



**Comparative Environmental History:
The Twentieth-Century World
S&TS / BSOC 4131**

Fall 2009

**Wednesdays, 12:20 – 2:15 pm
189 Rockefeller Hall**

DR. SARA B. PRITCHARD

Office 301 Rockefeller Hall

Office hours Wednesdays, 2:15 – 4:00 pm; and by appt

Phone 607.255.3691

Email sbp65@cornell.edu

Course description

One of the most troubling realizations of the twentieth century has been the extent to which human activities have transformed the environment on a global scale. The rapid growth of human population and the acceleration of the global economy have meant that the twentieth century, in environmental terms, has been unlike any other in world history.

This course takes a comparative approach, examining crucial themes in the environmental history of the twentieth-century world in different times, places, and ecologies. Classes are organized around paired readings that explore these comparisons. These include environmental degradation and restoration in the United States and French North Africa; the commodification of forests and mines in America; the relationship between politics and the environment in China and the United States; and technology, ecology, and modernity in Brazil, Russia, and France.

Several key issues will inform our understanding of the twentieth-century world and its environmental history: the reciprocal relationship between humanity and the environment; the social construction of “nature” and environmental knowledge; the role of race, class, gender, colonial relations, and other social dynamics in mediating interactions between people and the natural world; and the role of imperialism, postcoloniality, and globalization in shaping the relationship between nature and states both across and within national borders.

Through readings, discussion, and independent research, students will explore comparative environmental history in three ways: *historically* (e.g., comparisons and contrasts across times, places, and cultures); *ecologically* (e.g., similar historical processes at work in divergent ecologies); and *methodologically* (e.g., the various approaches and tools environmental historians and scholars in related disciplines have used to conceptualize and write (comparative) environmental history). This seminar thus also examines what “comparative” environmental history might mean and what it might have to offer not only to historians, but also to policy-makers and global citizens of the twenty-first-century world.

Required readings

The following books are required. They are available at the Cornell Store. One copy of each book has also been put on 4-hour reserve at Uris Library.

- Neil Maher, *Nature's New Deal: The Civilian Conservation Corps and the Roots of the American Environmental Movement* (Oxford University Press, 2007);
- Diana Davis, *Resurrecting the Granary of Rome: Environmental History and French Colonial Expansion in North Africa* (Ohio University Press, 2007);
- Thomas Andrews, *Killing for Coal: America's Deadliest Labor War* (Harvard University Press, 2008);
- Scott Prudham, *Knock on Wood: Nature as Commodity in Douglas-Fir Country* (Routledge, 2004);
- Sarah Phillips, *This Land, This Nation: Conservation, Rural America, and the New Deal* (Cambridge University Press, 2007);
- Judith Shapiro, *Mao's War on Nature: Politics and the Environment in Revolutionary China* (Cambridge University Press, 2001);
- Paul Josephson, *Industrialized Nature: Brute Force Technology and the Transformation of the Natural World* (Island Press, 2002);
- Michael Bess, *The Light-Green Society: Ecology and Technological Modernity in France, 1960–2000* (University of Chicago Press, 2003).

In addition, several book chapters and articles are required. They are available through the course's Blackboard website [[STS4131-Pritchard-Fall2009: Comparative Environmental History](#)] and are noted [BB] on the syllabus, *or* through Cornell Library's e-journals collection and marked [EJ] on the syllabus.

Assignments and grading

The following assignments are required for undergraduates enrolled in the course. Any graduate students taking the class should speak with Professor Pritchard as soon as possible.

Academic reading journal (30%)

All students are required to keep an academic reading journal. Your journal should include six entries (one entry = a *critical* response to the reading(s) for that week). Each entry should be no more than two typed, doubled-spaced pages and composed of the following:

1. An abbreviated list of the reading(s) on which it comments (author's last name and pre-colon title are just fine);
2. A brief *summary* of the main argument in that day's reading(s);
3. Several paragraphs that *synthesize* and *analyze* that day's reading(s), relating them to one another (if relevant) as well as previous readings and discussion;
4. Several *questions* that might help spark class discussion.

Your journal entries should be completed *before* the class session on which they comment. You are asked to complete six entries over the semester, but you can choose which sessions/readings. A word to the wise: I recommend that you "save" your (three) "freebie" weeks for the second half of the semester. I will collect the entries each week so please bring yours (if you wrote one) to class. Plus you may want to refer to your entry during discussion.

As you can probably guess, the goal of the academic journal is to ensure that you come to class prepared – that is, having not only completed the readings, but also reflected upon them so that you are ready to discuss them in class. Although the entries are not expected to be formal

papers, their quality should be more substantial than rambling stream of consciousness typed an hour before our seminar (!?). They will be graded on content, not organization or grammar.

Discussion (35%)

This is a senior seminar so class meetings will be organized around discussion. We will generally meet as an entire class, but we may break into smaller groups. All students are expected to participate in discussion, but a student's discussion grade will be based foremost on quality and secondarily on quantity. In addition, I value students who listen to one another, ask follow-up questions, synthesize others' comments, and pose questions to the entire class. In other words, these kinds of contributions also "count" toward your discussion grade.

Final research paper (35%)

More information will be distributed later in the semester, but you will write a final research paper for this course. There is considerable flexibility here, but your paper does need to engage clearly with the major themes of the class. Course readings are a good starting point for identifying possible topics, but you will want to find additional scholarly sources (books, book chapters, journal articles, historiographical essays, etc.) that allow you to identify, select, refine, develop, and explore your precise topic. Some general ideas might include: environmental movements; cities and urban environments; industrialization; water resource development; gender and the environment; colonial resource management; conservation politics; etc.

Because the reading load of this senior seminar is relatively heavy, the final paper is a shorter research paper based on the equivalent of 4 *academic* books (e.g., 4 academic books; OR 2 academic books and 6 – 8 scholarly articles; OR 1 academic book and ~10 scholarly articles, etc.) on a topic that interests you. Your topic does *not* have to be comparative. The comparative component of the assignment will be developed by working with another student in the class on a related topic. Your paper will entail 10 – 12 pages of historical analysis while you and your co-author will write 3 – 5 additional pages that connect your two studies, examining some of the comparisons and contrasts between your cases.

Please note: If you are interested in working with primary sources, please let me know so that we can adjust the expectations accordingly. If you are working on a senior or Honors thesis, I am also open to shaping the assignment so that it helps you complete your research, but we need to discuss this *in advance*.

In addition, you will give a short presentation about your research during our university-scheduled final exam slot. Your final paper is also due during our final exam, which is tentatively scheduled for Wednesday, December 10, 2:00 – 4:30 pm (location TBA).

To encourage progress on the final paper over the semester, I have developed several intermediate deadlines. They count towards your final grade as specified below.

Oct 14	Preliminary topic	2%
Oct 28	Revised topic and bibliography	3%
Nov 18	Tentative thesis and 1 – 2-page outline	5%
Nov 18 and Dec 2	In-class collaborative work	4%
Dec 2	Peer review of rough drafts	6%
Dec 10	Presentation of final paper	5%
Dec 10	Final draft [of which your paper is 85% and co-written comparative portion is 15%]	75%

Course policies and other legalese

A Blackboard course website [[STS4131-Pritchard-Fall2009: Comparative Environmental History](#)] has been set up to facilitate communication and to coordinate the peer review process. All students enrolled in the class are expected to sign up in a timely fashion.

Unless otherwise noted, all assignments are due in class and must be submitted in order to earn a passing grade in the course. Electronic submissions are not accepted, unless specified on the assignment or alternative arrangements have been made due to an emergency. Late assignments will be penalized one-third of a letter grade (e.g., B+ to B) immediately, and one-third of a letter grade for each subsequent day the assignment is late. Make-up assignments as well as extensions will **only** be given for legitimate extenuating circumstances: that is, medical conditions, family emergencies, and religious holidays. They will also require proper documentation from the appropriate official(s). That said, if an emergency comes up, *please contact me as soon as possible*. Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact me privately at the beginning of the semester so that we can make appropriate arrangements. Alternative arrangements will not be made for students departing early for winter break. Cliff-hanging final grades will be decided by the degree of improvement over the semester and participation during discussion.

Academic conduct and honesty

Each student in this course is expected to abide by the Cornell University Code of Academic Integrity, which states the following: “Absolute integrity is expected of every Cornell student in all academic undertakings... A Cornell student’s submission of work for academic credit indicates that the work is the student’s own. All outside assistance should be acknowledged, and the student’s academic position truthfully reported at all times. In addition, Cornell students have a right to expect academic integrity from each of their peers.” The complete Code is available at: <http://www.cuinfo.cornell.edu/Academic/AIC.html>.

Please note that standards for academic integrity are not necessarily the same in the United States as in other academic systems. International students are strongly encouraged to review carefully the definition of academic integrity at Cornell. In particular, using text from authoritative sources without proper acknowledgement can be a violation of academic integrity.

In short, by enrolling in this class, I am assuming that you are familiar with and agree to abide by the University’s standards with respect to academic integrity and conduct. If you have any questions or concerns, please see me!

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1 Sept 2	Welcome! Course introduction, review syllabus, etc.
Week 2 Sept 9	What is (comparative) environmental history? <u>Discussion:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [BB] Donald Worster, “Appendix: Doing Environmental History,” in <i>The Ends of the Earth</i>, ed. Donald Worster (Cambridge University Press, 1988), 103 – 117;

- [EJ] Douglas Weiner, “A Death-Defying Attempt to Articulate a Coherent Definition of Environmental History,” *Environmental History* 10:3 (2005): 404 – 420;
- [EJ] Kate Brown, “Gridded Lives: Why Kazakhstan and Montana Are Nearly the Same Place,” *American Historical Review* 106:1 (2001): 17 – 48;
- [EJ] Mart Stewart, “If John Muir Had Been an Agrarian: American Environmental History West and South,” *Environment and History* 11:2 (2005), 139 – 162;
- [EJ] Paul Sutter, “What Can U.S. Environmental Historians Learn from Non-U.S. Environmental Historiography?” *Environmental History* 8:1 (2003): 109 – 129;
- [EJ] Lynne Heasley, “Reflections on Walking Contested Land: Doing Environmental History in West Africa and the United States,” *Environmental History* 10:3 (2005): 510 – 531.

- Week 3**
Sept 16 **Environmental degradation and restoration: Narratives and landscapes, I**
Discussion: Neil Maher, *Nature’s New Deal: The Civilian Conservation Corps and the Roots of the American Environmental Movement* (Oxford University Press, 2007).
Please note: Before you read Maher (and any of the other books in this class), please peruse Paul N. Edwards’s essay, “How to Read a Book, v4.0”:
<http://www.si.umich.edu/~pne/PDF/howtoread.pdf>
- Week 4**
Sept 23 **Environmental degradation and restoration: Narratives and landscapes, II**
Discussion: Diana Davis, *Resurrecting the Granary of Rome: Environmental History and French Colonial Expansion in North Africa* (Ohio University Press, 2007).
- Week 5**
Sept 30 **Commodified nature: Political economy meets ecology, I**
Discussion: Thomas Andrews, *Killing for Coal: America’s Deadliest Labor War* (Harvard University Press, 2008).
- Week 6**
Oct 7 **Commodified nature: Political economy meets ecology, II**
Discussion: Scott Prudham, *Knock on Wood: Nature as Commodity in Douglas-Fir Country* (Routledge, 2004).
- Week 7**
Oct 14 **Library session on research skills and strategies (location TBA)**
Read: William Cronon, et.al., “Learning to Do Historical Research: A Primer for Environmental Historians and Others”:
<http://www.williamcronon.net/researching/index.htm>
→ Preliminary topic for research paper due.

- Week 8**
Oct 21 **Politics of nature and the nature of politics, I**
Discussion: Sarah Phillips, *This Land, This Nation: Conservation, Rural America, and the New Deal* (Cambridge University Press, 2007).
- Week 9**
Oct 28 **No class [Professor Pritchard at 4S]**
→ **Revised research paper topic and bibliography due.**
- Week 10**
Nov 4 **Politics of nature and the nature of politics, II**
Discussion: Judith Shapiro, *Mao's War on Nature: Politics and the Environment in Revolutionary China* (Cambridge University Press, 2001).
- Week 11**
Nov 11 **Ecology and technological modernity, I**
Discussion: Paul Josephson, *Industrialized Nature: Brute Force Technology and the Transformation of the Natural World* (Island Press, 2002).
- Week 12**
Nov 18 **Doing comparative environmental history, I**
In-class collaborative work: Read and discuss outlines as well as potential comparative dimensions with your peer review partner (pairs TBA).
→ **Tentative thesis and 1 – 2-pg outline due; bring two copies to class.**
- Week 13**
Nov 25 **Ecology and technological modernity, II**
Discussion: Michael Bess, *The Light-Green Society: Ecology and Technological Modernity in France, 1960–2000* (University of Chicago Press, 2003).
- Week 14**
Dec 2 **Doing comparative environmental history, II**
In-class collaborative work: Read your peer review partner's rough draft in class; then discuss your studies' comparative dimensions and develop an outline for the co-written component of your final paper.
→ **Rough draft due; bring one copy to class.**
→ **Official peer review process outside class (due within 48 hours).**
- Finals week** **Tentatively scheduled for Wednesday, December 10, 2:00 – 4:30 pm**
→ **Presentations of final papers.**
→ **Final papers due.**