

**21H.421 (HASS-D CI)**  
**INTRODUCTION TO ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY**

Spring 2011  
TR 2:30-4

Prof. H. Ritvo

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Subject Description

A historical overview of the interactions between people and their environments. Focusing primarily on 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

Daniel Defoe, Journal of the Plague Year (Norton Critical Edition)

Friedrich Engels, The Condition of the Working Class in England (Oxford World's Classics Edition)

Karl Jacoby, Crimes Against Nature

Peter C. Mancall, Envisioning America

J. R. McNeill and W. H. McNeill, The Human Web

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 24, March 29, and May 12 respectively. A proposal for paper 3 will be due on April 12. 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 page (not hand written) 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).

### Exam

There will be an in-class exam on April 14, on the material covered up to that date in class and in the readings.

### Schedule of Classes

February 1-3:	Introduction Reading: McNeill and McNeill, 25-40,75-81, 108-15, 137-54, 158-78, 186-9, 200-23, 230-52, 264-7, 279-88, 319-327
February 8-10:	The Columbian Exchange Reading: Mancall, 45-61, 112-132, 140-148 Judith Carney, "African Rice in the Columbian Exchange" John McNeill, "Revolutionary Mosquitos of the Atlantic World"
February 15-17:	Wilderness and Garden Reading: Cronon, <u>Changes in the Land</u>
February 22:	NO CLASS—MONDAY SCHEDULE
February 24-March 1	The Disease Environment Reading: Defoe, <u>Journal of the Plague Year</u> (6-66, 197-230) PAPER 1 DUE IN CLASS FEBRUARY 24
March 3-10	Science and Nature Reading: Cook, <u>Journal</u> , 39-61, 125-134,335-339, 374-390, 530-547 Cook's Instructions March 10—field trip to MIT Archives

March 15-17	Landscape and Agriculture Reading: Harriet Ritvo, "Possessing Mother Nature: Genetic Capital in 18 <sup>th</sup> -Century Britain"
March 21-25	SPRING VACATION
March 29-31	Industry and Demography Reading: Friedrich Engels, <u>The Condition of the Working Class in England</u> , chs. 2 (The Great Towns), 5 (Results) PAPER 2 DUE IN CLASS MARCH 29
April 5-7	Conservation and Preservation Reading: Jacoby, <u>Crimes Against Nature</u> , Introduction, chs. 4-6 Harriet Ritvo, "Manchester v. Thirlmere and the Construction of the Victorian Environment"
April 12	Preparation for research paper PAPER 3 PROPOSALS DUE IN CLASS APRIL 12
April 14	IN CLASS EXAM
April 19	NO CLASS—PATRIOT'S DAY
April 21-28	Poisoning and Environmentalism Reading: Carson, <u>Silent Spring</u> , chs. 1, 7, 9, 10, 14, 16 Nancy Langston, "The Retreat from Precaution: Regulating DES, Endocrine Disruption, and Environmental Health"
May 3-5	Current Events Reading: White, <u>Organic Machine</u>
May 10-12	Oral presentation of research papers PAPER 3 DUE IN CLASS MAY 12 ALL REVISIONS DUE IN CLASS MAY 12

### Things to remember

Written assignments should represent original and individual work. The following link to the MIT Online Writing and Communication Center gives some suggestions about how to recognize plagiarism and how to avoid it.

<http://writing.mit.edu/wcc>

All sources used in written assignments must be fully cited. This includes sources of information as well as direct quotations; it includes the assigned readings as well as other materials.

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 exam, and class participation (including informal reflections), weighted as follows: paper 1—10%; paper 2—15%; paper 3 (including final oral presentation)—30%; exam—30%; class participation (including response papers)—15%.

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