

**A Spoiled New World?
Western Hemisphere Environments, 1500-2000**

History 215

Spring 2009

Fisk 217

Office hours:

Tues Thurs 11-1 (Crowe 1-140)

Wed 12-2 (1800 Sherman rm 118)

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Description:

Environmental change is a grand theme in the history of North and South America. From the great plague of sheep that ate its way across Mexico through the rubber boom that hit the Brazilian Amazon to the green revolution that promised "Food for Everyone," many forces have shaped many new worlds in the Western Hemisphere. Running throughout this five centuries' long history is a central theme: the conquest, exploitation, and restoration of the commons -- of the natural resources of land, water, and air -- and all the earth's living forms that thrive on the land, under the water, and in the air -- that once belonged to all. This lecture course takes up this great story in four segments. First, the course will spend two weeks on the migration to frontiers, beginning with New England and New Spain in the 15th and 16th centuries and running through the United States's Alaska and Brazil's Rondônia in the 1960s. For the second section, the course will confront an often forgotten kind of environmental change, the 19th-century filling up of two continents. In the third part, the course will consider the great 20th-century selling-off of natural resources to private owners. And, finally, in the fourth segment, the course will seek to understand more recent efforts to restore public access to and control of common resources, in movements ranging from clean water campaigns to sustainable agriculture to rebuilding barrier islands and wetlands in the wake of hurricanes to the arrest and reversal of the production of greenhouse gases.

Required reading:

Reading requirements consist of selections from or entirety of the following books. BlackBoard will hold on-line reading packets. The University Library's Reserve Room and Electronic Reserve will store reference works and recommended reading.

Brown, Bruce. *Mountain in the Clouds a Search for the Wild Salmon*. Seattle: University

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Campbell, David G. *A Land of Ghosts: The Braided Lives of People and the Forest in Far Western Amazonia*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007.

Cronon, William. *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2003.

Kline, Benjamin. *First Along the River: A Brief History of the U.S. Environmental Movement*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman, 2007.

Kolbert, Elizabeth. *Field Notes from a Catastrophe: Man, Nature, and Climate Change*. New York: Bloomsbury Pub., 2007.

Miller, Shawn William. *An Environmental History of Latin America*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Mintz, Sidney W. *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*. New York: Penguin, 1986.

Weart, Spencer R. *The Discovery of Global Warming*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008.

Writing requirements:

History 215 aims to promote your compositional skills as well as enhance your knowledge of environmental history. The major written assignments will consist of an in-class mid-term examination, a take-home final examination, and a term essay. Both the final examination and the term essay must be type-written and double-spaced. Please note that you will have several options for both the take-home final examination and the final essay. These options will be outlined in a separate handout to be distributed in the second week of the quarter.

Grading:

Simplicity itself. The mid-term examination will count for 20% of the final grade, the take-home final examination for 30% of the final grade, the term essay for 30% of the final grade, and class participation for 20% of the final grade. Class participation will be evaluated on a combination of attendance and quality of discussion (which is not identical to quantity) in weekly sections.

Discussion sections and review sessions:

The Graduate Assistant will lead weekly one-hour discussion sessions. In addition to these weekly sessions, the Graduate Assistant and I will conduct three review sessions during the last week of classes. These review sessions will be entirely voluntary. Sign-up sheets for these review sessions will be distributed a week before the meetings.

Syllabus of lectures and readings:

I. March 31- April 11: Conquering the Commons, 1492-1820

Mar. 31: Does nature have a history?

Reading: Shawn Miller, *An Environmental History of Latin America* (2007), 1-48.

Apr. 2: An envelope for the living

Reading: David Campbell, *A Land of Ghosts* (2007), 1-32;
Bruce Brown, *Mountain in the Clouds* (1995), 7-58.

Apr.7: Claiming lands, controlling people

Reading: William Cronon, *Changes in the Land* (2003), 3-107;
Miller, *Environmental History of Latin America*, 49-76.

Apr. 9: Reaping the harvest, slaughtering the livestock

Reading: Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, 108-170; Miller, *Environmental History of Latin America*, 77-104.

Apr. 14: Taking charge of the commons

Reading: Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power* (1986), 19-150.

II. *April 16-April 28: Despoiling the Commons, 1800-1940*

Apr 16: Claiming continents

Reading: Brown, *Mountain in the Clouds*, 59-108.

Apr. 21: Settling frontiers

Reading: Campbell, *Land of Ghosts*, 33-124.

Apr. 23: Cutting the forest and channeling the rivers

Reading: Miller, *Environmental History of Latin America*,
105-135; Brown, *Mountain in the Clouds*, 111-162.

Apr. 28: Feeding the world

Reading: Brown, *Mountain in the Clouds*, 165-239; Miller,
Environmental History of Latin America, 136-166.

III. *April 30-May 12: Breaking Up the Commons, 1880-1950*

April 30: Mid-term examination

May 5: Surveying continents

Reading: Campbell, *Land of Ghosts*, 125-187.

May 7: Cultivating in the desert

No reading

May 12: Sprawling into the backlands

Reading: Benjamin Kline, *First along the River* (2007), 13-50.

May 14: Making free-flowing rivers into organic machines

Reading. Campbell, *Land of Ghosts*, 188-214.

May 19 Heading north into the boreal woods

Reading: Elizabeth Kolbert, *Field Notes from a Catastrophe* (2006), 1-90.

IV. *May 21-May 28: Reclaiming the Commons? 1950-2000*

May 21: Making New World cities

Reading: Miller, *Environmental History of Latin America*, 167-192.

May 26: Mobilizing to reclaim

Reading: Kline, *First along the River*, 51-173; Miller, *Environmental History of Latin America*, 193-227.

May 28: Discovering global warming

Reading: Spencer Weart, *The Discovery of Global Warming* (2008),

V. *Review sessions, final examination and final paper*

June 2-5: Review sessions

June 8: Final examination due, 5pm (University Registrar's scheduled time for final examinations of Tu Th 9:30am classes)

June 8: Final paper due, 5pm