

**BOWLING GREEN STATE UNIVERSITY**

**ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY OF LATIN AMERICA (HIST 400)**

**SPRING 2008**

BAA 1009. Tue. & Thu. 1:00-2:15pm

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Office Hours: Mon. 9:30-10:30; Wed. 1:00-2:00; Th. 4:30-5:15

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

An environmental history of Latin American societies from the Aztecs to the present day. Explore the biological exchanges between the New and the Old Worlds, the radical transformation of indigenous agricultural practices, the politics and economics of deforestation and intense exploitation of natural resources, and the challenges of industrialization and urbanization. Specific readings include diet, disease, and agriculture before and after the conquest of the Americas; tropical agriculture and the transformation of Central American societies; political and economic forces behind deforestation in Brazil; and the environmental legacy of the Cuban Revolution.

**LEARNING OUTCOMES**

1. Understand the mutual interactions between inequality, politics, economic development and the environment in Latin American societies
2. Formulate a thesis and plan a bibliographic research project
3. Conduct independent research to secure materials for the project
4. Communicate efficiently the conclusions of the research in a presentation and paper

## **CLASS PLAN**

### **Introduction (1/8-1/10)**

- Joan Martinez-Alier, "Ecology and the Poor: A Neglected Dimension of Latin American History," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 23, no. 3 (1991): 621-39. (Blackboard.)

### **A Long-Run Perspective: The History of Brazil's Atlantic Forest (1/15-1/24)**

- Warren Dean, *With Broadax and Firebrand the Destruction of the Brazilian Atlantic Forest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). (Online.)

### **Natives and the Environment Before and During the Conquest (1/29-1/31)**

- Jared M Diamond, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail Or Succeed* (New York: Viking, 2005), 157-77. (Blackboard.)
- Richard H. Steckel, "Health and Nutrition in Pre-Columbian America: The Skeletal Evidence," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 36, no. 1 (2005): 1-32. (Online.)
- Rodolfo Acuña-Soto et al., "Drought, Epidemic Disease, and the Fall of Classic Period Cultures in Mesoamerica (Ad 750–950). Hemorrhagic Fevers as a Cause of Massive Population Loss," *Medical Hypotheses* 65, no. 2 (2005): 405-09. (Online.)
- Rodolfo Acuña-Soto et al., "Megadrought and Megadeath in Sixteenth-Century Mexico," *Emerging Infectious Diseases* 8, no. 4 (2002): 360-62. (Online.)

### **The Ecology of Conquest and Colonization (2/5-2/14)**

- Elinor G. K Melville, *A Plague of Sheep: Environmental Consequences of the Conquest of Mexico* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). (Ohiolink.)
- Matthew D. Therrell, "Tree Rings and "El Año Del Hambre" in Mexico," *Dendrochronologia* 22, no. 3 (2005): 203-07. (Online.)
- Arij Ouweneel, *Shadows Over Anáhuac: An Ecological Interpretation of Crisis and Development in Central Mexico, 1730-1800* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 59-100. (Blackboard.)

### **Ecological Transformations of Global Capitalism: The Case of Rubber (2/19-2/21)**

- Warren Dean, *Brazil and the Struggle for Rubber: A Study in Environmental History*, vol. Studies in environment and history (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). (Ohiolink.)

**Ecological Transformations of Global Capitalism II: Agriculture (2/26-2/28)**

- John Soluri, "People, Plants, and Pathogens: The Eco-Social Dynamics of Export Banana Production in Honduras, 1875–1950," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 80, no. 3 (2000): 463-501. (Online.)
- Adrian Gustavo Zarrilli, "Capitalism, Ecology and Agrarian Expansion in the Pampean Region, 1890-1950," *Environmental History* 6, no. 4 (2001): 561-83. (Blackboard.)
- Myrna I Santiago, "Rejecting Progress in Paradise: Huastecs, the Environment, and the Oil Industry in Veracruz, Mexico, 1900-1935," *Environmental History* 3, no. 2 (1998): 169-88. (Blackboard.)
- David A. Sonnenfeld, "Mexico's 'Green Revolution,' 1940-1980: Towards an Environmental History," *Environmental History Review* 16, no. 4 (1992): 28-52. (Blackboard)

**Spring Break (3/4-3/6)**

### **The Cuban Revolution and the Environment (3/11-3/27)**

- Sergio Diaz-Briquets, and Jorge F. Pérez-López, *Conquering Nature: The Environmental Legacy of Socialism in Cuba* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000). (Ohiolink.)

### **→ Paper Proposal & Preliminary Bibliography Due on 3/20**

### **Government Policies and Communal Strategies (4/1-4/15)**

- Jared M Diamond, *Collapse*, 329-57. (Blackboard.)
- Sterling Evans, "Yaquis Vs. Yanquis: An Environmental and Historical Comparison of Coping With Aridity in Southern Sonora," *Journal of the Southwest* 40 (1998): 363-96. (Blackboard.)
- Paul B. Trawick, "Comedy and Tragedy in the Andean Commons," *Journal of Political Ecology* 9 (2002): 35-68. (Online.)
- Peter Winn, ed. *Victims of the Chilean Miracle : Workers and Neoliberalism in the Pinochet Era, 1973-2002* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 337-87. (Blackboard.)
- Brent H. Millikan, "Tropical Deforestation, Land Degradation, and Society: Lessons From Rondonia, Brazil," *Latin American Perspectives* 19, no. 1 (1992): 45-72. (Online.)

### **→ First paper Draft Due on 4/10 (no class)**

### **→ Presentations (4/17-4/24)**

### **→ Final Paper Due on 5/1**

## ASSIGNMENTS AND ASSESSMENT

Grade Composition:	All assignments are graded in the following scale:
25% Participation	90–100 A Excellent
10% Questions on each reading, and thesis	80–89 B Good
20% Three book reviews	70–79 C Acceptable
5% One article review	60–69 D Poor but Passing
40% One paper & presentation	0–59 F Failure

### Paper

Developing the skills to write an analytical paper on the environmental history of Latin America is one of the major goals of the class. The writing of the paper involves the use of the materials presented in class, as well as independent research to find additional material. The paper is not descriptive, but thesis-driven. Through the class we will provide elements to identify and state a thesis, use sources to build the thesis, and find the sources. You are expected to come to office hours to discuss the selection of the extra readings needed for the paper. The minimum length of the paper is ten pages (times 12, double spaced).

Focus on a specific region, historical period and topic. The following are some broad topic examples that may help as starting points:

1) *Environmental Initiatives of the US and Multilateral Agencies in Latin America.* Focus on one major aid initiative, its goals, its negotiation with local society and its results. The topic requires use of primary sources (congressional hearings, or working papers of multilateral organizations).

2) *The Ecology of the Poor.* How have the poor sought to protect their access to resources? What threats did they face? What were their strategies? Have their strategies been detrimental to their own welfare?

3) *Deforestation.* Origins, statistics, policies.

4) *Climatic Change in History*. Using paleoclimatic datasets, explain how the climate explains certain historical processes and events. (Use Thirrell and Acuña-Soto as examples.)

5) *Comparative Analysis with the US*. Choose a region or place in the United States, and compare it with a region or place in Latin America. For example: erosion in the prairies and in the Pampas.

The proposal, first draft and presentation are integral components of the writing of the paper and will be considered in the evaluation.

## **Participation**

This class is run as a seminar. All participants are expected to collectively contribute to the learning of Latin American's environmental history and develop the skills of historical analysis and writing. The first requirement of participation is attendance. You are only allowed to miss three classes (out of thirty), regardless of the reason. Each additional absence carries a 30 point discount in participation grade.

Attendance, however, is a minor component of participation. In order to obtain a high participation grade, voice your opinion, express your doubts, provide answers to the questions of your peers, provide critical insights on the readings, and compare the point in discussion with other knowledge you have from a field you are familiar with. If you do not feel that the class format is conducive to your participation, please express your concern to me in office hours or by email.

## **Identification of Thesis and Questions on Readings**

Write down questions on what you read. Some questions may be about the context or specific facts. Look up the answers in textbooks or online. Other questions are more substantial and inquire on why the author arrived to a conclusion and not other, or how the authors' finding compare with other materials you have read. For each text you read, you have to send me an email (the day before the class) with one substantial question. I will compile the questions, probably summarize them if there are overlaps, and we will tackle them in class.

For each day, you also have to write one paragraph summarizing the theses of the pieces you are reading and the evidence the authors use to sustain their theses. I will collect these short assignments every day.

### **Book Reviews**

For each entire book we read in this class (*With Broadax and Firebrand, Plague of Sheep, Brazil's Struggle for Rubber, Conquering Nature*) you are asked to write a two-page review (500 words). An explanation of what a review entails will be distributed in class before the first book review is due.

### **Article Report**

You will be assigned to review one article (one to two pages) and send it by email to your classmates the Friday before the reading is scheduled.

### **ACADEMIC HONESTY**

All class activities and assignments (even drafts, outlines, etc) must abide by the academic honesty policy as stated in the Student Handbook. Violations of the academic honesty policy (such as cheating, falsification and plagiarism) will be severely penalized, and reported to the Dean of Students. Feel free to discuss with the instructor if you are in doubt about the policy.