

The Americas in Global Environmental History

Professor Matthew Vitz H&SS 4005

Thursday, 9-11:50 in HSS 6008

Office Hours: Tuesday 11-12 and Wednesday 2-3.

Latin America evokes images of stunning landscapes and waterscapes. The Amazon River snakes through the largest rain forest in the world. Its headwaters are found in the Peruvian Andes, a long mountain chain stretching from Colombia down to Patagonia with peaks regularly reaching 18,000 ft. above sea level. In South America as in Central America and Mexico, you can find strikingly different environments such as temperate forests, deserts, rain forests, and sandy beaches with magnificent coral reefs within just 50 miles of each other, in some areas. How have Latin Americans lived in, worked with, and transformed these environments and what have the consequences of these interactions been on social relations? These are some of the questions that this colloquium will try to answer. In Latin America, as elsewhere, social power and nature are inextricably linked. Social and political power is anchored in the material environment, and environmental change has been a major source of conflict and contention between groups and between groups and states. Human interactions with the environment reflect and create social inequalities, but these interactions may also challenge existing inequalities. Latin America's striking landscapes are, of course, natural in part, but they have also been shaped by centuries of human intervention. It is this history of interaction between nature and society that concerns us.

This course will also focus on questions of historiography (the writing of history) and historical interpretation of broad trends and structural forces more generally. The readings will represent a sample of the major trends in the environmental history of the Americas, emphasizing a transnational perspective on the way environment—broadly defined—has been wrapped up in the making of empire, capitalism, urbanization, international science, state formation, and subaltern politics. We will compare North American and Latin American environmental history traditions and explore how environmental history can inform other fields by posing new questions and integrating non-human actors and forces. For the first week, we will discuss the practice of environmental history: its theoretical and conceptual concerns, method, and subject matter. We will attempt to answer these additional questions over the course of the term: Does nature have agency? What can environmental historians of Latin America teach other environmental historians? To what extent does environmental history advance, alter, or complicate our understanding of conventional historical topics in the region such as conquest and colonization, export economies, state formation, and subaltern politics? Beyond reinterpreting such crucial subjects, environmental historians of Latin America have also contributed to studies on disasters, climate change, and the history of science.

The colloquium will also integrate different kinds of assignments to engage you in the multiple themes of environmental history and the sources historians use. One is a commodity assignment where you will present in class on the environmental aspects of a commodity historically produced in Latin America (banana, sugar, coffee, silver, cocaine, etc). The other is a visual image assignment, where you will also be asked to give a short presentation on how a particular image (map, photograph, painting, etc) sheds light on or helps explain a topic involving human-nature interactions or the environmental history of a particular region. For both these assignments, you will submit a short text to me (the written version of your presentation).

You will write a total of 3 weekly response papers to the assigned readings. You are free to select the weeks you wish to write a response paper—just be sure you reach a total of

3. Note that there are 6 weeks where you will be able to write a response paper; the last week is not an option. The response papers are due Wednesdays at 4pm in my mailbox on the 5th floor. I will accept emailed papers until 6pm, but please don't make a habit of it. They will be graded on a pass/fail basis. Each student will lead discussion of the week's readings at least once, depending on the total number of students enrolled in the class. Grad students will write a historiographical review essay (15 pages) on an environmental history topic of their choice. You will consult with me at the end of January to discuss your topic. Undergrads will write a "contemporary theme" paper (8-9 pages). You will research the historical and contemporary aspects of a particular environmental problem affecting the Americas. In your paper you will discuss the historical dimensions of the problem, analyze how history can help us deal with the problem, and explain how the problem has changed over time. You will present your initial findings in an oral presentation during the last week of class.

Additional details on and specific instructions for the major assignments in this colloquium to follow.

Participation 20%

Response Papers 10%

Commodity Paper and Presentation 15%

Map/Image Paper and Presentation 15%

Final Project 40%

Course Schedule

Assigned books are available for purchase on Amazon and other online sites. Articles are available for download from the UCSD server. If not, I will email them to you.

January 7: Course Introduction: What is environmental history?

January 14: Introductory Readings and Environmental Aspects of the Conquest

Ellen Stroud, "Following Dirt Through History: Does Nature Always Matter" *History & Theory* (2003).

Ted Steinberg, "Down to Earth: Nature, Agency, and Power in American History" *American Historical Review* (2002).

Elinor Melville, "Environmental and Social Change in the Valle de Mezquital, Mexico, 1521-1600" *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 32, 1 (1990): 24-53.

Alfred W. Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* 30th anniversary edition (Praeger, 2003): foreword by J.R. McNeill, preface to edition, chapters 2, 3, and 5.

January 21: The Science of Empire

HAHR: Science and Medicine in Latin America, Essays in Honor of Nancy Leys Stepan (2011)

Julia Rodriguez and Ann Zulawski, Introduction: "Science and Medicine in Latin America"

Alexandra Minna Stern, "The Hour of Eugenics" in Veracruz, Mexico: Radical Politics, Public Health, and Latin America's Only Sterilization Law"

Nancy Leys Stepan, "The National and the International in Public Health: Carlos Chagas and the Rockefeller Foundation in Brazil, 1917 – 1930s"

ISIS "Focus: Global Currents in National Histories of Science: The "Global Turn" and the History of Science in Latin America

Stuart McCook, "Introduction" *ISIS* (2013)

Regina Horta Duarte, "Between the National and the Universal: Natural History Networks in Latin America in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries" *ISIS* (2013)

Mariola Espinosa, "Globalizing the History of Disease, Medicine, and Public Health in Latin America" *ISIS* (2013)

Download at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/674937>

Discuss commodity assignments for February 4

January 28: Commodity Chains Versus Commodity Ecologies

John Soluri, *Banana Cultures: Agriculture, Consumption, and Environmental Change in Honduras and the United States* (Austin: Univ. of Texas press, 2005)

February 4: Commodity presentations

February 11: The Nature of State Formation and Nationalism

Myrna Santiago, *The Ecology of Oil: Environment, Labor and the Mexican Revolution, 1900-1938* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2006)

Discuss Visual Source Presentations for following week

February 18: Map/image presentations

February 25: Does Nature Have Agency?

J.R McNeil, *Mosquito Empires: Ecology and War in the Greater Caribbean, 1620-1914* (Cambridge Univ. press, 2010) (selections)

Paul Sutter, "Nature's Agents or Agents of Empire? Entomological Workers and Environmental Change during the Construction of the Panama Canal 98, 4 (December 2007)

March 4: Frontier Zones and the Environmental Politics of Neoliberalism

Thomas Miller Klubock, *La Frontera: Forests and Environmental Conflict in Chile's Frontier Territory* (Duke, 2014)

Film in class, TBD

March 11: Climate Change, Disasters, Interdisciplinary Approaches and New Directions

For this week, undergraduates will give a brief presentation (maximum of 10 minutes) on the preliminary findings of their “contemporary theme” projects. Graduate students will present to the class reviews of select readings below (summaries and critiques that tie the reading to the course themes).

Mark Carey, "Climate, Medicine and Peruvian health Resorts for Tuberculosis Treatment, 1850-1950" *Science, Technology, and Human Values* 39, no. 6 (2014): 795-818.

Mark Carey, “Latin American Environmental History: Current Trends, Interdisciplinary Insights, and Future Directions” *Environmental History* (April, 2009)

Germán Palacio, “An Eco-Political Vision for an Environmental History: Toward a Latin American and North American Research Partnership” *Environmental History* (2012) 17 (4): 725-743

Paul Sutter, “What Can U.S. Environmental Historians Learn from Non-U.S. Environmental Historiography” *Environmental History* (2003).

Lise Sedrez, “Urban Natures in Latin America: Diverse Cities and Shared Narratives” *New Environmental Histories of Latin America and the Caribbean* ed. Claudia Leal, John Soluri, and José Pádua (2013)

John Soluri, “Campesinos and the Hidden History of Biodiversity” *New Environmental Histories of Latin America and the Caribbean* ed. Claudia Leal, John Soluri, and José Pádua (2013)