create a spirit of honesty and honor for its own sake.”

For more information, please visit: <https://barnard.edu/honor-code>

A crucial part of academic integrity consists of avoiding plagiarism. Plagiarism includes using other people’s work without acknowledgment, for example by copying or paraphrasing ideas, concepts and metaphors taken from others or the internet without appropriate reference. It is also forbidden to submit papers or assignments produced for other classes. Many of the themes discussed in class deal with sensitive issues of the politics of race, class, and gender. Please be always respectful of other participants to the seminar and their reactions to the readings.

- **Wellness Statement:**

Your personal, emotional, physical, financial and mental well-being is of paramount importance for your academic success, especially during the current Covid-19 pandemic. The Barnard community urges you to make yourself - your own health, sanity, and wellness -your priority throughout this term and your career here. Sleep, exercise, and eating well can all be a part of a healthy regimen to cope with stress. Resources exist to support you in several sectors of your life, and we encourage you to make use of them. Should you have any questions about navigating these resources, please visit these sites:

- <https://barnard.edu/primarycare>
- <https://barnard.edu/about-counseling>
- <https://barnard.edu/wellwoman/about>
- <https://barnard.edu/events/Stressbuster>

As instructor, I am committed to support you in any way to achieve your best results and enhance your learning experience. Please feel free to communicate with me about any circumstances that may impact your wellness during the semester.

- **Affordable Access to Course Texts Statement**

This class does not require you to buy any additional materials.

All students deserve to be able to study and make use of course texts and materials regardless of cost. Barnard librarians have partnered with students, faculty, and staff to find ways to increase student access to textbooks. By the first day of advance registration for each term, faculty will have provided information about required texts for each course on CourseWorks (including ISBN or author, title, publisher, copyright date, and price), which can be viewed by students. A number of cost-free or low-cost methods for accessing some types of courses texts are detailed on the Barnard Library Textbook Affordability guide (library.barnard.edu/textbook-affordability).

Undergraduate students who identify as first-generation and/or low-income students may check out items from the FLIP lending libraries in the Barnard Library (library.barnard.edu/flip) and in Butler Library for an entire semester. Students may also consult with their professors, the Dean of Studies, and the Financial Aid Office about additional affordable alternatives for having access to course texts. Visit the guide and talk to your professors and your librarian for more details.

- **Class Attendance Policy**

Be punctual: Class discussion and participation are a fundamental component of this class. Please do not miss class.

- **Late Assignments Policy**

Assignments that are overdue will not be accepted. Exceptions can be granted based on previous communication with the instructor. If you have any specific concern about meeting a deadline for an assignment, you should contact me in advance for an extension.

- **Email policy:** please allow about 24 hours for email responses. Make sure to start early on your assignments. Emails with requests of extensions on deadlines and communication on short notice ahead of submission cannot be satisfied.

- **Covid Protocols:** Please always wear a mask correctly on your nose and mouth when we will be in class. You are allowed to drink but not to eat in class. If you need to eat something, please leave the room briefly.

HAVE A GREAT SEMESTER!

Professor Angelo M. Caglioti