History 167a
Environmental History of the Americas

Brandeis University, Spring 2019
Tu/Th 5:00pm - 6:20pm
Building and Room

Timothy Lorek
timothylorke@brandeis.edu
Office, Tu/Th 2:00pm -
3:20pm and by appointment

Detail from J.M.W. Turner, Slave Ship (Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying, Typhoon Coming On), 1840. Boston Museum of Fine Arts.

This course will introduce classic and new scholarship and debates in environmental history. Just as flora, fauna, water, and pollution do not adhere to political boundaries, we will take a transnational and border crossing approach, considering environmental histories of the Americas, north and south. Avoiding the scholarly isolation of country-specific historical studies, this course will instead emphasize inter-connectivity in the Western Hemisphere, including shared histories of human migration, biological and capital exchange, race, identity, and slavery, commodity and extractive economics, colonialism, imperialism, and republican citizenship. We will take stock of the evolving field of environmental history but primarily focus on recent scholarship that addresses convergences with other thematic areas, including race and political identity, gender and representation, urban and rural communities, capitalism and economics, the politics of natural disasters, science, and climate change, and the transnational flow of people, capital, ideas, plants, and animals.
History 167a
Environmental History of the Americas

In this course, we will set a local, place-based foundation in order to think broadly about the Americas. Students will trace connections between their daily lives and their Boston environs to people and things from other places and times. We will explore a variety of specific topics, including Boston’s built environment, natural setting, and position as a global commercial center. Specific thematic emphases will migrate from a detailed study of Boston’s United Fruit Company, to ecotourism and land rights in Patagonia, to hurricanes in Puerto Rico and Louisiana, to disease and public health, to climate change and Peruvian glaciers, to masculinity and land rights in national parks and feminized cultural representations of the Amazon, along with many others. Through diverse readings, we will ask how the field of environmental history has approached North America and Latin America differently and how scholarship in each has changed and addressed contemporary concerns and the negotiation of political and economic power.

Lectures and discussions will center on casual objects (a banana, a can of Coca Cola, a mosquito, a refrigerator) and primary sources available online or in Boston area archives to connect broader processes to students’ daily lives. For a final project, students will pursue a research essay exploring the environmental history of their hometowns or a selected topic incorporating Boston-area sources. We will pay close attention to the research process throughout the semester, including writing proposals, finding archives and materials, producing a draft, and peer review.

Success in this four-credit course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings, papers, discussion sections, preparation for exams, etc.).

Learning Objectives:

1. To evaluate the growing field of environmental history and how an environmental perspective adds new dimensions to major historical themes.

2. To practice history without borders, to appreciate a transnational perspective on historical processes and actors, to explore inter-connectivity.

3. To situate Waltham in the greater Boston metro environment and to connect Boston in currents of global environmental history.

4. To evaluate the work of producing history, to think critically, write effectively, communicate and listen to ideas, and dissect the research process.

5. To produce an original, if preliminary, work of historical research. To practice the skills of the historian, including archival identification, evaluation of sources, the creative assembly of source material into narrative, and careful revisions based on peer review. To offer critical and constructive feedback in the peer review process.
History 167a
Environmental History of the Americas

In order to accomplish these objectives, students will undertake the following assignments:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage of grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regular attendance and participation in discussions:</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation and Discussion Leadership (once)</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance and Report (2 pages) on Environmental Seminar</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Prospectus (3 pages and outline)</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Paper Draft:</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Review (2-3 pages):</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Paper (10-15 pages):</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Attendance, Participation, and Discussion Leadership: Students are expected to come to class ready to discuss the assigned readings. In the first week of the semester, we will divide up the weekly discussion sections and assign students to lead at least one session. Leadership of discussion requires careful attention to the readings, the formulation of a series of discussion questions to bring to class, and a short presentation on an outside news article related to the topic and suggestive of the theme’s contemporary significance.

Attendance and Report on a Boston-area Environmental Seminar: The Boston metro area is your classroom. At least once during the semester, students will be required to choose a Boston-area environmental history seminar or colloquium to attend. Within one week of attendance at the seminar, students must turn in a two-page report of the seminar’s proceedings, including any contributions the seminar or scholarship might make to the themes discussed in class. I will present a separate handout with a full schedule of Boston-area environmental history groups and further details regarding this assignment.

Research Project: Students will research, draft, and revise a semester-long research project in consultation with the instructor. The theme can be anything having to do with environmental history that is either A). related to the environmental history of the student’s hometown, B). related to the environmental history of greater Boston, or C). related to any topic that can be explored from an environmental history perspective based on an archival collection in the Boston area. The final paper is expected to be between 10-15 pages, double-spaced, and no more than 20 pages. We will devote considerable time throughout the semester to this project, including proposing a topic, choosing a regional archival collection, drafting a paper, peer review, and revisions. More details and handouts of particular strategies will be discussed in class.

Students with disabilities have a right to be accommodated. If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately. We will strive to create an open and inclusive atmosphere in this course.
Academic integrity is demanded of all participants in this course. You are expected to be honest in all of your academic work. Please consult Brandeis University Rights and Responsibilities (http://www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/srcs/rr/) for all policies and procedures related to academic integrity. Students may be required to submit work to TurnItIn.com software to verify originality. Allegations of alleged academic dishonesty will be forwarded to the Director of Academic Integrity. Sanctions for academic dishonesty can include failing grades and/or suspension from the university. Citation and research assistance can be found at LTS - Library guides (http://guides.library.brandeis.edu/c.php?g=301723).

Required Books (The following titles are assigned in their totality and available at the university bookstore):

- Mark Carey, *In the Shadow of Melting Glaciers: Climate Change and Andean Society*
- Bartow J. Elmore, *Citizen Coke: The Making of Coca-Cola Capitalism*
- Nancy Langston, *Sustaining Lake Superior: An Extraordinary Lake in a Changing World*
- Jon Soluri, *Banana Cultures: Agriculture, Consumption, and Environmental Change in Honduras and the United States*
- Christopher Wells, *Car Country: An Environmental History*

Recommended Books (We will read selections from the following titles. These books are available at the bookstore and recommended but I will also provide a PDF of the selections):

- Anthony N. Penna and Conrad Edick Wright (Eds.), *Remaking Boston: An Environmental History of the City and Its Surroundings*
- Jon Soluri, Claudia Leal, and José Augusto Pádua, *A Living Past: Environmental Histories of Modern Latin America*

**Week 1: What is Environmental History?:**

January 15:
Course Introduction, No Reading

January 17:
Louis Warren, “Paths Toward Home: Landmarks of the Field in Environmental History”
Select Chapters from Ted Steinberg, *Down to Earth*
“Introduction” and “Epilogue” in Soluri, Leal, and Pádua, *A Living Past*

**Week 2: The Columbian Exchange:**

January 22: No Class, Monday Schedule
History 167a
Environmental History of the Americas

January 24:
Charles C. Mann, Chapters from 1491 and 1493
Elinor Melville, Chapter from A Plague of Sheep

Week 3: Cultural Encounters and Ways of Knowing:

January 29:
Brian Donahue, “Environmental Stewardship and Decline in Old New England”

January 31:
Black Elk Speaks, Selections

Week 4: The Exotic and the Sublime:

February 5:
William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness, or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature”
John Muir, Selections

February 7:
Paul S. Sutter, “The Tropics: A Brief History of an Environmental Imaginary”
Claudia Leal, Chapter in A Living Past

Week 5: National Parks and Preservation:

February 12:
Aldo Leopold, “Thinking Like a Mountain” and “The Land Ethic” in A Sand County Almanac

February 14:
Louis Warren, “Blackfeet and Boundaries at Glacier National Park,” The Hunter’s Game, Ch. 5.
Emily Wakild, “Purchasing Patagonia: The Contradictions of Conservation in Free Market Chile”

Break: No classes February 18-22

Week 6: Cities:
History 167a
Environmental History of the Americas

February 26:
Chapters from William Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*
Chapters from Ted Steinberg, *Gotham Unbound: The Ecological History of Greater New York*

February 28:
Chapters from Anthony N. Penna and Conrad Edick Wright (Eds.), *Remaking Boston: An Environmental History of the City and Its Surroundings*

**Week 7: Agriculture:**

March 5:
Edward Melillo, “The First Green Revolution”
Sterling Evans, “Transnational Agricultural History in the North American West”

March 7:
Selections from Jon Soluri, *Banana Cultures: Agriculture, Consumption, and Environmental Change in Honduras and the United States* (skim the rest)

**Week 8: Capitalism:**

March 12:
Steven Stoll, “A Metabolism of Society: Capitalism for Environmental Historians”

March 14:
Bartow J. Elmore, *Citizen Coke: The Making of Coca-Cola Capitalism*

**Week 9: Politics and the Environmental Movement:**

March 19:
Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* excerpts

March 21:
Richard White, “Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?”

**Week 10: Energy:**

March 26:
Myrna Santiago chapter in *A Living Past*

March 28:
Christopher Wells, *Car Country: An Environmental History*

**Week 11: Water:**

6 of 7
History 167a
Environmental History of the Americas

April 2:
Chapter from Mikael D. Wolfe, *Watering the Revolution*

April 4:
Nancy Langston, *Sustaining Lake Superior: An Extraordinary Lake in a Changing World*

**Week 12: (Un)Natural Disasters:**

April 9:
Chapters from Stuart Schwartz, *Sea of Storms: A History of Hurricanes in the Greater Caribbean from Columbus to Katrina*
Documents from "Imagining New Orleans"

*April 11: No Class, Instructor Away*

**Week 13: Climate Change:**

April 16:
Peer Review Discussion and Presentation of Research Projects

April 18:
Mark Carey, *In the Shadow of Melting Glaciers: Climate Change and Andean Society*

*Break: No Classes April 19-26*

Tuesday, April 30: Course Review and Final Project Presentations

***Final Research Papers Due May 2 at 5pm***