

History of the Global Environment:
Themes, Questions, and Narratives of Nature from around the World.

Instructor:
Prof. Angelo Matteo Caglioti
Barnard College, Columbia University

Class Description

This class introduces students to the field of environmental history from a global perspective. Environmental history is the study of the relationship between nature and society over time. It deals with the material environment, cultural and scientific understandings of nature, and the politics of socio-economic use of natural resources. The class combines the study of classic texts that were foundational to the field with modern case studies from all over the world. It addresses questions of global relevance, such as: how did the environment shape human history? How did humans shape the natural environment? How are power relations of class, race and gender embedded in the environment we live in? The class welcomes students from the natural and social sciences, as well as the humanities. The goal of the course is to understand how the relationship between environment and society in history led to the current climate crisis.

Class Info:
Meeting: TTh
Location: TBA

Office Hours:
TBA
Location: 801 Milstein

Learning Outcomes:

- Examining different material and ecological transformations of the global environment from a historical and multifaceted perspective.
- Learning about how different societies understood nature as a cultural, religious, and scientific phenomenon.
- Examining the relationship between race, class, and gender and the politics of environmental management.
- Developing a methodology across the natural and social sciences, by connecting the study of nature and society.

Readings:

The class requires the following textbooks, both freely available through the library catalog. Other readings will be excerpts from the books listed in the class schedule and will be available online.

- Edmund Burke and Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Environment and World History*, University of California Press, 2009. <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb30978.0001.001>.
- Stephen Mosley, *The Environment in World History*, New York: Routledge, 2024: <https://clio.columbia.edu/catalog/17774810>

Sourcebooks:

- Libby Robin, ed. *The Future of Nature: Documents of Global Change* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013. <https://clio.columbia.edu/catalog/14084660?counter=1>
- Chris Magoc, *Environmental Issues in American History: A Reference Guide with Primary Documents*. Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 2006. <https://clio.columbia.edu/catalog/5633476>
- Joshua Howe, ed. *Making Climate Change History: Primary Sources from Global Warming's Past*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2017. <https://clio.columbia.edu/catalog/14121652>
- Carolyn Merchant, ed. *Green versus Gold: Sources in California's Environmental History*. Electronic resource. Washington, D.C: Island Press, 1998. <http://www.columbia.edu/cgi-bin/cul/resolve?clio14090330>.
- Thomas R Dunlap, ed. *DDT, Silent Spring, and the Rise of Environmentalism: Classic Texts*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008.

Reference books:

- Andrew Isenberg, ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Environmental History*. Oxford Handbooks. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Emily O’Gorman, William San Martín, Mark Carey, and Sandra Swart, eds. *The Routledge Handbook of Environmental History*, Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003189350>.

Class Schedule:

Part I: Introduction & Concepts

Week 1 (September 3-5): What is global environmental history? What is the environment?

Paul Warde, Libby Robin, and Sverker Sörlin. *The Environment: A History of the Idea*. Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018.

Donald Worster, *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*, New York: Harper & Row, 1989.

Optional Readings:

J. R. McNeill, “Observations on the Nature and Culture of Environmental History” *History and Theory* 42, no. 4 (2003): 5–43.

Edmund Burke and Kenneth Pomeranz, eds. *The Environment and World History*, Introduction. <http://www.columbia.edu/cgi-bin/cul/resolve?clio10817308.001>.

Sarah R. Hamilton, “The Promise of Global Environmental History” *Entremons: UPF Journal of World History*, 2012, 1–12.

Week 2 (September 10-12): Nature or Wilderness? Unpacking Concepts of Nature in North America

Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1982. <http://www.columbia.edu/cgi-bin/cul/resolve?clio14203104>.

Christopher Wells, *Car Country: An Environmental History*, University of Washington Press, 2014.

William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England*, New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 2003.

PART II: Themes and Places

Week 3 (September 17-19): Mountains and the Mediterranean

Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, New York: Harper & Row, 1972 (Excerpts on Courseworks)

John Richards, F. “The Unending Frontier: An Environmental History of the Early Modern World.” *ACLS Humanities E-Book*, ACLS Humanities E-Book, 2003. <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.90017>.

John Robert McNeill, *The Mountains of the Mediterranean World: An Environmental History*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Week 4 (September 24 – 26): Ecological Imperialism: Tropical Islands and in the Caribbean and Beyond

John McNeill, "Mosquito Empires", Cambridge University Press:
<https://clio.columbia.edu/catalog/14131510> [Links to an external site.](#)

Alfred W Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492*, Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2003.

Richard Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600-1860*, Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Week 5 (October 1-3): Deserts and Foodstuff in Africa

James McCann, "Maize and Grace: Africa's Encounter with a New World Crop, 1500-2000" *ACLS Humanities E-Book*, 2005. <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.05687>.

Diana K Davis, *The Arid Lands: History, Power, Knowledge*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2016.

Week 6 (October 8 – 10): Environment and Animals in the Middle East

Alan Mikhail, *The Animal in Ottoman Egypt*, Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Samuel Dolbee, *Locusts of Power: Borders, Empire, and Environment in the Modern Middle East*, Cambridge; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2022.

Week 7 (October 15- 17): Urban Environments

William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*, New York: W. W. Norton, 1992.

Ted Steinberg, *Gotham Unbound: The Ecological History of Greater New York*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014.

Dawn Biehler, *Pests in the City: Flies, Bedbugs, Cockroaches, and Rats*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013.

Paper 1 Due

Week 8 (October 22- 24): Rivers, the State, and War in East Asia

Sunil Amrith, *Unruly Waters: How Rains, Rivers, Coasts, and Seas Have Shaped Asia's History*. New York: Basic Books, 2018.

Chris Courtney, *The Nature of Disaster in China: The 1931 Yangzi River Flood*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

Micah Muscolino, *The Ecology of War in China: Henan Province, the Yellow River, and Beyond, 1938–1950*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107785274>.

Week 9 (October 29- 31): Pacific Waters

Bathsheba Demuth, *Floating Coast: An Environmental History of the Bering Strait*, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2019.

Gregory Cushman, *Guano and the Opening of the Pacific World: A Global Ecological History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139047470>.

John R. McNeill, ed. *Environmental History in the Pacific World*, Routledge, 2022.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315256313>.

Week 10 (November 5-7): Glaciers and Forests in Latin America

Mark Carey, *In the Shadow of Melting Glaciers: Climate Change and Andean Society*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. <http://www.columbia.edu/cgi-bin/cul/resolve?clio9695113.001>.

Warren Dean, *With Broadax and Firebrand: The Destruction of the Brazilian Atlantic Coastal Forest*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.

PART III: From Environmental History to the Climate Crisis

Week 11 (November 12 – 14): Industry, Capital, and Energy

Andreas Malm, “Fossil Capital: the Rise of Steam-Power and the Roots of Global Warming”

Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil*, London; New York: Verso Books, 2011.

Victor Seow, *Carbon Technocracy: Energy Regimes in Modern East Asia*, Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2021.

Paper 2 Due

Week 12 (November 19 – 21): Environment, Pollution, Diseases

Donald Worster, *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Linda Nash, *Inescapable Ecologies: A History of Environment, Disease, and Knowledge*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.

Gregg Mitman, *Breathing Space: How Allergies Shape Our Lives and Landscapes*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007.

Week 13 (November 26): Consumerism

Guest Speaker: Dr. Rachel Gross, *Selling Nature*

Thanksgiving – NO CLASS

Week 14 (December 3 – 5): Climate crisis: from the Great Acceleration to the Anthropocene

John McNeill, *The Great Acceleration: An Environmental History of the Anthropocene since 1945*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014.

Conclusions

Final: TBA

Graded Assignments

Midterm assignment: 20%

Paper: 30%

Participation: 15%

Final: 35%

- **Participation** consists of attendance, contributions to class discussions (questions, comments) and weekly posts (about one paragraph) in the discussion session on Courseworks. In the discussion post, you can raise any questions about the readings and lectures. You can also share with the class any relevant articles/books/materials that connect class topics with contemporary issues. Weekly posts close on Thursday at 9:00 AM.
- The **midterm assignment** (paper 1) consists of a two pages (double-spaced) proposal for the research paper. The goal of the assignment is to propose a topic related to environmental history in a specific context. The assignment should include a research question and a short annotated bibliography with the sources that you intend to use for the paper.
- The **research paper** (paper 2, about 8 pages long double spaced) will be an opportunity for students to examine the history of climate change in a specific context. While based on research on secondary sources, the use of primary sources is encouraged depending on students' language skills. Suggestions for the research paper:
 - Pick a place or community.
 - Background: what are its environmental features?
 - Environment: did the environment change over time? how did society interact with the natural resources of this region over time? What kind of global phenomena shaped the relationship between environment and society in this locality?
 - Science: what knowledge has been produced about this region in history? Who produced it? E.g.: farmers/fishermen/scholars/scientists/government officials/businesses/activists/government/non-governmental or international organizations.
 - Politics: What is the ecological and human landscape produced by these interactions between nature and society? Have different actors been affected differently by the transformation of the environment over time? Are there conflicts over the use of natural resources, or different visions of nature at play?
 - Future: What is their possible future in the face of increasing climate change? <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/01/28/opinion/climate-change-risks-by-country.html>
- The final exam will cover the materials throughout the semester. It is going to include 4 ID questions of choice and 2 short essay questions. The exam will be offered online.

Additional policies and information:

You will receive more instructions on the paper and midterm ahead of time. Re: the papers, you will select a topic from one of those listed from the course schedule and carry out some original research based on secondary sources. Plagiarism will not be tolerated. In short, you cannot use other people's work without acknowledgment, you cannot copy or paraphrase ideas, concepts and metaphors taken from others or the internet without appropriate reference. You also cannot submit papers or assignments produced for other classes. For further information, please refer to the *Barnard Honor Code*:

“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. “established 1912, updated 2016.”

Center for Accessibility Resources & Disability Services Statement

If you believe you may encounter barriers to the academic environment due to a documented disability or emerging health challenges, please feel free to contact me and/or the Center for Accessibility Resources & Disability Services (CARDS). Any student with approved academic accommodations is encouraged to contact me during office hours or via email. If you have questions regarding registering a disability or receiving accommodations for the semester, please contact CARDS at (212) 854- 4634, cards@barnard.edu, or learn more at barnard.edu/disabilityservices. CARDS is located in 101 Altschul Hall.

Affordable Access to Course Texts Statement

All students deserve to be able to access course texts. The high costs of textbooks and other course materials prohibit access and perpetuate inequity, and Barnard librarians are partnering with students, faculty, and staff to increase access. By the first day of advance registration for each term, you should be able to view on CourseWorks information provided by your faculty about required texts (including ISBN or author, title, publisher and copyright date) and their prices. Once you have selected your classes, here are some cost-free methods for accessing course texts, recommended by the Barnard Library. I have placed the texts on reserve at Barnard Library, otherwise look for course texts using CLIO (library catalog), Borrow Direct (request books from partner libraries), Interlibrary Loan(request book chapters from any library), and NYPL. Students with financial need or insecurity can check items out from the FLIP lending libraries in the Barnard Library and Butler Library and can consult with the Dean of Studies and the Financial Aid Office about additional affordable alternatives for getting access to course texts. Talk with your librarian and visit the Barnard Library Textbook Affordability guide(library.barnard.edu/textbook-affordability) for more details.

Class Attendance Policy

Be punctual: respect means also to be timely. If such delay becomes recurrent, it will affect your grade. Class discussion and participation are a fundamental component of this class. Do not miss class! Your grades will be affected. If needed, please justify your absence in advance.

Late assignments

Assignments that are overdue will not be accepted with the exception of medical and family emergencies. If you have any specific concern about meeting a deadline for an assignment, you should contact me at least three days in advance for an extension.

HAVE A GREAT SEMESTER!

Prof. Angelo Caglioti