

Fall 2019 | HST339U
Environment & History

Prof. Daegan Miller
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virtual office hours—by appointment



Edward Burtynsky, *Colorado River Delta #2, Near San Felipe, Baja, Mexico*, 2011

Course Overview

This course is an introduction to a global history of human interactions with the environment with a special focus on how people have thought about the environment, about what that word even means, and about their relationship to the wider world. Organized thematically, the course covers topics that range from empire to waste, and food to fuel. We will find ourselves facing large questions about the underpinnings of humans' relationships with their environment by looking at a variety of case studies from around the globe, sometimes jumping back and forth in time over the term. We will also focus on primary sources, though we will also see what contemporary historians have said about past environmental issues. By the end of the course, you will have a stronger understanding of not only how humans have dealt with environmental issues in the past but also the historical background for modern environmental issues.

Readings

There are no textbooks to purchase. All readings are available free as scans on D2L.

- **However:** You may need to order the book you choose to review for the book review assignment. You can either buy the book or request it from the library. Either way, give yourself plenty of time.

Grading & Policies

“Attendance”	-	
D2L Discussion	25%	Due every Friday by 12pm
Paper 1	25%	Due Oct. 25
Paper 2	25%	Due Nov. 22
Final Exam	25%	Due Dec. 6

Late Policy: Late papers lose 1/3 of a letter grade for every 24 hours they are late. For instance, an A- paper submitted the morning after the deadline will get a B+. **Late D2L discussion contributions will not be graded.**

Attendance/D2L Discussion:

Since this is an online class, attendance is virtual. Every week by **Friday at noon**, you will participate in a discussion of the week’s readings (no more than 75 pages). There will be five discussion questions each week, drawing on the readings you’ve done. **You need to answer each question, but can only create a maximum of two threads each week.** This means that the bulk of your answers will be responding to your classmates’ threads. (Eg.: you can create two threads and respond to classmates’ threads three times, or, you could create one thread, and respond four times; or create no threads, and respond five times).

These rules are intended to get you to participate in a true discussion with your classmates, reading their posts, considering their perspectives on the readings, and responding. You will get full credit for writing substantive responses, engaging with classmates in a true discussion, and showing evidence that you’ve done the assigned reading.

Paper 1: Compare and Contrast

The first paper will ask you to compare and contrast two authors we’ve read. This paper should be a **between 1000 and 1250 words**. You’ll find a full paper prompt in the Paper 1 folder in the Written Assignments activity. **Due 6PM Oct. 25**

Paper 2—The Book Review

This is a much shorter assignment—only **750 words**—in which you’ll summarize the argument of one of the books we’re dipping into this semester. Please choose from the following list. **NOTE:** you may need to purchase your book or request it through the library from another campus. Give yourself plenty of time for the book to come in and for you to read it carefully. You’ll find a full paper prompt in the Paper 2 folder in the Written Assignments activity. **Due 6PM Nov. 22.**

- Bathsheba Demuth, *Floating Coast: An Environmental History of the Bering Strait*.
- Raj Patel and Jason W. Moore, *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things*.
- Heather Swan, *Where Honeybees Thrive: Stories from the Field*
- Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*

- Arundhati Roy, *Walking with the Comrades*.

Final Exam: The exam will consist of essay prompts that will allow you to think about themes throughout the course. As the exam is open book, you should take advantage of your ability to reference specific readings, referring to specific passages and citing your sources throughout. You'll find a full paper prompt in the Final Exam folder in the Written Assignments activity. **Due 6PM Nov. 22.**

Disability Access Statement

If you have, or think you may have, a disability that may affect your work in this class and feel you need accommodations, contact the Disability Resource Center to schedule an appointment and initiate a conversation about reasonable accommodations. The DRC is located in 116 Smith Memorial Student Union, 503-725-4150, drc@pdx.edu, <https://www.pdx.edu/drc>

Title IX Reporting

As an instructor, one of my responsibilities is to help create a safe learning environment for my students and for the campus as a whole. Please be aware that as a faculty member, I have the responsibility to report any instances of sexual harassment, sexual violence, and/or other forms of prohibited discrimination. If you would rather share information about sexual harassment, sexual violence or discrimination with a confidential employee who does not have this reporting responsibility, you can find a list of those individuals. For more information about Title IX please complete the required student module "Creating a Safe Campus: Preventing Gender Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Assault" in the "My Courses" section of D2L.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is a vital part of the educational experience at PSU. Please see the [PSU Student Code of Conduct](#) for the university's policy on academic dishonesty. A confirmed violation of that Code in this course will result in failure of the course.

Questions?

Please do not hesitate to email me (daegan@pdx.edu) with any questions. Remember, I'm in Massachusetts, 3 hours ahead of you. So if you e-mail me at 10PM your time, you absolutely won't get an answer until the next day (probably at some annoyingly early time, like 4AM PST).

Course Schedule

Week 1: Beginnings.

Reading:

- N. Scott Momaday, "The Setting Out" from *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (1969).
- Vieve Francis, "White Mountain," from *Forest Primeval* (2016).
- Arundhati Roy, "Mr Chidambaram's War," from *Walking with the Comrades*.

Friday, Oct 4, noon: *D2L Discussion*

Week 2: Environment...Defined?

Reading:

- John Muir, “To the High Mountains” and “The Yosemite” from *My First Summer in the Sierra* (1911)
- Aldo Leopold, “The Land Ethic” from *A Sand County Almanac* (1949)
- The Wilderness Act of 1964

Friday, October 11, noon: *D2L Discussion*

Week 3: Environment Questioned

Reading:

- Ramachandra Guha, “Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique,” (1989) from *The Great New Wilderness Debate*, edited by J. Baird Callicott and Michael P. Nelson.
- Richard White, “ ‘Are you and Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?’: Work and Nature,” in *Uncommon Ground* (1996).

Friday, October 18, noon: *D2L Discussion*

Week 4: How the World Became Modern

Reading:

- Sven Beckert, “Introduction,” “The Rise of a Global Commodity,” and “Capturing Labor, Conquering Land,” from *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (2015).
- Raj Patel and Jason W. Moore, “Cheap Nature” from *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things* (2017).

Friday, October 25: ***Paper Due 6PM (no D2L discussion)***

Week 5: Food

Reading:

- Raj Patel and Jason W. Moore, “Cheap Food” from *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things* (2017).
- Jennifer Price, “Missed Connections: The passenger Pigeon Extinction,” from *Flight Maps: Adventures with Nature in Modern America*.

Friday, November 1, noon: *D2L Discussion*

Week 6: Chemicals & Contamination

Reading:

- William J. Darby, “Silence, Miss Carson,” *Chemistry & Engineering News* (Oct 1, 1962): 62-63.
- Rachel Carson, “A Fable for Tomorrow,” “Earth’s Green Mantle,” and “The Other Road,” from *Silent Spring* (1962).
- Kate Brown, “Bodily Secrets,” from *Dispatches from Dystopia: Histories of Places Not Yet Forgotten* (2015).

Friday, November 8, noon: *D2L Discussion*

Week 7: On Energy

Reading:

- “Pipedreams,” from Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011).
- “When We Kept the Lights On,” from William T. Vollman, *No Immediate Danger: Volume One of Carbon Ideologies* (2018).

Friday, November 15, noon: *D2L Discussion*

Week 8 & 9: Plants & Animals (And Bugs, Too).

Reading:

- Please read the book you chose for Paper 2.

Friday, November 22: *Paper Due (no D2L discussion)*

Reading:

- Heather Swan, “Bees as Indicator Species,” and “Searching for the Bees of Guangxi and Sichuan,” from *Where Honeybees Thrive: Stories from the Field* (2017).
- Fiona Stafford, “Buds, Bark and a Golden Bough,” and “Apple” from *The Long, Long Life of Trees* (2016).
- Bathsheba Demuth, “Whale Country,” from *Floating Coast: An Environmental History of the Bering Strait* (2019).

Friday, November 29, noon: *No D2L Discussion*

Week 10: Crises, Hope, & Conclusions

Reading:

- Paul Kingsnorth, “Confessions of a Recovering Environmentalist,” from *Confessions of a Recovering Environmentalist and Other Essays* (2017)
- Rebecca Solnit, “Looking Into Darkness,” “When We Lost,” “What We Won,” and “False Hope and Easy Despair,” from *Hope in the Dark* (2016).
- W.S. Merwyn “Unchopping a Tree.”

Friday, December 6 *Take-home Exam Due at 6pm (no D2L discussion)*