

# **Introduction to World Environmental History**

Fall 2013

Instructor: Dr. Miles A. Powell

Office Hours Tuesday and Thursday, 3-4:30, or by appointment / 2229 Social Sciences

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## **Course Description:**

In this class, students will encounter the field of world environmental history through a variety of theoretical and methodological frameworks. We will begin by examining “Big History,” which contextualizes the human past within broader biological, geological, and even astronomical processes. We will then contemplate how the exchange of pathogens has connected human populations and shaped world history through plagues and epidemics. Next, we will examine the role of the environment in European colonization of America and Australasia, a theme environmental historians have dubbed “Ecological Imperialism.” We will subsequently draw on world systems analysis and dependency theory to explore how the spread of capitalism has transformed societies and environments the world over. We will conclude with a discussion of the theories of space and place that underlie our understandings of the globe and its human history.

## **Requirements:**

I will determine your grades as follows:

### **I. Participation (20%)**

Students must attend every seminar prepared to discuss that week’s assigned readings. Outstanding participants will demonstrate a thorough and critical understanding of the assigned books by offering perceptive comments and asking informed questions. Please bring all weekly reading materials to seminar.

### **II. Found Object Presentation (10%)**

Each student will sign up to present a “found object” on a week of their choosing. You may select anything you like, from a Nike shoe to a vaccine scar, but you must connect that object to the week’s themes in a meaningful and insightful manner. You will present your object for ten minutes, and then field questions from your peers.

### **III. Found Object Essay (30%)**

The week following your found object presentation, you will submit a brief (three to four page) essay that builds on your presentation by addressing your peers’ input. Due to the page restriction, I advise you to limit your discussion to a single course theme. As you formulate your argument, make your mantra “narrow but deep.”

#### IV. Historiographic Essay (50%)

At the last seminar, you will submit a six to eight page essay comparing the relative strengths and weaknesses of two of the approaches to world environmental history explored in the course. Your essay must draw on all of the assigned readings for those weeks, and must make a compelling argument as to which approach offers the best insights into our global past.

#### Assignment Submission Policies:

**Essays are due at the start of class on the assigned date.** In the interest of saving trees, I will allow you to submit papers via E-mail. However, if you choose to submit your work electronically, you must send it as an attachment in MS Word, or a compatible word processor. This will allow me to provide you with feedback using the “track changes” tool. You assume full responsibility for properly uploading the assignment in the correct format, and I will not accept technical errors as an excuse for a late paper. **If you are not comfortable with this arrangement, submit a printed copy of the essay directly to me at the start of class. These are the ONLY two ways I will accept essays.** I will subtract 5% per day for late assignments, beginning at the start of class on the due date. **I will not accept papers more than two weeks after the due date.**

#### Course Texts:

David Christian, *Maps of Time: An Introduction to Big History* (2005)  
Denis Cosgrove, *Apollo's Eye: A Cartographic Genealogy of the Earth in the Western Imagination* (2001)  
Alfred Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900* (2004)  
Hornborg, et al. Eds, *Rethinking Environmental History: World-System History and Global Environmental Change* (2007)  
Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: the Fates of Human Societies* (1997)  
William H. McNeil, *Plagues and People* (2005)  
Daniel Smail, *On Deep History and the Brain* (2008)  
Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (2001)  
Sheldon Watts, *Epidemics and History: Disease, Power, and Imperialism* (1999)  
Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People without History* (1997)

### Schedule of Classes

Week One: Big History I

Readings: David Christian, *Maps of Time*  
Recommended Readings: Robert McNeil, *The Human Web* (2003)

Week Two: Big History II

Readings: Daniel Smail, *On Deep History and the Brain*  
Recommended Readings: Patrick Manning, "Homo sapiens Populates the Earth: A Provisional Synthesis, Privileging Linguistic Evidence" *Journal of World History* (2006)

### Week Three: Epidemics I

Readings: William H. McNeil, *Plagues and People*  
Recommended Readings: Alfred Crosby, "Virgin Soil Epidemics as a Factor in the Aboriginal Depopulation in America" *William and Mary Quarterly* (1976)

### Week Four: Epidemics II

Readings: Sheldon Watts, *Epidemics and History*  
Recommended Readings: Paul Farmer, *Infections and Inequalities* (2001)

### Week Five: Ecological Imperialism I

Readings: Alfred Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism*  
Recommended Readings: Alfred Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange* (2003)

### Week Six: Ecological Imperialism II

Readings: Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: the Fates of Human Societies*  
Recommended Readings: John F. Richards, *The Unending Frontier* (2006)

### Week Seven: The Spread of Capitalism I

Readings: Hornborg, et al. Eds, *Rethinking Environmental History*  
Recommended Readings: Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Capitalist World-Economy* (2002);  
Kenneth Pomeranz and Steven Topik, *The World that Trade Created* (2005)

### Week Eight: The Spread of Capitalism II

Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People without History*

Recommended Readings: Joseph E. Inikori, *Africans and the Industrial Revolution in England* (2002); Jeremy Pretholdt, *Domesticating the World* (2007)

### Week Nine: Space and Place I

Readings: Denis Cosgrove, *Apollo's Eye: A Cartographic Genealogy of the Earth in the Western Imagination*

Recommended Readings: Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay* (1989)

### Week Ten: Space and Place II

Readings: Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*

Recommended Readings: Sugata Bose, "Space and time on the Indian Ocean Rim: Theory and History," in *Modernity and Culture* (2002); Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (1992)

**\*\*HISTORIOGRAPHIC ESSAY DUE\*\***