

Colloquium in Global Environmental History

16:510:534

Fall 2024

Tuesdays 2-5 pm

Van Dyck 308

Professor Toby Jones

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Office hours T 1-2 or by appointment

Professor Jamie Pietruska

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Office hours (via Zoom | link [here](#)) M 11:00-1:00 ET, Th 1:45-2:45 ET, or by appointment

Course Description

From its roots as a niche subfield of American history in the late 20th century, environmental history has grown into a robust and dynamic field of global historical inquiry. Our colloquium will explore themes in environmental history, in the intersections of environment and technology, and in the politics and cultures of envirotech studies today. Exploring topics on climate, waste, disaster, computing, future thinking, energy and more, we will examine how historians and fellow travelers concerned about the past and future of local and global envirotechnical systems think though and negotiate a broad range of pressing issues. Our readings will introduce us to key historiographic themes in the field, but will also balance historical writing with journalism, non-fiction, and other approaches to thinking both historically and conceptually about the intersections of the environment and technology over time.

Course Requirements & Policies

Coursework consists of weekly readings, thoughtful and sustained engagement in our class discussions, a short book review (4-5 pages), and a final historiographical review essay (12-15 pages). In addition, students will take turns introducing the readings and leading the discussion each week. We will provide more detail about each assignment as the course gets underway.

The success of our intellectual community will depend on your regular attendance, careful reading, and active participation in our weekly meetings. We look forward to working with you all this semester.

Assignments

Participation (20%): This is an intensive, discussion-based colloquium that will require your attendance and active participation each week.

Leading discussion (20%): Students will take turns introducing the readings and framing the discussion each week. Your presentation (10-15 minutes) should identify the major themes of the assigned reading(s) and explain how the reading(s) fit into the broader intellectual conversation and scholarly debates in history or related fields. Also say a bit about the author(s) and their disciplinary training, other notable publications, and relationship to environmental history. (Read published book reviews to help you situate the work in its field.) At the end of your presentation, offer 3-4 questions for class discussion.

Book review, with 1-paragraph statement of topic and bibliography for final historiographical essay (25%): Write a formal academic book review (4-5 double-spaced pages) on a book of your choosing that will also be a part of your final historiographical review essay. Identify a specific academic journal that is relevant to your field (e.g., *Environmental History*, *American Historical Review*, *Social Studies of Science*, etc.) and tailor your review to that journal's audience and style.

Historiographical review essay on a topic of your choosing (35%): Write a historiographical essay on a topic of your choosing that is related to environmental history, broadly defined. You may want to choose one of our weekly themes or come up with your own. Your essay should discuss a minimum of 5 books in 12-15 double-spaced pages with [Chicago style](#) footnotes and bibliography. A topic paragraph and bibliography for the review essay will be due in week seven along with your book review. Your review essay is due December 20.

Course Schedule

Instructors reserve the right to adjust the following schedule as needed in case of illness, inclement weather, or other unforeseen events.

****Please note that there is a set of short readings that we will discuss on the first day of class (Sept 3).**

9/3 Week One: Introductions, Definitions, and Debates

Richard C. Hoffmann, Nancy Langston, James C. McCann, Peter C. Perdue, Lise Sedrez, "[AHR Conversation: Environmental Historians and Environmental Crisis](#)," *The American Historical Review* 113, no. 5 (2008): 1431–1465.

Etienne Benson, [Surroundings: A History of Environment and Environmentalisms](#) (Chicago, 2020), 1-13. [Canvas]

Emily Callaci, "[On Acknowledgments](#)," *American Historical Review* (February 2020): 1-6.

Recommended: Paul Edwards, "[How to Read a Book](#)"

Resources for students considering an exam field in environmental history:

Sara B. Pritchard and Carl A. Zimring, *Technology and the Environment in History* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2020).

Mark D. Hersey and Ted Steinberg, eds., *A Field on Fire: The Future of Environmental History* (University of Alabama Press, 2019).

Andrew Isenberg, "Introduction: A New Environmental History," in *The Oxford Handbook of Environmental History* (Oxford University Press, 2014), 1–22.

Sara B. Pritchard, "Joining Environmental History with Science and Technology Studies: Promises, Challenges and Contributions," in *New Natures: Joining Environmental History with Science and Technology Studies*, ed. Dolly Jørgensen, Finn Arne Jørgensen, and Sara B. Pritchard (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013), 1-17.

Paul Sutter, "The World With Us: The State of American Environmental History," *Journal of American History* 100, no. 1 (2013): 94-119.

J. R. McNeill, "The Historiography of Environmental History," in Axel Schneider and Daniel Woolf, eds., *The Oxford History of Historical Writing: Volume 5: Historical Writing Since 1945* (Oxford, 2011; online edn, Oxford Academic, 18 Jan. 2018).

Sarah T. Phillips, "Environmental History," in *American History Now*, ed. Eric Foner and Lisa McGirr (Temple University Press, 2011), 285-313.

Stephen Cutcliffe and Martin Reuss, eds., *The Illusory Boundary: Environment and Technology in History* (University of Virginia Press, 2010).

Susan Schrepfer and Philip Scranton, eds., *Industrializing Organisms: Introducing Evolutionary History* (Routledge, 2003).

William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness, Or Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," in Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (W.W. Norton, 1995), 69-90.

9/10 Week Two: Ideas about Nature

Michael Rawson, [*The Nature of Tomorrow: A History of the Environmental Future*](#) (Yale University Press, 2021). [unlimited digital copies via Rutgers Libraries]

Raymond Williams, "[Ideas of Nature,](#)" in *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (Verso, 1980).

Richard White, "[Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?: Work and Nature.](#)" in William Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (W. W. Norton & Co., 1996).

Recommended: Leo Marx, "[The Idea of Nature in America,](#)" *Daedalus* (Spring 2008): 8-21.

9/17 Week Three: Energy

Bathsheba Demuth, *Floating Coast: An Environmental History of the Bering Strait* (W.W. Norton & Co., 2019). [on course reserve at Alexander Library]

Richard White, *The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River* (Hill and Wang, 1995), Introduction and chapters 1-2. [on course reserve at Alexander Library]

9/24 Week Four: Capitalism

Mark Stoll, *Profit: An Environmental History* (Polity, 2022). [will be on course reserve at Alexander Library]

10/1 Week Five: Disaster

Kate Brown, [*Plutopia: Nuclear Families, Atomic Cities, and the Great Soviet and American Plutonium Disasters*](#) (Oxford University Press, 2013). [unlimited digital copies via Rutgers Libraries]

Sara B. Pritchard, "[An Envirotechnical Disaster: Nature, Technology, and Politics at Fukushima.](#)" *Environmental History* 17, no. 2 (2012): 219–43.

10/8 Week Six: Computing

Nathan Ensmenger, "[The Environmental History of Computing.](#)" *Technology and Culture* 59, no. 4 (2018): S7-S33.

Steven Gonzalez Monserrate, "[The Cloud Is Material: On the Environmental Impacts of Computation and Data Storage.](#)" *MIT Case Studies in Social and Ethical Responsibilities of Computing* (Winter 2022).

Mél Hogan, "[Data Flows and Water Woes: The Utah Data Center.](#)" *Big Data & Society* 2, no. 2 (2015): 1–12.

Christophe Lécuyer, [“From Clean Rooms to Dirty Water: Labor, Semiconductor Firms, and the Struggle over Pollution and Workplace Hazards in Silicon Valley.”](#) *Information & Culture: A Journal of History* 52, no.3 (2017): 304–33.

10/15 Week Seven: Geographies

Book review due (with 1-paragraph statement of topic and bibliography for historiographical review essay)

Nathalie Koch, *Arid Empire: The Entangled Fates of Arizona and Arabia* (Verso, 2022). [e-book version will be available via Rutgers Libraries]

10/22 Week Eight: Waste and Wastelands

Gabrielle Hecht, [Residual Governance: How South Africa Foretells Planetary Futures](#) (Duke University Press, 2023). [open access]

10/29 Week Nine: Movements

Keith Makoto Woodhouse, [The Ecocentrists: A History of Radical Environmentalism](#) (Columbia, 2020). [unlimited digital copies via Rutgers Libraries]

11/5 Week Ten: Climate

On Barak, *Heat, a History: Lessons from the Middle East for a Warming Planet* (University of California Press, 2024).

11/12 Week Eleven: The Carceral State

Connie Y. Chiang, [Nature Behind Barbed Wire: An Environmental History of the Japanese American Incarceration](#) (Oxford University Press, 2018). [unlimited digital copies via Rutgers Libraries]

11/19 Week Twelve: Practicing History

Jamie L. Pietruska, "[“A Tornado is Coming!”: Counterfeiting and Commercializing Weather Forecasts from the Gilded Age to the New Era,”](#) *Journal of American History* 105, no. 3 (2018): 538-62. (original manuscript submission, readers' reports, and editorial correspondence will be posted on Canvas)

Jamie L. Pietruska, "[“Why President Trump’s Sharpied weather map was likely a crime — and should be,”](#) Made by History, *Washington Post*, Sept. 6, 2019.

11/26 Week Thirteen

NO CLASS (change in designated class days)

12/3 Week Fourteen: Biography & Literary Non-fiction

Rebecca Solnit, [“*River of Shadows: Eadweard Muybridge and the Technological Wild West*”](#) (Penguin, 2003). [4 simultaneous digital copies via Rutgers Libraries]

12/10 Week Fifteen: Fictional Futures

Octavia Butler, [“*Parable of the Sower*”](#) (1993). [unlimited digital copies via Rutgers Libraries]