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21H.421 Introduction to Environmental History
Spring 2004

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21H421 (HASS-D CI)
INTRODUCTION TO ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY

Spring 2004
TR 3-4:30

Prof. H. Ritvo

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Subject Description

A historical overview of the interactions between people and their environments. Focusing primarily on the experience of Europeans in the period after Columbus, the subject explores the influence of nature (climate, topography, plants, animals, and microorganisms) on human history and the reciprocal influence of people on nature. Topics include the biological consequences of the European encounter with the Americas, the environmental impact of technology, and the roots of the current environmental crisis.

CI CREDO

Communication intensive subjects in the humanities, arts, and social sciences should require at least 20 pages of writing divided among 3-5 assignments. Of these 3-5 assignments, at least one should be revised and resubmitted. HASS CI subjects should further offer students substantial opportunity for oral expression, through presentations, student-led discussion, or class participation.

Readings

The following books can be purchased at the MIT Bookstore or through various online booksellers. They are also available at the Reserve Library.

Rachel Carson, Silent Spring
James Cook, Journals of Captain Cook (Penguin edition)
William Cronon, Changes in the Land
Alfred Crosby, The Columbian Exchange
Daniel Defoe, Journal of the Plague Year
Friedrich Engels, The Condition of the Working Class in England
David Herlihy, The Black Death and the Transformation of the West
Karl Jacoby, Crimes Against Nature
Peter Mancall, Envisioning America

J. R. McNeill and W. H. McNeill, The Human Web
Cormac O'Grada, Black 47 and Beyond
Richard White, The Organic Machine

Written Assignments

There will be three papers, of at least 5, 5, and 10 pages, due in class on February 17, March 16, and May 13 respectively. Specific assignment sheets will be handed out later in the term. The last assignment will also include an oral presentation. Either assignment 1 or assignment 2 (your choice) must be revised and resubmitted for a new grade. If you like, you can revise and resubmit both assignment 1 and assignment 2.

In addition, a single sheet of informal reflections on each reading will be due in class on the day it is scheduled for discussion (normally the second class of each unit).

Schedule of Classes

February 3-5: Introduction
Reading: McNeill and McNeill, 25-40

February 10-12: The Disease Environment
Reading: Herlihy, Black Death
Daniel Defoe, Journal of the Plague Year, 1-51
McNeill and McNeill, 75-81, 264-6

February 17 NO CLASS: Monday Schedule on Tuesday

February 19-26: The Columbian Exchange
Reading: Crosby, Columbian Exchange, chs. 2,3, 5
Mancall, Envisioning America, 45-61, 112-132, 140-148
McNeill and McNeill, 108-15, 160-1

PAPER 1 DUE IN CLASS ON FEBRUARY 19

March 2-4 Wilderness and Garden
Reading: Cronon, Changes in the Land

March 9-11 Science and Nature
Reading: Cook, Journal, 39-61, 125-134, 335-339, 374-390, 530-547 [check pp]
McNeill and McNeill, 137-53, 162-78, 186-9, 200-5

March 16 Field trip to Burndy Library

PAPER 2 DUE IN CLASS ON MARCH 16

March 18	Landscape and Agriculture
March 23-25	NO CLASS: Spring Vacation
March 30-April 1	Landscape and Agriculture, continued Reading: O'Grada, <u>Black 45</u> , chs. 1, 3, 4 PAPER 3 PROPOSALS DUE IN CLASS ON APRIL 1
April 6-8	Industry and Demography Reading: Friedrich Engels, <u>The Condition of the Working Class in England</u> , chs. 2, 5
April 13-15	Conservation and Preservation Reading: Jacoby, <u>Crimes Against Nature</u> , Introduction, chs. 4-6 McNeill and McNeill, 217-23, 230-52, 279-84
April 20	NO CLASS: Patriot's Day
April 22	NO CLASS: Individual Conferences on Paper 3
April 27-29	Poisoning and Environmentalism Reading: Carson, <u>Silent Spring</u> chs. 1, 7, 9, 10, 14, 16
May 4-6	Current Events Reading: White, <u>Organic Machine</u> McNeill and McNeill, 284-8, 319-327
May 11-13	Oral presentation of final projects PAPER 3 DUE IN CLASS MAY 13. REVISIONS DUE IN CLASS MAY 13.

Things to remember

Written assignments should represent original and individual work.

Assignments are to be handed in on time. If an extension becomes necessary it should be requested ahead of the due date. Otherwise, lateness will be penalized.

Attendance is important. Not all the material to be covered in class is included in the readings. Be sure to bring your copy of the readings to discussion classes.

Grading will be based on the three written assignments, the oral presentation, and class participation (including informal reflections), weighted as follows: paper 1--1/6; paper 2--1/6; paper 3--1/3; final oral presentation--1/6; class participation (including response papers)--1/6.