

PRELIMINARY SYLLABUS. We will review and possibly revise it the first day of class.

HIST 720: History of Environment and Technology

Fall, 2005
Friday 1:00-3:30
BRN 334
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Goals

This course has two goals: (1) to introduce students to two historical fields-- environmental history and history of technology--and their overlap; and (2) to advance essential skills of the historian: analyzing, writing, and speaking.

To a lay person, it would seem obvious that technology and environmental change have had intertwined history. Leave it to scholars, though, to come up with a more difficult way of going at history. Two fields with separate histories developed to study each topic, and only recently have many scholars focused on the junction between the two. Environmental history developed out of Western American history (where the impact of the environment on human history is especially clear), while the history of technology developed out of the history of science. Both have developed interests well afield from their parents. A few scholars have participated in both fields for many years, but only recently has the number become large enough to merit review articles and an organization. Envirotech is an interest group within the Society for the History of Technology; it meets at conferences of the American Society for Environmental History as well as Society for the History of Technology meetings.

The readings for this course consist mainly of works by leading figures in the two fields and recent books (many of them prize winners). We will read them to assess their approaches to the historical craft as well as for content. You are required to read the books, but not necessarily to own them. Copies will be on reserve in the Clark Hall library. Other readings (such as articles) will be available on line.

This course is primarily about historiography and does not aim to be a chronological survey. I am teaching a course with the latter focus this term: STS 206: American Environmental History. You would be welcome to take or audit that course.

We will spend most of class discussing the readings. The key to good discussion is advance preparation. We will write book reviews to encourage that. Each week, before we discuss a given book, please write an review of up to 500 words in which you:

- Identify the thesis of the reading

- Summarize the most important ideas and evidence that support the thesis
- Evaluate the reading. Does the author make a convincing case? Do the author's sources, methods, insights, or angle of approach stand out? How does this reading relate to others?

Please send your review as an email attachment (easier to read than email itself) to the whole class by noon on Thursday (so you are writing on books before we discuss them). Each of you may take one bye (that is, not submit a review if you wish) over the course of the semester. At the end of the term, I will drop the lowest two review grades before calculating your overall writing grade.

This assignment has two advantages in addition to stimulating thoughtful discussion:

- It gives you practice writing book reviews, an important part of being a historian. The length is realistic: 500 words is the typical word limit for book reviews in Environmental History.
- It improves your writing and your grade. I will comment briefly on each paper, giving you the chance to take suggestions into account in subsequent assignments.

At the beginning of the semester, we will divide responsibility for leading each week's discussion of the required readings.

Please join these listservs: H-environment, H-sci-med-tech, and Envirotech. You can sign up for the first two at the H-Net site.

Credit

50% discussion
50% writing

Books

These books will be in the bookstore (some may arrive after the semester starts) and on reserve at the Clark Hall Library. You are required to read them; owning them is optional. Other readings will be available on line and may be added as the semester progresses.

Jared Diamond, Collapse: How Civilizations Fail and Disappear and the Lessons for the Modern World

Thomas Hughes, Human-Built World: How to Think about Technology and Culture

Merritt Roe Smith and Leo Marx (editors), Does Technology Drive History?: The Dilemma of Technological Determinism

Brian Donahue, The Great Meadow: Farmers and the Land in Colonial Concord

David Nye, America As Second Creation: Technology and Narratives of New Beginnings

William Cronon, Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West

Edmund Russell, War and Nature: Fighting Humans and Insects with Chemicals from World War I to Silent Spring

Susan Schrepfer and Philip Scranton (editors), Industrializing Organisms: Introducing Evolutionary History

James C. Williams, Energy and the Making of Modern California

Adam Rome, The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism

Gabrielle Hecht, The Radiance of France: Nuclear Power and National Identity after World War II

Michael Bess, The Light-Green Society: Ecology and Technological Modernity in France, 1960-2000

William Strunk and E. B. White, Jr., Elements of Style

Honor Code

As in all work at the university, the honor code applies to everything you do for this course. My assumption is that all of us are honorable people and will not lie, cheat, or steal. If confronted with evidence to the contrary, and if investigation convinces me that a violation took place, the student will fail the course and the case may go to the honor committee. The biggest danger in a course like this is plagiarism, so be sure to (1) cite a source for any idea not your own, (2) set off quotations in quotation marks, or by indenting, and cite the source, and (3) use the Chicago endnote style of documentation.

Schedule

August 26. Introduction to environmental history and history of technology. Please read before first class:

- Oxford English Dictionary, definitions of “nature,” “technology,” “environment,” and “history” (on line through Virgo)
- Raymond Williams, Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society, revised edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), definitions of “nature,” “technology,” “history” (Toolkit)
- Donald Worster, “Doing Environmental History,” from Donald Worster (ed.), The Ends of the Earth (Toolkit)
- Richard White, “Environmental History: Watching a Historical Field Mature,” Pacific Historical Review 70 (no. 1, 2001): 103-111 (on line via Virgo)
- John Staudenmaier, S. J. “Rationality, Agency, Contingency: Recent Trends in the History of Technology,” Reviews in American History 30 (2002): 168-181 (on line via Virgo)
- Jeffrey K. Stine and Joel A. Tarr, “Technology and the Environment: The Historian’s Challenge,” Technology and Culture 39 (1998): 601-640 (on line via Virgo)

September 2. Does History Offer Lessons for the Present?

- Jared Diamond, Collapse.
- Guidelines for Writing Book Reviews (Toolkit)
- Strunk and White, Elements of Style

- Send the first book review (of Diamond, not Strunk and White) via email to the whole class by noon the day before class (and each week after this)

September 9. Technology and Culture and Conference Presentations

- Thomas Hughes, Human-Built World
- Paul Edwards, “How to Give an Academic Talk: Changing the Culture of Public Speaking in the Humanities” (go to the SHOT website at <http://shot.press.jhu.edu/>, click on Annual Meeting, then click on “Advice on Delivering Conference Talks”)

September 16. Agriculture and Environmental Change

- Brian Donahue, The Great Meadow
- Practice conference presentation

September 23. Technological Determinism.

- Merritt Roe Smith and Leo Marx (editors), Does Technology Drive History?
- Practice conference presentation

September 30. First and Second Nature I.

- William Cronon, Nature’s Metropolis
- Practice conference presentation

October 6-9. Conference Week.

- No class meeting at regular time; attend local conferences instead.
- Environmental Letters/Environmental Law conference at UVA Law School Thursday-Friday. If possible, attend (1) William Cronon’s talk (title TBA) **Thursday** 4:15-5:15, and (2) **Friday** morning’s session on environmental history from 8:45 to 10:30 (Russell and Arthur McEvoy will present; Julia Mahoney and Karl Books will comment). Attend other sessions if you wish.
- WHEATS conference Friday-Sunday.

October 14. First and Second Nature II. David Nye, America As Second Creation

October 21. War. Edmund Russell, War and Nature

October 28. Evolutionary History.

- Susan Schrepfer and Philip Scranton (editors), Industrializing Organisms
- Edmund Russell, “Evolutionary History: Prospectus for a New Field,” Environmental History 8 (April 2003): 204-228 (on line via Virgo).

November 4. Society for the History of Technology Meeting. No class.

November 11. Energy. James C. Williams, Energy and the Making of Modern California

November 18. Suburbanization. Adam Rome, The Bulldozer in the Countryside

November 25. Thanksgiving recess. No class.

December 2. French Technology and Environmentalism. Michael Bess, The Light-Green Society, and Gabrielle Hecht, The Radiance of France.