



MIDDLEBURY SCHOOL OF THE ENVIRONMENT

SENV 3452A **Environmentalism and the Poor**

Environmentalism used to be understood as the privilege of affluent “first worlders,” an exercise in protecting nature from those too uncivilized or too ignorant to care for it by themselves. But this is no longer the case. In the past several decades, environmentalists—and environmental historians who study the history of human-nature relationships—have begun to acknowledge and account for the diverse “environmentalisms” that are practiced by both “first worlders” and “third worlders,” by both rich and poor, both workers and capitalists, between the global north and the global south as well as within small-town communities, villages, and cities across the world. That class is one of the key determinants in how different people experience and care for the environment is gaining acceptance among social scientists and is inspiring exciting new research in the field of environmental history. This course will explore the relationships among environmentalism, class, and power in human history, as well as the consequences of these relationships for poor and working class peoples. A class-conscious history of globalization—in which “globalization” is understood as the rise of a globally-interwoven capitalist economy over the past two centuries—reveals the various ways in which “environmentalism” has served the powerful while impacting the lives of the less powerful. At the same time, we will examine the resistance strategies of working class peoples the world over, to see how environments can be reclaimed by and for the poor. We will work collectively in this class towards developing a “poor people's environmentalism”: a blueprint for thinking about global nature and the responsibilities of the powerful and privileged in alleviating poverty and supporting poor people's rights to, and in, the environment.

Course information

Instructor: Gregory Rosenthal, Department of History, SUNY Stony Brook

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Class meetings:	M 11am-12pm	Office hrs. (Hlcrst 207): Tu 9am-10am
	W 9am-11am	F 11am-12pm
	Th 10am-12pm	and by appt.

Course objectives

- ~ Students will bring to this course their passion for environmental leadership and social justice.
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- ~ Students will bring to this course issues, actions, and projects that interest them and that they are potentially working on or will work on in the future. We will incorporate these into class discussion.
- ~ Students will walk away from this course with a better sense of how both class and a global perspective shape all environmental conflicts at all levels of society. Understanding the history of environmentalism and globalization from poor peoples' perspectives will cultivate the skills necessary to turn class solidarity and cross-class empathy into meaningful change to benefit all.

Readings

- ~ Ramachandra Guha, *Environmentalism: A Global History* (2001)
- ~ Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World* (2001)
- ~ Additional readings will be made available as PDFs on the class Moodle site or through links to online sources.

Assessment

- 1) Engagement: *expectations will be determined in Week 1* (25%)
- 2) Tracing our Global Footprints (personal reflection essay) – due Week 2
- *tying in with the first week's readings and the “big ideas” discussed in Week 1, this assignment asks students to write about both 1) how your own experiences of the environment locally are shaped by class relations and global processes, and 2) how your actions locally impact working-class peoples and environments across the world* (20%)
- 3) Disaster Analysis (op-ed) – due Week 5
- *building on our readings of Mike Davis's Late Victorian Holocausts, this assignment asks students to denaturalize a recent “natural” disaster: to write about the role of social class and global capitalism in shaping different peoples' experiences of disasters and recovery* (20%)
- 4) Film Introduction & Discussion (public speaking) – due throughout the semester
- *students will select one of the four films featured in this course, then prepare an introduction to that film to present before its screening. Students will also help facilitate discussion of the film* (15%)
- 5) Group Final Project – due Week 6
- *TBD as a group* (20%)

Grading

Grades will be assigned on a straight percentage basis: 90-100% is an A, 80-89% is a B, 70-79% is a C, 60-69% is a D, and <60% is an F, with + and - grades assigned to high and low scores within those ranges.

Calendar

Week 1 (June 23-27): What are we talking about?

Read: Martinez-Alier, "The Environmentalism of the Poor"

White, "Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?": Work and Nature"

Guha, Introduction and "Part One: Environmentalism's First Wave"

Introduce Assignment: Tracing our Global Footprints (due Week 2)

Introduce Assignment: Film Introduction & Discussion (due at various times)

Discuss Group Project (due Week 6)

Mon, June 23: introductions

Wed, June 25: Martinez-Alier & White

Thurs, June 26: Guha

Week 2 (June 30-July 4): Commodities: Labor and Consumption

Global Footprints Reflection Essay Due!

Read: Marx, on commodities

Soluri, "Accounting for Taste"

Klinge, "Spaces of Consumption"

reading on lake perch?

Rome, "Nature Wars? Culture Wars?"

Guha, "Part Two: Environmentalism's Second Wave"

Film: *Darwin's Nightmare* (2004) – 110 min.

Mon, June 30: 1 hr. class: Marx & Klinge

Wed, July 2: 2 hr. class: Soluri, Rome, Guha, & lake perch?
evening: film

Thurs, July 3: 2 hr. class: Guha cont'd

Week 3 (July 7-11): "Natural" Disasters: Colonialism and Vulnerability

Read: Davis, Preface, "Part One: The Great Drought, 1876-1878" and "Part Two: El Niño and the New Imperialism, 1888-1902"

Pritchard, "An Envirotechnical Disaster: Nature, Technology, and Politics at Fukushima"

Zoltan Gluck, "Race, Class, and Disaster Gentrification"

Introduce Assignment: Disaster Analysis (due Week 5)

Film: *Trouble the Water* (2008) – 90 min.

Mon, July 7: 1 hr. class: Davis (preface & Ch. 1)

Wed, July 9: 2 hr. class: Davis (Ch. 2 & 3) & Pritchard

Thurs, Jul 10: 2 hr. class: Davis (Ch. 4-6) & Gluck
evening: film

Week 4 (July 14-18): Dispossession: Enclosure and Exploitation

Read: Marx, on dispossession

Excerpt from Pai, *Scattered Sand: The Story of China's Rural Migrants*
Jacoby, selection from *Crimes Against Nature* [read online]
Davis, selection from *Planet of Slums*
Rosenthal, “People and Nature in Motion”
Films: *Land of Oil and Water* (2010) – 45 min.

Mon, July 14: 1 hr. class: Marx & Jacoby
Wed, July 16: 2 hr. class: Davis, Pai, and Rosenthal
 evening: *public film screening* w/ Neil McArthur
Thurs, Jul 17: 2 hr. class: discussion w/ Neil McArthur

Week 5* (July 21-25): **Resistance: Fight the Power*

Disaster Analysis Op-Ed Due!

Read: Davis, “Part Three: Decyphering ENSO” and “Part Four: The Political Ecology of Famine”
 NYT article series on China
Film: *Crude* (2009) – 100 min.

Mon, July 21: 1 hr. class: Davis (ch. 7 & 8)
Wed, July 23: 2 hr. class: Davis (ch. 9 & 10) & NYT articles
 Watch on your own: *The Warriors of Qiugang*
Thurs, Jul 24: 2 hr. class: Davis (ch. 11 & 12)
 evening: film

Week 6* (July 28-August 1): **Summary and Next Steps*

Group Final Project Due!

Mon, July 28: 1 hr. class: TBD
Wed, July 30: 2 hr. class: TBD
Thurs, Jul 31: 2 hr. class: TBD