21H421 (HASS-D CI)  
INTRODUCTION TO ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY  

Fall 2008  
TR 2:30-4  

Prof. H. Ritvo  
Professor  

Subject Description  

A historical overview of the interactions between people and their environments. Focusing primarily on the experience of Europeans in the period after Columbus, the subject explores the influence of nature (climate, topography, plants, animals, and microorganisms) on human history and the reciprocal influence of people on nature. Topics include the biological consequences of the European encounter with the Americas, the environmental impact of technology, and the roots of the current environmental crisis.  

CI CREDO  
Communication intensive subjects in the humanities, arts, and social sciences should require at least 20 pages of writing divided among 3-5 assignments. Of these 3-5 assignments, at least one should be revised and resubmitted. HASS CI subjects should further offer students substantial opportunity for oral expression, through presentations, student-led discussion, or class participation.  

Readings  

The following books can be purchased at the MIT bookstore or through various online booksellers. They are also available on the ground floor of Building 14.  

Rachel Carson, Silent Spring  
James Cook, Journals of Captain Cook (Penguin edition)  
William Cronon, Changes in the Land  
Karl Jacoby, Crimes Against Nature  
Peter C. Mancall, Envisioning America  
Elinor Melville, A Plague of Sheep  
Richard White, The Organic Machine
**Written Assignments**

There will be three papers, of at least 5, 5, and 10 pages, due in class on September 23, October 23, and December 9 respectively. Specific assignment sheets will be handed out later in the term. The last assignment will also include an oral presentation. Either assignment 1 or assignment 2 (your choice) must be revised and resubmitted for a new grade. If you like, you can revise and resubmit both assignment 1 and assignment 2.

In addition, a single page (not hand written) of informal reflections on each reading will be due in class on the day it is scheduled for discussion (normally the second class of each unit).

**Exam**

There will be an in-class exam on November 13, on the material covered up to that date in class and in the readings.

**Schedule of Classes**

**September 4-11:**
- Introduction

**September 16-18:**
- The Columbian Exchange
  - Reading: Melville, *Plague of Sheep*, 1-77, 151-166
  - Mancall, 45-61, 112-132, 140-148

**September 23-25:**
- Wilderness and Garden
  - Reading: Cronon, *Changes in the Land*
  - PAPER 1 DUE IN CLASS SEPTEMBER 23

**Sep 30-Oct 2:**
- The Disease Environment
  - Reading: Defoe, *Journal of the Plague Year* (6-66, 197-230)

**October 7-16:**
- Science and Nature
  - Reading: Cook, *Journal*, 39-61, 125-134, 335-339, 374-390, 530-547
  - Cook’s Instructions
  - October 14—preparation for research paper
  - October 16—field trip to MIT Archives
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October 21-23</td>
<td>Landscape and Agriculture</td>
<td>Reading: Harriet Ritvo, “Possessing Mother Nature: Genetic Capital in 18th-Century Britain” PAPER 2 DUE IN CLASS OCTOBER 23</td>
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<td>October 28-30</td>
<td>Industry and Demography</td>
<td>Reading: Friedrich Engels, The Condition of the Working Class in England, chs. 2 (The Great Towns), 5 (Results)</td>
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<td>November 4-6</td>
<td>Conservation and Preservation</td>
<td>Reading: Jacoby, Crimes Against Nature, Introduction, chs. 4-6 PAPER 3 PROPOSALS DUE IN CLASS NOVEMBER 4</td>
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<td>November 11</td>
<td>NO CLASS: VETERAN’S DAY</td>
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<td>November 13</td>
<td>IN CLASS EXAM</td>
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<td>November 18-20</td>
<td>Poisoning and Environmentalism</td>
<td>Reading: Carson, Silent Spring, chs. 1, 7, 9, 10, 14, 16</td>
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<td>Nov 25-Dec 2</td>
<td>Current Events</td>
<td>Reading: White, Organic Machine NO CLASS NOV 27: THANKSGIVING</td>
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<td>December 4-9</td>
<td>Oral presentation of research papers</td>
<td>PAPER 3 DUE IN CLASS DECEMBER 9 ALL REVISIONS DUE IN CLASS DECEMBER 9</td>
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Things to remember

Written assignments should represent original and individual work. The following link to the MIT Online Writing and Communication Center gives some suggestions about how to recognize plagiarism and how to avoid it.
http://web.mit.edu/writing/Citation/plagiarism.html

All sources used in written assignments must be fully cited. This includes sources of information as well as direct quotations; it includes the assigned readings as well as other materials.

Assignments are to be handed in on time. If an extension becomes necessary it should be requested ahead of the due date. Otherwise, lateness will be penalized. Attendance is important. Not all the material to be covered in class is included in the readings. Be sure to bring your copy of the readings to discussion classes.
Grading will be based on the three written assignments, the exam, and class participation (including informal reflections), weighted as follows: paper 1—10%; paper 2—15%; paper 3 (including final oral presentation)—30%; exam—30%; class participation (including response papers)—15%.
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