What is Environmental History?
History 97d
Spring 2017
Tuesday 12-3PM
Professor Ian J. Miller

Few topics today cause more anxiety than the planet’s future. And yet, most historians have written the natural world out of the story. This class brings nature back in. We will explore the dynamics of a young field in formation: environmental history. We will each begin, not by asking what environmental history is, but by deciding what it is not. From there we will ask how environmental matters are woven into the fabric of human history. Do animals have a place in history? What about ecologies, climates, and disease? Where is the line between “nature” and “society,” and how has it changed over time? Are cities “natural”? By the end of the semester we will have examined imperial, social, and intellectual history through an environmental lens. We will conclude by asking whether or not all history is, in fact, environmental history.

The seminar will meet on Tuesdays 12-3PM. Every third week, we will divide into tutorials that will meet 12-1.30PM or 1.30-3PM. These meetings allow you to review each other’s papers fully and carefully.

Course Requirements

You will write and revise two short abstracts and a 1000-word essay; two 1500-word essays; and one 3500-word essay, as well as several shorter thought pieces. Each of the short essays is worth 10% of your grade; the longer essay is worth 30%.

Paper 1: Summaries: two 250-word abstracts plus 1000-word essay: 10%
Paper 2: Historiography (1500 words): 10%
Paper 3: Primary Source Analysis (1500 words): 10%
Paper 4: Final Paper, building on papers 1-3 (3500 words): 30%
Participation in seminar and small writing assignments: 20%
Tutorial work (peer review, participation, editing, and rewriting): 20%

Course and Section Policies
1. **Attendance, class participation, papers, and presentations** are all required to pass this class.

2. **Student collaboration:** You are encouraged to consult with one another on the choice of paper topics, and you may also share library resources. You may find it useful to discuss your chosen topic with your peers, particularly if you are working on the same topic as someone else. However, you should ensure that the written papers you submit for evaluation are the result of your own research, reflection, and writing. You are also expected to abide by the Harvard Honor Code, which can be found [here](#).

3. **Papers - extension policy:** Papers must be submitted by the posted deadlines. Late papers will be downgraded by 1 full letter-grade for every 24 hours submitted late (i.e. papers submitted at 5:01pm will receive no higher than a ‘B’). This is course policy and no tutor or instructor has any power to alter it. We urge you to plan ahead and to submit early to avoid last-minute problems. The only acceptable excuses for late work are family or medical emergencies. If such an emergency arises, immediately contact the administrative tutor, Michael Thornton ([michaelthornton@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:michaelthornton@fas.harvard.edu)). You will need to submit a note from University Health Services in the case of medical excuses, or your Resident Dean in the case of family emergencies.

   If you submit a draft within 2 hours of the deadline, only 1/3 of a letter grade will be deducted per 24 period (such that A- will be the maximum grade).

**Books and Readings:**

The following books are available for purchase at the COOP. Other readings will be placed on reserve at Lamont Library as soon as possible. Some readings will be posted to the course iSite and others will be linked to the webpage. (The Carson book is on order)


**Week 1 (1/25): Welcome to History!**

1. Getting to know one another, asking questions
2. Introduction to History 97—What is “What is History?”
3. Introduction to Tutorial from Matthew Sohm
4. Short discussion of “The Cause of Her Grief” by Wendy Anne Warren, and “New World Tempests” by Kate Grandjean (shared by all sections of Hist. 97)
5. Discuss first paper assignment

   **Unit 1: Turning Events to Histories**
   What does environmental history narrate? Is it the history of environmentalism, environmental change, or environmental crisis? Or is it something else? How does it differ from other kinds of history? Is history writing always an act of *power*? If so, who benefits and how? How does this apply in the case of environmental history?

**Opening Plenary (1/30): History at Harvard and Beyond**

Meet at [CGIS-South Tsai Auditorium](#), 6-8pm. Dinner provided.
All History 97 students and faculty will discuss the importance of history at Harvard and beyond after watching a Harvard commencement address. Informal socializing will follow over pizza and soft drinks.

**Week 2 (2/1): What is (or isn’t) Environmental History?**


**J. R. McNeill, “Observations on the Nature and Culture of Environmental History,” History and Theory, 42 (2003), 5-43.** (You may choose to skim this reading if pressed for time, but please do look it over)


**Feb. 6: First Draft of Paper 1 Due at 5PM**

Write two 250-word abstracts, one each for the Warren and Grandjean articles. What is the key argument of the texts? What claims and evidence support those arguments? What contribution does the text make to a broader field of historical research? How does it change our understanding of the time, place, or historical themes under consideration?

**Week 3 (2/8): Tutorial**

Revise your abstracts. Then, write a 1000-word compare-and-contrast essay about Warren and Grandjean. Do not simply summarize their arguments: instead, develop an argument about the relationship between the two texts that you can support with evidence from each essay. More details will be provided in seminar and tutorial.

**Feb. 13: Revised Version of Paper 1 Due at 5PM**

**Unit 2: The History of Environmental History**

How do historical interpretations change, accumulate, modify each other, and return? Where are the most salient differences between environmental history and other forms of history or academic writing? Couldn’t almost any topic be seen as an environmental topic? Where is the line between the sciences and history in each of these works?

**Week 4 (2/15): Narrative and Power: Who or What Counts and How?**


**Assignment due in class: Hollis self-test (available on iSite)**

At some point during Week 4, please come to office hours with your professor and tutor to decide on a historical theme or area of interest, which will be the focus of paper 2 and ideally build toward your final paper.

**Week 5 (2/22): Empire and Environment**


Feb. 27: First Draft of Paper 2 Due at 5PM

**The Frame—So What?**

The meaning and import of a particular event is rarely—if ever—entirely self-evident. It often only becomes clear when viewed in the company of other events, accounts, theories, and arguments. To join the community of historians is to learn about these different approaches—often at odds with one another—and to use them to underline the significance of one’s own contribution. In this paper you will situate the event from your first assignment in historiographical context. You will use that context to highlight the meaning of your own research. 1500 words.

**Week 6 (3/1): Tutorial**

Mar. 6: Revised Version of Paper 2 Due at 5PM

**Unit 3: Getting Dirty (or Dusty): Material Context and Primary Sources**

What is a primary source for most historians and how do environmental historical sources differ? How do these various kinds of information come together most fruitfully for environmental historians? Perhaps more than any other genre of history, environmental history is focused on place and material context.

**Week 7 (3/8): The Organic Machine and the Importance of Place**


Optional reading (another meditation on place):
http://www.williamcronon.net/writing/Cronon_Kennecott_Journey.pdf

This week: Please meet with tutor and/or faculty to choose a primary source (or pair or triplet of related sources) for paper 3 (on which you will build for your final paper).

No Class (3/15): Spring Break

Week 8 (3/22): Archives of Extinction: Of Beef, Bison and Birds at Harvard

Jennifer Price, “When Women were Women, Men were Men, and Birds were Hats,” in Flight Maps: Adventures with Nature in Modern America (New York, 1999), 57-109.


Etienne Benson ’99 on squirrels in Harvard Yard: http://harvardmagazine.com/2014/01/squirrely


Optional reading:


Full Benson article: http://jah.oxfordjournals.org/content/100/3/691.full

We are working on a field trip to Harvard’s Peabody Museum related to these readings for this week.

I also hope that we can celebrate our grim discoveries with a dinner at Chez Miller (organic, of course)!

Mar. 27: Statement of Topic and Annotated Bibliography Due at 5PM

Please define and explain the topic for your final paper, and provide an annotated bibliography of primary and secondary sources.

Week 9 (3/29): Tutorial

Apr. 3: Paper 3 Due at 5PM
Using Your Sources
This paper is a close reading of one, two, or three primary sources related to the topic of your final paper. These sources may be traditional or non-traditional. Please consult with your tutor and professor for ideas about various kinds of sources. You will not revise this paper, as it is designed to build toward your final paper.

Unit 4: Synthesis

Week 10 (4/5): The History of the Future?


Optional reading:


Apr. 10: Written Thesis Statement and One-page Outline Due at 5PM
Thesis statements and brief outlines will be posted to dropbox. *Please read everyone’s submissions and come to class on 4/16 ready to discuss.*

Week 11 (4/12): History in the Making: Presentations

Each student will present their thesis statement and outline in class. Presentations will be five minutes followed by short discussion

Apr. 17: First Draft of Final Paper Due at 5PM
3500 words

Week 12 (4/19): Tutorial

Apr. 22: Post Short Answer to Website: “What is (or isn’t) Environmental History?”
Due at 5PM
250-450 words

Week 13 (4/26): Seminar

Students will finalize their presentations for the capstone plenary session.
Monday 5/1, 6-8PM: Capstone Meeting for All Sections
CGIS South Concourse, 1730 Cambridge St.

TBD (last day of reading period): Revised Version of Final Paper Due at 5PM

The Harvard Lorax: Our Mascot