



The University of Western Ontario
HISTORY 9833A
Environmental History:
People & Nature through Time
Fall 2023

Instructor: Prof. Alan MacEachern

Drop-in hours, time & location tba

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DRAFT SYLLABUS

Course Description:

Environmental history considers how humans have thought about and acted toward nature through time, and how nature itself has changed. Besides introducing the main concepts and debates in the field, “People & Nature through Time” traces a global environmental history, with special emphasis on the concept of the Anthropocene - the era in which humans have made intense, effectively permanent environmental changes on a global scale.

Course Materials:

Seminars are built around a series of readings, together averaging around 300 pages per week. Readings have been made available on the course OWL site, on the internet (linked off the syllabus), and/or through the Western Libraries online system.

Methods of Evaluation:

Seminar participation – 30%

This is a seminar course, and student participation is essential to its success. Students are expected to read all assigned readings and participate in every class.

Book reviews – 2 x 10% = 20%

Twice during the term, students are to write a 750-word book review of a monograph that is being read in whole or in part for the class. (The review is to be of the whole book.) Each review should describe the book’s topic and argument; discuss the significance of its methodology, theoretical framework, and/or findings within the broader literature; assess its strengths and weaknesses; and indicate what questions it raises for further research. Students can submit the reviews on OWL any time prior to the book being discussed in class.

Image essay – due week 6 – 10%

In week 6, the class discusses historical images of nature (and people), as seen in photographs, films, advertising, etc. Students are to write a 750-word essay on an environmental image of their choice – although it cannot be one discussed in detail in any of the assigned readings for that week’s class. They are to treat the images, as Joan Schwartz states in one of the week’s readings, “not as illustrations but as primary sources.” Students are asked to include a copy of the image in their Word doc.

Major essay – 40%

Students are to write an approximately 4-5000-word research paper, with a primary source component, on an environmental history topic to be determined in consultation with the instructor. In keeping with the course, the essay can be on any period and place in history. Bear in mind the importance of having a manageable topic, however, as well as an available and manageable source base.

introduced in class – week 11 or 12 – 5%

In an OWL Forum in advance of one of these classes, students will describe their research essay in progress and raise any issue they are facing. In class, they will lead a short discussion to seek input for improvement.

final essay – due 1 week after final class – 35%****The fine print:***

All assignments will be discussed further in class.

All written work is to be submitted through the OWL course site in Microsoft Word form (not as an Adobe pdf, please), preferably with a file name “Last name assignment” (ex. “Smith book review 1”). There is no need to submit a paper copy.

Late essays are penalized 5% per day. Please come to the instructor with any routine requests for extensions. However, a student’s request for accommodation (on medical, non-medical, or compassionate grounds) are to go to the graduate chair, who will consult and communicate with the instructor.

The final date to submit material for the course is **two weeks after the final class**. All assignments must be completed in order to pass the course.

Course Schedule and Readings:**1 *Introductions*****2 *Introduction to Environmental History***

- Alan MacEachern, [*The Miramichi Fire: A History*](#) (2020).
- William Cronon, “[The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature.](#)” *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (1995), 69-90.
- Sverker Sörlin and Paul Warde, “The Problem of the Problem of Environmental History: A Re-reading of the Field,” [*Environmental History*](#) 12 (2007), 107-30.

3 *The Anthropocene*

- Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, *The Shock of the Anthropocene: The Earth, History, and Us*, trans. David Fernbach (2016).
- Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer, “The ‘Anthropocene,’” [*Global Change Newsletter*](#) 41 (2000), 17-18.

4 *Indigenous People & Nature*

- Bathsheba Demuth, *Floating Coast: An Environmental History of the Bering Strait* (2019).

- You may also wish to listen to Demuth's [Greenhouse book talk](#).
- Shepard Krech, "Beaver," in *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History* (1999), 173-209.
- Lyle Dick, "People and Animals in the Arctic: Mediating Between Indigenous and Western Knowledge," in [Method and Meaning in Canadian Environmental History](#), eds. Alan MacEachern and William J. Turkel (2009), 76-101.

5 *Energy*

- Richard White, *The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River* (1996).
- Jeremy Zallen, [American Lucifers: The Dark History of Artificial Light, 1750-1865](#) (2019), prologue, ch.5, and epilogue.
 - You may also wish to listen to Zallen's [Greenhouse book talk](#).
- R.W. Sandwell, ed., [Powering Up Canada: A History of Power, Fuel, and Energy from 1600](#) (2016), ch.1.

6 *Seeing Nature*

- Finis Dunaway, [Seeing Green: The Use and Abuse of American Environmental Images](#) (2015), introduction, pt.1, and pt.3.
- Joan M. Schwartz, "Photographic Reflections: Nature, Landscape, and Environment," [Environmental History](#) 12 (2007), 966-93.

7 *Climate*

- Sam White, [A Cold Welcome: The Little Ice Age and Europe's Encounter with North America](#) (2017), introduction, ch.1, 9, and conclusion.
- Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses," [Critical Inquiry](#) 35 no.2 (2009), 197-222.
- Dagomar Degroot, et. al., "Towards a Rigorous Understanding of Societal Responses to Climate Change," *Nature* 591 (2021), 539-50.
- Andreas Malm, "Corona and Climate," *Corona, Climate, Chronic Emergency: War Communism in the Twenty-First Century* (2020), ch.1.

8 *Food & Agriculture*

- George Colpitts, [Pemmican Empire: Food, Trade, and the Last Bison Hunts in the North American Plains, 1780-1882](#) (2015), introduction and ch.1-4.
- Donald Worster, [The Good Muck: Toward an Excremental History of China](#) (2017).
- Vaclav Smil, "Understanding Food Production," *How the World Really Works* (2022).

Reading Week

9 *Inequality*

- Brittany Luby, [Dammed: The Politics of Loss and Survival in Anishinaabe Territory](#) (2020).
- Mike Davis, "A World's End: Drought, Famine, and Imperialism, 1896-1902," *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, 1999.
- Rob Nixon, [Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor](#) (2011), introduction.

10 *Critters*

- Stephanie Rutherford, *Villain, Vermin, Icon, Kin: Wolves and the Making of Canada* (2022).
 - You may also wish to listen to Rutherford's [Greenhouse book talk](#).
- Sandra Swart, "Kicking over the Traces? Freeing the Animal from the Archive," *Traces of the Animal Past: Methodological Challenges in Animal History*, eds. Jennifer Bonnell & Sean Kheraj (2022), 19-48.
- Erica Fudge, "A Left-Handed Blow: Writing the History of Animals," *Representing Animals*, ed. Nigel Rothfels (2002), 3-18.
- Richard Bulliet, "Postdomesticity: Our Lives with Animals," *Hunters, Herders, and Hamburgers: The Past and Future of Human-Animal Relationships* (2005), 1-35.

11 *(Environmental) History as Literature // essay works-in-progress*

- Stephen J. Pyne, [Voice and Vision: A Guide to Writing History and Other Serious Nonfiction](#) (2009), intro, ch.1-4 and ch.21-22.

12 *Nature & Nation // essay works-in-progress*

- Claire Elizabeth Campbell, [Nature, Place, and Story: Rethinking Historic Sites in Canada](#) (2017).
- James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (1998), introduction, and ch.1.
- Richard White, "The Nationalization of Nature," [Journal of American History](#) (December 1999), 976-86.

13 *Environmentalism*

- Etienne S. Benson, *Surroundings: A History of Environments and Environmentalism* (2020).
- Christof Mauch, [Slow Hope: Rethinking Ecologies of Crisis and Fear](#) (2019).

Additional Statements:

Please review the Department of History Course Must-Knows document, <https://www.history.uwo.ca/undergraduate/Docs/Department%20of%20History%20Course%20Must-Knows.pdf>, for additional information regarding:

- Academic Offences
- Accessibility Options
- Medical Issues
- Plagiarism
- Scholastic Offences
- Copyright
- Health and Wellness