Scott Moranda

Society and Environment:
An Environmental History of the European World
A Syllabus Proposal

In 1989, East Germans and Russians took to the streets of Leipzig and Moscow to protest industrial pollution and the related collapse of public health. As Eastern Europe reached a breaking point, it appeared that the unpredictable behavior of a physical environment beleaguered by pollution could influence the fate of political regimes. This conflict between a state and its citizens, as we will see, is a key theme in European environmental history.

Environmental historians study human interaction with the natural world through time. Too often, however, social histories of Europe fail to take account of the environment. This course takes nature as a category of historical analysis and makes an effort to bring together social and environmental history. As such, we will pay close attention to a key thesis of environmental historians: the physical environment has reacted in unexpected ways to man-made change and thwarted ambitious projects of control. Put another way, nature itself has been an actor in history.

Inspired by Enlightenment hopes for progress and the rational improvement of the world, Europeans have embarked on institutionalized projects to control and improve nature. Meant to enlighten as well as encourage economic growth, the control of nature has often allowed for the control of social classes, colonial subjects, ethnic groups and even women. We will consider the various effects environmental change (natural and man-made) has had on different social classes and ethnic groups from the seventeenth century to the present. At the same time, social and intellectual groups (whether inspired by romantic nationalism, pleas for social justice, desires for consumer comforts, or ecological science) have often disrupted the “conquest of nature.”

By the end of this course, it will become clear that, much more than in the USA, state institutions and projects dominated Europe’s environmental history. While the state often aided the capitalist transformation of nature into a commodity, it also found inspiration in romantic nationalism and welfare programs to manipulate the environment in order to gain the popular legitimacy necessary to compete with rival states. By the end of the twentieth-century, Europe was the home to red-green environmentalists engaged in populist politics, as well as technocrats scientifically controlling nature to encourage trade, produce electricity and provide recreation for the people. These two developments, this course argues, have histories that are surprisingly intertwined.

I have divided the course into four thematically distinct units (as a result, there will be some chronological overlap at times). The course, in its entirety, takes a transnational approach and considers the ways that environmental history diverts our attention from the confines of the nation-state to histories that know no political borders. In the first unit, we will discuss the ways in which Europeans, encouraged by the growth of the centralized state, transformed the earth through cultivation, primarily focusing on agriculture, forestry and land reform in the Age of Enlightenment. We will not just talk about educated agricultural reformers, but also about the relationship of other social groups – from peasants to urban consumers – with the land. In the second unit, we will look closely at the age of imperial expansion from the eighteenth to the early-twentieth century. How did European settlers transform non-European environments? In what ways did the exploration and exploitation of colonial resources shape European attitudes toward nature back at home? In the third unit, we will look to the great environmental changes wrought by the industrial revolution in the nineteenth century and how these transformations shaped working class identities. Finally, a fourth unit will address the physical environment’s significance in the age of mass politics and the welfare state. How did states manage the competing needs of industry and the electorate?
Requirements:
There will be an in-class midterm exam and a final exam. In addition, there will be short writing exercises (part of your discussion grade) and two 5-page papers based on the reading.

The short writing assignments will require students to write one sentence of 50 words or less addressing a question related to their reading. Throughout the course of the semester, there will be six such assignments, which will be due at the beginning of that week’s Friday discussion section. This assignment is modeled after an exercise used by Professors Cohen and Koshar here in the History Department.

Each week in addition to two 50-minute lectures there will be a discussion section. This will provide an opportunity to discuss the course readings in depth.

Grading for this course will be based on the following scale: Discussion and short writing assignments: 25%, Mid-term Exam: 25%, 5-Page Paper: 25% and Final Exam: 25%,

Required Texts:
Alfred Crosby, Ecological Imperialism
Mark Cioc, The Rhine, an Eco-Biography, 1815-2000
Thomas Lekan, Imagining the Nation in Nature
Douglas Weiner, A Little Corner of Freedom: Russian nature protection from Stalin to Gorbachev
Christa Wolf, Accident: a day's news
Course Reader – includes remaining book excerpts, articles and documents

Weekly Schedule:

Week 1: Introduction
   M: Introduction – What is Environmental History?
   W: Questions Posed by European Environmental History
   F: Discussion

Short Writing Assignment: In one sentence of no more than fifty (50) words, summarize the goals of environmental historians and identify one key challenge facing environmental historians of Europe.

Readings:
Donald Worster, "Doing Environmental History," The Ends of the Earth
Raymond Williams, “Ideas of Nature,” Problems in Materialism and Culture
Simon Schama, “Introduction,” Landscape and Memory

Week 2: The Old Regime
   M: Disease and Christian Attitudes Toward Nature
   W: Mediterranean Ecology: Striking a Balance?
   F: Discussion
Readings:

**Unit I: The Age of Enlightenment and State Revenues**

*W3: Enlightenment*
  M: Agricultural Regimes of Early Modern Europe and Agricultural Reform
  W: Enclosing the Land
  F: Discussion

Reading:
W. G. Hoskins, *The Making of the English Landscape*, p. 117-204
Walter Blith, *The English Improver Improved: or, the Survey of Husbandry Surveyed, Discovering the Improvableness of All Lands* (London, 1652)

*W4: Scientific Forestry*
  M: Seeing Like a State: Scientific Forestry and its Global Impact
  W: Forestry and Society: Woodland Revolts in France
  F: Discussion

**Short Writing Assignment:** In one sentence of no more than fifty (50) words, comment on the advantages and disadvantages of Hamish Graham’s thesis about gender and timber-gathering.

Readings:

**Unit 2 – Ecology and Imperial Expansion**

*W5: Ecology of Empire*
  M: Ecology and the Columbian Exchange
  W: Settler Landscapes – New Spain, New England, New Zealand
  F: Discussion

**Short Writing Assignment:** In one sentence of no more than fifty (50) words, summarize Alfred Crosby’s primary argument.
Readings:
Alfred Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism*

**W6: Classification and Conservation**
- M: Museums, Botanical Gardens and Zoos: Collecting Nature
- W: Empire and the Roots of Nature Conservation
- F: Discussion

Readings:
Baden-Powell, B. H., *The Land Systems of British India*, 1892

**W7: Empire, Ecology, and Society**
- M: Empire Forestry, Gender and Subaltern Resistance in British India
- W: Review
- F: **Mid-Term Exam**

Readings: None

**Unit 3: Industrialization – Challenges to the State?**

**W8: Industrial Revolution**
- M: Class Identity: What Role does the Physical Environment Play?
- W: Rivers, Canals and Railroads: Robbing Nature of its Agency?
- F: Discussion

Readings:
Mark Cioc, *The Rhine, an Eco-Biography, 1815-2000*, p. ix-75
Karl Marx, *Communist Manifesto* (recommended)

**W9: Nature's Metropolis**
- M: Coal: The Paths In and Out of Town
- W: Urban Green Spaces and the Working Class: Hamburg, Manchester and Paris
- F: Discussion

**Short Writing Assignment:** In one sentence of no more than fifty (50) words, identify one key example in Mark Cioc's text that illustrates the agency of nature and comment on the importance of this example for explaining the history of the Rhine.

Readings:
Mark Cioc, *The Rhine, an Eco-Biography, 1815-2000*, p. 76-171
Images from *Die Gartenlaube*

**W10: Winners and Losers?**
- M: Losers? Irish Potato Famine and Galician Oil Booms
- W: Winners? The Middle Classes, Romanticism and the Emergence of Environmentalism
F: Discussion

Readings:
Thomas Lekan, *Imagining the Nation in Nature*, excerpts
*The Irish Famine: A Documentary Reader*, excerpts

Unit 4 – The Age of Mass Politics and the Welfare State

W11: Twentieth-Century War, Nationalism and the Environment
M: War and the Environment
W: Nazism, Antisemitism and Projects to Improve Nature
F: Discussion

Short Writing Assignment: In one sentence of no more than fifty (50) words, summarize Thomas Lekan’s argument about National Socialist environmental policy.

Readings:
Thomas Lekan, *Imagining the Nation in Nature*, excerpts

W12: Cold War and Rebuilding
M: The Nuclear Age in Europe – Wismut (GDR), Chernobyl, and Radiant France
W: Nature at Holocaust Memorials
F: Discussion

Reading:
Christa Wolf, *Accident: a day's news*

W13: Managing Nature?
M: The Rhône River in France – Managing Ecological Systems
W: Consumption and Agricultural Revolutions: Mechanization and the Green Revolution
F: Discussion

Film:
Alexander Dovzhenko, *Earth*, 1930 (Film, USSR) – To be shown in discussion.

5-Page Paper Due at Beginning of Discussion. Choose from one of the following topics:
1. How was the birth of environmentalism in Europe related to imperialism and nationalism?
2. Discuss nature’s agency in European history and comment on the implications environmental history has for histories of European nation-states.
3. Discuss how the control of nature has or has not supported the oppression of the peasantry, the working class and colonial subjects.
4. What role has the physical environment played in the emergence of national and class identities?
**W14: Communism and Nature**
- M: The Soviet Union, East Germany and Czechoslovakia
- W: Air Pollution and Environmental Protest under Communism
- F: Discussion

**Short Writing Assignment:** In one sentence of no more than fifty (50) words, summarize Václav Havel's primary argument about the environment in his essay, "Power and the Powerless."

**Readings:**
Douglas Weiner, *A Little Corner of Freedom: Russian nature protection from Stalin to Gorbachev*, 1-22, 414-448

**W15: Adapting to a Consumer Age**
- M: The Automobile and the Limits of Management: Auto Camping, Nature Parks and Smog
- W: Red-Green Politics: 1968, Anti-Nuclear Movement, Greenpeace, Green Politics
- F: Discussion

**Readings:**
Greenpeace, *Shut them down: a 4 year timetable for closing all Britain's nuclear reactors*, 1986
"Program of the German Green Party," 1983

**W16: Conclusions and Review**