

Fall 2022
 Wednesday 3:30 – 6:30
 Williams 321

Marcy Norton
 marcy.norton@sas.upenn.edu

History 6700 - 303: Global Environmental History Draft & Subject to change

What is the environment and when did it come to be? Is the environment different from nature? If so how? If not, why not? These days, perhaps, we think of the environment as something that we inhabit, shape, experience, destroy. This course explores the changing relationships between human beings and the natural world from early history to the present. We will consider the various ways humans across the globe have interacted with and modified the natural world by considering such topics as domestication, mineral extraction, petrochemicals, and pandemics, among others.

In this graduate seminar we will explore the field of global environmental history with attention to the causes and effects of anthropogenic change with particular attention to diverse methodologies. In order to offer coherence to such a vast field, the course pivots around three organizing principles: time, posthumanism, and decolonization. The first part of the course – largely centered on “classic” works or approaches in environmental history – we will focus on transformative processes, such as sedentarism, globalization and imperialism, capitalism, and “acceleration.” The second part of the course is centered around (mostly recent) works in environmental history and environmental humanities whose approaches reflect “post-humanism” and “de-colonization.”

Readings

Most books are available for purchase at the Penn Bookstore (3601 Walnut Street), and your preferred online retailer; many are also available as ebooks through the library. (Please do not use Kindle editions, as they lack page numbers necessary for class discussion and citation in papers.) For physical library books, you may want to use Borrow Direct and EZBorrow, both available at library.upenn.edu. These services allow you to borrow books for 12 weeks from other university libraries. Plan ahead and order early in the semester. Required articles will be made available via Canvas.

Course requirements

- 1) short postings on Canvas for 10 weeks (please post by 9 pm the night before class)
- 2) leading discussion once during semester
- 3) creating and presenting a sub-section of qualifying exam list (which will involve additional reading and writing precis to be shared with the class in advance)
- 4) a final historiographic essay (2500 – 3000 words).

I will provide more detailed instructions separately.

Office hours

Monday 1:30 – 3:15 and by appt. Office hours will be held in person and via zoom. ([Link is here](#)).

Covid Policy

This course meet in person. Given that we will be in close proximity for two-plus hours in a relatively small, windowless interior space, we will remain masked with the option of collectively revisiting this policy pending changes in transmission levels, etc. In order to minimize unnecessary spread of Covid (and other contagious illness), if you are sick or have reason to believe you might be Covid-positive, please attend via zoom if you feel well enough to do so. (Please let me know with as much advance notice as possible via email). If you have any COVID symptoms at all, have been exposed to COVID and are awaiting test results, or test positive for COVID, please do not come in person to class. To join remotely, please click this link ** and enter the password: EH.

Reading Schedule (note – some weeks will include additional articles TBD)

1. August 31: Introduction

Time

2. September 7 Deep history

Stephen J. Pyne, *The Pyrocene: How We Created an Age of Fire, and What Happens Next* (Univ of California Press, 2021).

Lynn White, Jr., “The Historical Roots of Our Environmental Crisis,” *Science*, 155, 3767 (1967), 1203-07.

Simon Lewis and Mark Maslin, “Defining the Anthropocene,” *Nature* 519 (2015): 71-80.

3. September 14 Colonialism

Alfred Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900* (Cambridge, 2004)

David S. Jones, “Virgin Soils Revisited,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 60, no. 4 (2003)

Molly A. Warsh, “A Political Ecology in the Early Spanish Caribbean,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 71, no. 4 (2014): 517–48, <https://doi.org/10.5309/willmaryquar.71.4.0517>.

4. September 21 Capitalism

William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York, 1991).

Jason Moore, “Anthropocene or Capitalocene?: On the Nature and Origins of Our Ecological Crisis,” in *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital* (London: Verso, 2015), pp. 169-202.

5. September 28 Great Acceleration

J. R. McNeill and Peter Engelke, *The Great Acceleration: An Environmental History of the Anthropocene Since 1945* (Harvard University Press, 2016).

Approaches

6. October 5 Animals

Jamie Kreiner, *Legions of Pigs in the Early Medieval West* (Yale University Press, 2020).

Marcy Norton, "The Chicken or the Iegue: Human-Animal Relationships and the Columbian Exchange," *The American Historical Review*, Volume 120, Issue 1, February 2015, 28–60, <https://doi-org.proxy.library.upenn.edu/10.1093/ahr/120.1.28>

Bathsheba Demuth, "The Walrus and the Bureaucrat: Energy, Ecology, and Making the State in the Russian and American Arctic, 1870–1950," *The American Historical Review* 124, no. 2 (April 1, 2019): 483–510, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/rhz239>.

7. October 12 Beyond the Book

Explore the Feral Atlas: <https://feralatlas.supdigital.org/>

And another creation of your choosing that is not a book or article, such as movie, podcast, art installation, etc that you will introduce to the class.

8. October 19 Climate

Sam White, *A Cold Welcome: The Little Ice Age and Europe's Encounter with North America* (Harvard University Press, 2017). (selections)

Dagomar Degroot, "Blood and Bone, Tears and Oil: Climate Change, Whaling, and Conflict in the Seventeenth-Century Arctic," *The American Historical Review* 127, no. 1 (2022): 62–99, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/rhac009>.

Tim Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil* (New York: Verso, 2011). (selections)

9. October 26 Nature or Technologies?

Judith Ann Carney and Richard Nicholas Rosomoff, *In the Shadow of Slavery: Africa's Botanical Legacy in the Atlantic World* (University of California Press, 2009).

Marcy Norton, "Subaltern Technologies and Early Modernity in the Atlantic World," *Colonial Latin American Review* 26, no. 1 (2017): 18–38.

Raymond Williams, "Ideas of Nature," in *Problems of Materialism and Culture: Selected Essays* (London, 1980), 67–85.

10. November 2 Indigenous Ecologies

Bathsheba Demuth, *Floating Coast: An Environmental History of the Bering Strait* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2019).

Heather Davis and Zoe Todd, “On the Importance of a Date, or, Decolonizing the Anthropocene *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 16, no. 4 (2017): 761–80.

Watts, Vanessa. Indigenous place-thought and agency amongst humans and nonhumans (First Woman and Sky Woman go on a European world tour!). *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 2(1), 20–34 (2013).

11. November 9 Repair (Author visit)

Kristina M. Lyons, *Vital Decomposition: Soil Practitioners and Life Politics* (Duke University Press, 2020).

Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Harvard University Press, 2011). (selections)

12. November 16 Black Ecologies

Katherine McKittrick, “Plantation futures,” *Small Axe* 42, 1–15 (2013).

Sophie Sapp Moore, Monique Allewaert, Pablo F. Gómez, Gregg Mitman, “The Plantationocene and Plantation Legacies Today,” *Edge Effects*, January 22, 2019, <https://edgeeffects.net/plantation-legacies-plantationocene/>.

J. T. Roane, “Black Ecologies, Subaquatic Life, and the Jim Crow Enclosure of the Tidewater,” *Journal of Rural Studies*, January 1, 2022,

TBD

13. November 23 – Thanksgiving Break – No Class

14. November 30 Trees (Author visit)

Jared Farmer, *Elderflora: A Modern History of Ancient Trees* (Basic Books, 2022).

15. December 7 Colonialism Revisited

Amitav Ghosh, *The Nutmeg’s Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis* (University of Chicago Press, 2021).

Carolyn Merchant, “Nature as Female,” in *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and The Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco, 1980).

Final paper due December 18