

HIST 099-17 Spring 2018 AN INTERDISCIPLINARY CORE HISTORY CLASS

Lecture: W 5:00-6:15

Discussions: F 9:30-10:45; F 11:00-12:15; F 11:00-12:15; F 12:30-1:45.



Coping with Environmental Change

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How did people in the past cope with sudden and dramatic change in the natural world? Why did some societies survive and others decline in the wake of outbreaks of wide-spreading virulent disease, rapid climate change, earthquakes or tsunamis? How 'natural' were major historical episodes of abrupt environmental variation? This class examines narratives of societal collapse and resilience in an effort to come to terms with the varying ability of peoples worldwide, and in different historical periods, to respond to environmental change, including human-caused environmental change. It introduces the concepts of resilience, susceptibility, threshold and tipping point, and evaluates the foundations and appeal of environmental determinism/reductionism and the pseudoscience of 'collapsology.'

In lectures, discussions and workshops, students engage popular histories of alleged societal collapses. They work hands on with primary sources of all sorts (written records and scientific reports pertaining to material evidence). The course also goes to lengths to flesh out episodes of historical environmental change, drawing in large part on the natural sciences to do so. In other words, students learn how we can ascertain societal responses to environmental change as well as how we can identify historical episodes of dramatic natural world change. An underlining theme, running throughout the class, is the role history has played and can play in projections of the environmental challenges facing our modern-day world.

Format, Readings, Assignments, Dates and Grading

Lectures are given on Wednesday and discussions and workshops are held on Friday. Students read a number of assigned readings, available on Blackboard, every week in preparation for Friday discussions and workshops. In discussions, students will discuss scholarly literature on the topic of the week, address a number of questions provided, and consider how historians (and other social scientists) research, write and produce history. In workshops, students break down a pre-assigned workshop exercise (see schedule below). Not every discussion follows a workshop, but every workshop follows a discussion. Workshops last 45 minutes and follow a 30-minute discussion. All workshops include a short written assignment related to the workshop exercise.

Readings for the class will be made available on Blackboard at least one week before they are discussed. There are no textbooks. Per week readings will total about 50 pages. The course is deeply interdisciplinary and the assigned readings will stem from a number of fields of study relevant to the investigation of past environmental change and societal resilience. Put simply, to understand the natural world in the past and how people have responded to its mutations, we must consider scholarship produced by a range of disciplines.

Students are expected to attend the lecture every week, read the assigned readings, and be prepared to discuss the assigned readings in their discussion/workshop. These expectations are reflected in the course's grading scheme. According to the university's *Undergraduate Bulletin* (<https://bulletin.georgetown.edu/regulation/studying>) students are expected to study "at least six hours" per three-credit course per week. Reading the assigned readings and thinking critically about them might take 3 hours. The three hours remaining should be devoted to assignments.

- Participation in Discussions/Workshops: 20%
- 5 Written Workshop Exercises: 10% (2% Each)
- Paper Prospectus and Bibliography: 5%
- Research Synthesis: 10%
- 5-Minute Research Presentation: 10%
- Draft Paper: 25%
- Test: 10%
- Final Paper: 10%

A Scaffolded Essay Assignment

The production of a 2,500-word essay is the primary assignment in this course. This assignment is broken down into 5 projects: a paper prospectus and bibliography, a research synthesis, a 5-minute research presentation, a draft paper, and a final paper. The prospectus is a 200-word synopsis of what your paper will be about and the bibliography will list ten pieces of scholarship that you will use to support your paper. For your bibliography: no online articles, no encyclopedias, no newspapers or magazines. The ten pieces of scholarship you cite must be academic or, if not academic, directly relevant to your project.

The 1,000-word research synthesis (1,000 words, not 900 or 1,100) requires you to read critically and synthesize ten academic articles/chapters/books that deal with the topic you have selected. This will require you to become (or will make you) an expert in your chosen subject. Think of your research synthesis as a 'State of the Art' report on your topic. In it you will communicate to your reader (Rob and Tim): (i) the sort of work being carried out on your topic; (ii) the evidence; (iii) arguments and debates (past and present if any) presented in the scholarship you have read; (iv) the progression (if visible) in the research on your topic; (v) how the scholarship you have read blends together (how individual articles/books compare and contrast); and (vi) what topics, questions and issues have yet to be investigated or are still requiring attention. You do not have to use the exact same ten pieces of scholarship you cited in your earlier bibliography, but there should be considerable overlap. For citation format, consult the syllabus citations below.

Researching, reading and synthesizing a range of scholarship on a given topic is a valuable skill both in and beyond the university. So is presenting the fruits of your labor. You will present your project to your discussion/workshop group for five minutes (not 4 minutes, not 6 – so practice!). Your presentation will largely be a rehashing or telling of your research synthesis. Communicate to your audience why you chose your topic, what sort of work has been carried out on your topic, the trajectory of the scholarship, the problems with the scholarship, and what you are adding or getting out of the scholarship. You are expected to use PowerPoint or GoogleSlides for your presentation, but please no handouts. Each presentation will be followed by 2-minutes of questions, so please be prepared to ask and answer questions.

Your 2,500-word draft essay will be a complete take on your essay. Treat it as if it is your final essay. Draw on your prospectus, bibliography, research synthesis and presentation. A rough breakdown: 500 words for your introduction; 1,750 for the body paragraphs; and 250 words for your conclusion. 2,500 words, not 2,400 or 2,600. Footnotes are required. For style guidelines, consult the citation format used in this syllabus below. This essay should take your ten pieces scholarship into consideration and build on them. Your draft essay will be returned to you on 27 April. Your final essay will be your draft essay with the criticisms, corrections and comments of your TA taken into account.

Paper Topics

- 1) Past collapses and present predicaments: What can we learn from history?

- Pick an alleged societal collapse (the Norse, Easter Island, Maya or Angkor Wat), engage with the scholarship on the collapse you have chosen, establish the trajectory of the scholarship on it (how the collapse has been supported and framed, and how the study of the collapse has evolved over time), pick out what lessons scholars have stressed are to be learned from the collapse and then establish what you think we can learn today from it, if anything – comment on what we can learn from history. Start with the readings assigned for the week in which we address your chosen collapse. Consult with your TA.
- 2) Historical Famine and Disease, the Nitty-Gritty.
 - Investigate the thorny subject of famine causation or the art of retrospective diagnosing. Start with the readings assigned for the weeks in which we address these topics. Focus in particular one particular event. Perhaps for famine, the Ukrainian Famine of 1932-33, the North Korean Famine of 1994-1998, the Great European Famine of 1314-1322, or the Greek Famine of 1941-1942. Perhaps for disease, the Black Death of 1347-1352, the Sweating Sickness of 1485-1551, the Provençal *Peste* of 1720-22, or Victorian Tuberculosis. Consult with your TA.

Written Workshop Assignments

These short, 225-word assignments each focus on a different topic. There are five workshop assignments sprinkled throughout the term. Conduct research for each of your assignments on Google Scholar, Jstor and/or Sciencedirect. Use scholarly publications (to establish if it is scholarly make sure the author is an academic and/or make sure it was published by a scholarly press or in an academic journal). Naturally, feel free to draw on the assigned readings. No footnotes or bibliography are required. Do not use quotes. 225 words, not 226. These assignments are equally about working on your writing as they are about getting you to grapple with concepts central to this course. Writing style counts.

Test

In the last discussion, we will have a 45-minute test. The test will be based solely on the lectures and will be multiple choice, true-and-false and short answer (no essay questions!).

Topics

- I COPING WITH ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE: CONCEPTS AND CASE STUDIES**
- II Stock Collapse 1: GREENLAND AND ITS NORSE EXTINCTION**
- III Stock Collapse 2: PALM TREES AND THE RAPANUI**
- IV Stock Collapse 3: THE ‘MEGADROUGHT’ AND ‘MEGADEATH’ OF THE MAYA**
- V Stock Collapse 4: ANGKOR WAT: A HYDRAULIC CITY THAT DIED OF THIRST**
- VI Anti-Collapse 1: CHINGGIS KHAN AND HIS PLUVIAL IN PARTICULAR, CHANGING CLIMATES AND STEPPE PEOPLES IN GENERAL**
- VII Anti-Collapse 2: THE SINKING NETHERLANDS**
- VIII Anti-Collapse 3: RECURRENT PLAGUE, A LITTLE ICE AGE, A ‘SEISMIC PAROXYSM’ AND THE (EAST ROMAN) EMPIRE THAT WOULD NOT DIE**
- IX Anti-Collapse 4: COMBATING PLAGUES IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY: *STAMPING OUT THE BOVILLA PESTE* AND CONTAINING THE *PESTE* OF PROVENCE**
- X Anti-Collapse 5: *TERREMOTOS DE MAYOR MAGNITUD: CHILE, 1575-2016***
- XI Anti-Collapse 6: DEALING WITH VOLCANOES UNSEEN AND UNHEARD**
- XII Anti-Collapse 7: PLAGUE GETS PNEUMONIC IN MANCHURIA AND EBOLA ENTERS WEST AFRICA: SPECIES JUMPING AND THE NEXT PANDEMIC**