

**History 0001**  
**Making of the Modern World: A History of Garbage**  
Anne Berg  
Spring 2024

**Course Description**

This course explores the history of waste in the modern world. We will trace how garbage – the actual stuff that humans discard – has changed along with methods of production, distribution and consumption. We will think about waste politics and garbage culture. We will examine how waste shapes societies, how it is managed, what roles it plays in different economies, how it integrates into people's everyday lives, and how it fits into their value systems. Most importantly, we explore how trash connects and divides people in different parts of an expanding and constricting world.

Students are expected to read primary and secondary sources, actively participate in class discussions, and complete regular writing assignments. But we are also going to get our hands dirty! This course invites you to use your analytical skills and your creativity to make tangible connections between global, local, and public history. Since we believe that the materiality of garbage is of profound significance, this course includes active explorative learning. We will touch stuff, talk to people, and go places.

**General Description:**

This course examines the political, economic, social, cultural and intellectual foundations of the world in which we live. We will cover the full scope of the human experience—empire, war, religion, revolution, industrialization, climate, globalization—over a vast geographic range, exploring key parallels and contrasts: in power and access to resources; modes of production and value systems; religious and ethnic traditions; identities and cultural practice, and in political systems and social formations. We will examine both human and non-human actors and personal and systemic changes and explore trajectories that are never predetermined.

This course serves as a gateway to the discipline of History and to the Department of History at Penn. It fulfills both the Sector II (History and Tradition) and Cross-Cultural Analysis requirement and, depending on the faculty member in charge, may examine the world through ONE specific theme (policing, garbage, environment) or highlight developments over two hundred or over two thousand years.

**Your work**

This is a team-based learning course. You will be assigned to a team and much (though not all) of your learning is interactive and much (though not all) of your submitted work is collaborative.

You will be doing a fair amount of reading and writing in this course. You will be assigned an *average* of 70-100 pages of reading a week (sometimes more, sometimes less; in general the expectation is that you spend 4 hours on reading per week). On any given day, you are expected to do *all* the assigned reading listed before class meeting.

There will be short, informal weekly writing assignments that ask you to engage with class materials or write a reflection on an activity. Sometimes, writing is to be done at home, sometimes in class or section.

### **Participation**

Participating in class discussion is an essential part of learning. You are expected to contribute regular, thoughtful comments that reflect completion of the assigned readings and engagement with the material. Active participation will be an important component of your overall grade. Your comments may also draw upon your reading of the week's news or other material, as long as you can make clear the relationship of such material to the topic at hand. Feel free to raise questions about anything in the reading that you didn't understand: such questions are also a valuable way of advancing the discussion. Note that attendance, while essential, is not equivalent to participation.

### **Reading**

Note: in any given week, there may be more reading listed for one day than the other. You should check in advance and plan your time accordingly. We are reading materials from different disciplines.

### **Note-Taking and Questions.**

You are expected to take notes during lectures, on field trips and as you read. Your notes are to capture the main argument or contribution of each text or presentation, help you remember important details, record your own reaction to the text or presentation (did you find the argument convincing? why? why not?) and help you understand the main basis of the evidence that arguments are based on. Please bring your notes to class. We will occasionally review notes or conduct activities that ask you to consult your notes.

Always also write down questions, There are different types of questions and they are all important. Basic I-didn't-understand-this-questions ensure that you get the explanations that help you grasp the material. Factual questions provide ask for more, better or related evidence about the details presented. Conceptual questions engage with the arguments presented, question the reasoning or evidence and allow you to formulate an original response to arguments encountered.

## Formal Assessment

You will write **three formal essays** that engage with a questions and formulate an argument based on the readings of the class. These take the place of exams and should be carefully composed, analytical and evidence based.

There will be **three team-based tests** that assess conceptual and factual knowledge from lectures and readings over the course of the semester. These test consist of short answer questions, multiple choice questions, identifications, and fill-in-the-blanks. Teams work collaboratively to complete each test. The weeks leading up to each tests feature short individual readiness assessment quizzes followed by a team-based discussion to prepare each of you and your group for the collaborative work.

Each team will work toward a **final project**. Each project will have an individual component and a group component. Once your teams have formed, you will receive more detailed guidelines.

## Grades

Class Participation (includes your personal log): 25%

Essay 1 5%

Essay 2 10%

Essay 3 10%

Test 1 5%

Test 2 10%

Test 3 10%

Final Project 25%

**Please note that this syllabus is subject to change**

## Schedule

### Part I: Concepts

Week 1	Beginnings
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Monday January 22	Garbage in History
No reading	

Wednesday January 24	The Concept of Waste
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- Michael Shanks, David Platt, William L. Rathje. "The Perfume of Garbage: Modernity and the Archaeological" *Modernism/Modernity* 11 1 (Jan 2004) 61-87

- Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (Routledge, 1966/2002), Introduction (pp. 1-6) and Chapter 2 (pp. 30-41).
- Joshua O. Reno. "Toward a New Theory of Waste: From 'Matter out of Place to Signs of Life'" *Theory, Culture, Society*. 31 3 (2014) 3-27
- Liboiron, Max. "Waste is not 'Matter out of Place'" *Discard Studies* (9 September 2019) <https://discardstudies.com/2019/09/09/waste-is-not-matter-out-of-place/>

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## Week 2 Boundaries

Monday January 29 Shit

- Pliny, *The Natural History*, Book XXVIII on remedies: urine and other excrement as remedies. Pages 269-271, 275-277, 284-286 in <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015004045350>.
- S. Stevens Hellyer, *The Plumber and Sanitary Houses: A Practical Treatise on the Principles of Internal Plumbing Work, or the Best Means for Effectually Excluding Noxious Gases from our Houses* (1893). TOC and chs. 12 & 13 on water closets (pp. 233-247 of PDF). <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433066423801>
- Dana Simons, "Waste Not. Want Not: Excrement and Economy in Nineteenth-Century France" *Representations* 96 1 (Fall 2006): 73-98.

Wednesday January 31 Toxicity

- Rachel Carson, "Silent Spring," *The New Yorker* (1962).
- Nancy Langston, "The Retreat from Precaution: Regulating Diethylstilbestrol (DES), Endocrine Disruptors, and Environmental Health," *Environmental History*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (Jan., 2008), pp. 41-65.
- W. C. Hueper, *Environmental Cancer* (National Cancer Institute public information pamphlet, 1950s).

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## Week 3 Scale

Monday February 5 Accumulation

- Blaise Farina, "A Portrait of World Historical Production and World Historical Waste after 1945" *Review* 30 3 (2007) 177-213
- Stuart Chase, *Waste in the Machine Age* (1931)

Wednesday February 7 Test 1  
No reading

## Part II: System

## Week 4

## Extractivism

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### Monday February 12 Mining Riches

- Joseph Denman, *West India Interests, African Emigration, Slave Trade* (London: James Big and Son, 1848)
- Clement Caines, *Letters on the Cultivation of the Otaheite Cane* (London, 1801), excerpts.
- Britt Rusert, "Plantation Ecologies: The Experimental Plantation in and against James Grainger's *The Sugar Caen*" *Early American Studies* 13 no. 2 (Spring 2015) 341-373.

### Wednesday February 14 Dumping Grounds

- "Old Plantation, Where Sugar Cane Grew, Would Sprout Toxic Waste Disposal Plant" *New York Times* 14 December 1980
- Martin Kalb, "Water, Sand, Molluscs: Imperial Infrastructures, the Age of Hydrology, and German Colonialism in Swakopmund, Southwest Africa 1884-1915" *Environment and History* 26 no.2 (May 2020) 175-206.

## Week 5

## Modern Metropolis

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### Monday February 19 Public Health

- Friedrich Engels, "The Great Towns" (pp. 58-66); Lewis Mumford "What is a City" (pp. 92-7) in *The City Reader*. Richard LeGates and Frederic Stout, eds. (New York: Routledge, 1996).
- Deborah Cadbury, "The Sewers of London." *Dreams of Iron and Steel*, 115-152.
- H.M. Plunkett. *Women, Plumbers and Doctors* (New York, 1885), excerpts
- A. Winter Blyth. *Lectures on Sanitary Law, "Sewers"* (London: Macmillan, 1893), 29-43.

### Wednesday February 21 Order

- George Waring, "The Cleaning of a Great City" in *McClure's Magazine* 9 no. 5 (September 1897)
- Carl Zimring, "Dirty Work: How Hygiene and Xenophobia Marginalized the American Waste Trades, 1870-1930" *Environmental History* 9 no. 1 (January 2004) 80-101

## Week 6

## Waste Regimes

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Monday February 26

Nazi Garbage

- Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*. "Architectural Megalomania" p 50-70
- Berg, "Rubbished World: White Supremacy's Complicated Love Affair with Garbage" *Journal of Genocide Research* (July 2021) <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2021.1950289>

Wednesday February 28

Socialist Waste

- Golfo Alexopoulos, *Illness and Inhumanity in Stalin's Gulag*, Ch 9 "Exploitation," 208-231.
- Joshua Goldstein, *Remains of the Everyday: A Century of Recycling in Beijing*, Ch 5, 119-143.

Spring Break

## Week 7

## Waste Regimes II

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Monday March 11

Imperial Excess

- Warwick Anderson, "Excremental Colonialism: Public Health and the Poetics of Pollution," *Critical Inquiry* 21 (Spring 1995): 640-669
- Amarjit Kaur, "Rubber Plantation Workers, Work Hazards, and Health in Colonial Malaya, 1990-1940" in *Dangerous Trade: Histories of Industrial Hazard Across A Globalizing World* edited by Christopher Sellers and Joseph Melling (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012), 17-32

Wednesday March 13

Capitalist Waste

- Rathje, "The Garbage Decade" *The American Behavioral Scientist* 28 1 (Sep/Oct 1984) 9-30.
- Charles W. Mills, "Black Trash" in *Faces of Environmental Racism: Confronting Issues of Global Justice*. 2nd ed. Laura Westra and Bill E. Lawson. (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001)
- Anna Malik, "Shipping the 'Next Prize': The Trade in Liquefied Natural Gas from Nigeria to Mexico" in *Dangerous Trade: Histories of Industrial Hazard Across A Globalizing World* edited by Christopher Sellers and Joseph Melling (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012), 87-98.

## Part III: Matter

### Week 8 Toxic Power

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Monday March 18 Energy and Waste

- Valerie Kuletz, *The Tainted Desert: Environmental Ruin in the American West* (Routledge, 1998), ch. 4: "Nuclear Wastelands," pp. 81-120.
- Allison MacFarlane, "Underlying Yucca Mountain: The Interplay of Geology and Policy in Nuclear Waste Disposal" *Social Studies of Science* 33 5 Earth Sciences in the Cold War (October 2003) 783-807
- Kyle Hill, "Chernobyl's Hot Mess, 'the Elephant's Foot,' Is Still Lethal," *Nautilus*, Blog Post (December 4, 2013). <http://nautil.us/blog/chernobyls-hot-mess-the-elephants-foot-is-still-lethal>
- John Upton, "[Our Nuclear Waste Is a Goldmine](#)," *Nautilus*, Issue 7 (November 7, 2013).

Wednesday March 20 Plastics

- Watch: *Plastic China* (2018)
- Jennifer Clapp, "The Rising Tide against Plastic Waste: Unpacking Industry Attempts to Influence the Debate," in Stephanie Foote and Elizabeth Mazzolini eds., *Histories of the Dustheap: Waste, Material Cultures, Social Justice*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012): 199-225.
- Elizabeth Grossman, "[Bad Plastic](#)," *Salon* 2008.

### Week 9 Collateral Damage

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Monday March 25 Technologies of Disappearance

- Scott Frickel, "Missing New Orleans: Tracking Knowledge and Ignorance through an Urban Hazardscape," in Stephanie Foote and Elizabeth Mazzolini eds., *Histories of the Dustheap: Waste, Material Cultures, Social Justice*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012): 119-146.
- Martin Melosi, "Fresno Sanitary Landfill in an American Cultural Context," *The Public Historian* 34 3 (Summer 2002): 17-35.

Field Trip (ideally)

Wednesday March 27 Test 2  
No reading

## Part IV: Lives

### Week 10

### Dirty Work

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Monday April 1                      Recycling

Due: Essay 2

- Joshua Goldstein, *Remains of the Everyday: A Century of Recycling in Beijing* Ch 8 "No Longer the World's Garbage Dump!" 223-257
- Mark Riley, "From Salvage to Recycling - New Agendas or Same Old Rubbish" *Area* 40 1 (Mar 2008) 79-89
- Finn Arne Jørgensen, "Green Citizenship at the Recycling Junction: Consumers and Infrastructures for the Recycling of Packaging in Twentieth-Century Norway," *Contemporary European History* 22 Special Issue 3 (August 2013) 499-516.

Wednesday April 3                      Waste People

- Watch *Wasteland* (Walker 2010)
- Elliott Woods, "Garbage City" *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 87 2 (Spring 2011) 6-27
- Kathleen Millar, "Trash Ties: Urban Politics, Economic Crisis and Rio de Janeiro's Garbage Dump" *Economies of Recycling* eds., Catherine Alexander and Joshua Reno, (London: Zed, 2012): 164-184.

### Week 11

### Garbage Sinks

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Monday April 8                      Waste and War

- Dorothee Brantz. "Environments of Death" in *War and the Environment: Military Destruction in the Modern Age* edited by Charles E. Closmann (Texas A&M University Press, 2009) 68-91
- Joseph R. Oppong and Ezekiel Kalipeni, "The Geography of Landmines and Implications for Health and Disease in Africa: A Political Ecology Approach" *Africa Today* 52 1 (Autumn 2005) 3-35
- Andrew Jenks. "Model City USA: The Environmental Cost of Victory in World War II and the Cold War" *Environmental History* 12 3 (Jul 2007): 552-577

Wednesday April 10                      Arctic, Oceans, Commons

- Watch *Chasing Ice* (Orlowski 2012)
- Bathsheba Demuth, "The Walrus and the Bureaucrat: Energy, Ecology and the Making of the State in the Russian and American Arctic, 1870-1950" *American Historical Review* 124 no. 2 (April 2019), 483-510.



Week 12 Resistance

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Monday April 15

- Berg, "Dump" *Somatosphere*. 13 November 2017. (<http://somatosphere.net/?p=13912>)

Wednesday April 17

Test 3

Week 13 Project Week

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Monday April 22

Due: Essay 3

Wednesday April 24

Week 14 Project Fair

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Monday April 29

Project Fair in class

Wednesday May 1

Ruins and Futures

- Gabrielle Hecht, "Human Crap" <https://aeon.co/essays/the-idea-of-disposability-is-a-new-and-noxious-fiction>

Final Project Written Component due: May 5