

History 165/265
Environmental Crises in History
Professor Naomi Oreskes, Spring 2001

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HSS 6086A, 534-4695

Course summary In the 20th century, industrialized nations began to set aside natural areas, and in doing so creating a modern notion of “wilderness” as something important, even sacred, to be preserved, protected, and defended from human activity. In the late 20th century, concern over toxic chemicals, loss of biodiversity, habitat destruction, and global warming has led to the sense that humans now face an environmental crisis. This course strives to place our current concern with environmental crises in historical context. How have people thought about environmental crisis in the past? What do we know about how past societies grappled with environmental crisis, environmental change? The emphasis in the course will be on close reading of texts to develop an understanding of how historians incorporate thinking about the natural environment into our understanding of human history.

Readings All of the reading for the course consists of books, most of which are on sale at *Groundworks*. Some are available through Amazon.com or other on-line book sellers. The final book is expensive; if the price seems prohibitive then we will consider an alternative reading.

Requirements and grading This is a seminar. The substance of the course is reading, and coming to class to discuss the reading. Each week you will be expected to come to class having completed the assigned text, and having written a 1-2 summary of the main arguments of the text. Your summary should *not* be a critique of the text, or an argument about it, but simply a summary of what the author has to say in the book. In class, we will critique and argue. The written summaries will be collected each week, and, together with class participation, will count for 50% of the course grade. In addition to class participation, each student will be required to complete a term paper on a topic of his or her own choosing, related to the theme of the course. Each student should consult with me as to the proposed topic. The papers take the place of a final exam, and will be due on the day assigned for a final by the university registrar. However, I encourage you to submit your papers before that; if you do, I will read them, critique them, and return them for final revisions before grading.

Reading List and Schedule

- Week 1 April 4 Introduction.
- Week 2 April 11 J. Donald Hughes, *Pan's Travail: Environmental Problems of the Ancient Greeks and Romans* (Johns Hopkins U.P., 1994)
- Week 3 April 18 William H. McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples* (Anchor, 1998).
- Week 4 April 25 Willian Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (Hill and Wang, 1984).
- Week 5 May 2 Professor out of town, no class, decide on term paper topic.
- Week 6 May 9 Tom Griffiths and Libby Robin, editors, *Ecology and Empire: Environmental History of Settler Societies* (University of Washington Press, 1998). Selected readings TBA.
- Week 7 May 16 Arthur McEvoy, *The Fisherman's Problem* (Cambridge University Press, 1990).
- Week 8 May 25 Joseph E Taylor, *Making Salmon: An Environmental History of the Northwest Fisheries Crisis* (University of Washington Press, 2001) **available on amazon.com for 18.00**
- Week 9 May 30 S. George Philander, *Is the Temperature Rising? The Uncertain Science of Global Warming* (Princeton University Press, 2000).
- Week 10 June 6 J.R. McNeill and Paul Kennedy, *Something New Under the Sun: An Environmental History of the 20th Century World* (Norton, 2000). **Available on amazon.com for 23.96**