

# HIS 209-02: World Environmental History

Fall 2016

T, TH 11:00-12:15, MHRA 1214



Professor Greg O'Brien

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My UNCG website: <https://www.uncg.edu/his/faculty/obrien.html>

Office Hours: Tuesday & Thursday 1:30-3:00 and/or by appointment

## **DESCRIPTION:**

This course will use an environmental history approach to better understand the past 500 years of human history around the planet. We will read and discuss books and articles, see films, and lecture on selected topics in order to gain an understanding of the relationship between humans and nature. Humans have always been limited by the natural resources at their disposal while simultaneously developing new techniques and technologies to exploit nature. Nature has impacted the general direction of human history more than any other single factor, while humans have altered and impacted nature more than any other species. It is impossible to fully understand human history without including the role of nature.

**GRADUATE ASSISTANT:** Ms. Elizabeth Ellis, MA student in History, will be the graduate assistant in this course and will help with grading, recording attendance, and other class duties. Her email address is: [eaellis2@uncg.edu](mailto:eaellis2@uncg.edu).

**STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:**

This course satisfies a number of UNCG curriculum markers (ENV, GHP, GMO, GN, and IGS), some of which require specific learning outcomes.

**Historical Perspectives (GHP)** Students use an historical approach to a specific region and period to explore the context of events (social structure, economics, political systems, culture, or beliefs), evaluate evidence and divergent interpretations, and communicate historical ideas in writing. All GHP courses must address the following Student Learning Outcomes:

At the completion of this course, the student will be able to:

1. Use a historical approach to analyze and contextualize primary and secondary sources representing divergent perspectives. (GHP1)
2. Use evidence to interpret the past coherently, orally and/or in writing. (GHP2)

**Global Non-Western (GN)** In a course in any subject, students focus on the interconnections among regions of the world other than North America, Great Britain, and continental Europe, interpret and evaluate information on diverse ecologies, human societies, artistic achievements, or political systems, and gain sensitivity to cultural differences on a global scale. All GN courses must address the following Student Learning Outcomes.

At the completion of this course, the student will be able to:

1. Find, interpret, and evaluate information on diverse cultures. (GN1)
2. Describe interconnections among regions of the world. (GN2)
3. Use diverse cultural frames of reference and alternative perspectives to analyze issues. (GN3)

The History Department identifies the following **learning goals for all history majors**:

1. Analyze historical duration, succession, and change in terms of human agency and larger systems or structures in a wide variety of places and periods. [Historical Comprehension] (HIS1)
2. Conduct original research by investigating and interpreting primary and secondary sources. [Historical Research] (HIS2)
3. Use evidence-based reasoning to interpret the past coherently while developing and presenting an original argument, orally and in writing. [Historical Interpretation] (HIS3)

**REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS TO PURCHASE:**

Robert B. Marks, *The Origins of the Modern World* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 2015)

Diane Ackerman, *The Human Age: The World Shaped by Us* (2014)

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

Class meetings are devoted primarily to lecture, with periodic discussions of readings and videos seen in class. I use PowerPoint to supplement my lectures with outlines, maps, and images, but they are not posted on Canvas nor online; take notes in class. My lectures will sometimes overlap with the materials you are reading about at that point in the course, but they also provide different material than is presented in the readings. Students are expected to attend all classes and to keep up with the reading assignments. Reading assignments and documentary films will provide the basis for short summary papers throughout the semester and for the mid-term and final exams. Attendance will be taken, and each absence above three

(3) that is not excused by the Athletic Dept., Dean of Students, or medical doctor will result in one-half letter grade subtracted from the final course grade. ALL assignments must be completed; late assignments are NOT accepted. **Tablets, phones, and other electronic devices are NOT allowed in class. If you wish to use a laptop computer to take your notes, you must sit in the front row.**

**SUMMARY OF GRADED ASSIGNMENTS:**

Summary Papers (8)	(5% each)	= 40%
Paper on <i>The Human Age</i>		= 20%
Mid-term Exam		= 20%
<u>Final Exam</u>		= 20%
TOTAL		100%

**LETTER GRADES** assigned as follows:

97-100	A+
93-96	A
90-92	A-
87-89	B+
83-86	B
80-82	B-
77-79	C+
73-76	C
70-72	C-
67-69	D+
63-66	D
60-62	D-
<60	F

**SUMMARY PAPERS ON ARTICLES AND DOCUMENTARY FILMS:** For most of the weeks of the semester you will see one academic article or a documentary film listed among the readings. For every article and documentary film you will write a 1-2 page, double-spaced summary. Your summary should include: your name, the date, the title and author of the article (or title of the documentary film), the main thesis of the article (or film) and at least two examples that the article or film used to support its thesis. In other words, what is the article/film about? What does the article/film want you to learn about this topic? How does the article/film prove its conclusion? Each article is available through the online academic article databases of the UNCG Library, especially the J-Stor database. As a UNCG student, you can access the articles online at any time and from any computer to read or print. Documentary films will be shown in class and sometimes are also available online, as noted. The summary papers are usually due at the start of class on the Tuesday following the week for which that article or film is assigned (see schedule below). See the Summary Paper grading rubric for more information about how these papers will be graded. **No late papers are accepted.** (GHP1, GHP2)

**PAPER BASED ON ACKERMAN, *THE HUMAN AGE*:** In this book, science writer Diane Ackerman argues that “The human species is now the dominant force shaping the natural world.” This notion is also the basis for calling the environmental epoch we live in the Anthropocene era. What is meant by the term “Anthropocene”? Is Ackerman pessimistic or optimistic about our current relationship with nature? How does Ackerman view the role of technology in our current and future relationship with nature? Lastly, be critical: Do you agree with Ackerman’s conclusions? Why or why not? Use examples from the book to support your arguments. The paper should be around 5-7 double-spaced pages, 12-point font, one inch margins all around. Consult the grading rubric. (GN1, GN2, GN3, HIS2, HIS3) **Due: December 1**

**EXAMS:** Exams will consist mostly of Identifications and short essay questions. Any/all material you encounter as part of this class—lectures, book and article readings, and films—will appear in some fashion on the exam. The final exam is not cumulative. A study guide will be provided for each exam. (GHP1, GHGP2, HIS1, HIS3)

\*Note about **geography**: This is a **world history course**; therefore, you must be knowledgeable about the basics of **world geography**. As part of each exam, you are required to identify major countries, cities, rivers, mountain ranges, deserts, and other physical and national features around the Earth. Use this website to study: <http://www.worldatlas.com/aatlas/world.htm>. Also consult the maps in the Marks, *The Origins of the Modern World* book. More information about what is expected will be included on the exam study guides, but you should study world geography throughout the semester in order to better understand the places you will be learning about. (GN1, HIS1)

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICY:** Refer to the UNCG *Undergraduate Bulletin* (<http://sa.uncg.edu/handbook/academic-integrity-policy/>). Plagiarism (to take the work of another and present it as your own) is absolutely not allowed and will be punished according to UNCG guidelines. The least punishment you will receive will be a zero on the plagiarized assignment and reporting of your indiscretion to the Dean of Students Office.

### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

UNCG Writing Center

Location: 3<sup>rd</sup> floor MHRA

<https://writingcenter.uncg.edu/>

From the Writing Center website: “The purpose of the Writing Center is to enhance the confidence and competence of student writers by providing free, individual assistance at any stage of any writing project. Staff consultants are experienced writers and alert readers, prepared to offer feedback and suggestions on drafts of papers, help students find answers to their questions about writing, and provide one-on-one instruction as needed.”

**SCHEDULE:**

WEEK ONE: Introduction

(8/23-8/25)

What does nature have to do with human history?

The Rise of Agriculture

Reading: Marks, *The Origins of the Modern World*, Preface & Introduction

Watch video by environmental historian Jan Oosthoek, "What is Environmental History?":

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KkFdDPBbn20>

WEEK TWO: The Role of Climate

(8/30-9/1)

Reading: Marks, *The Origins of the Modern World*, Chapter 1

Documentary Film: *Little Ice Age: Big Chill* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vZFXZ0bATyc>)

WEEK THREE: Origins of the Modern World & Trade

(9/6-9/8)

The Indian Ocean and China & the Impact of Global Trade, ca. 1400

Reading: Marks, *The Origins of the Modern World*, Chapter 2

**9/6 Summary Paper #1 due on the *Little Ice Age: Big Chill* film**

WEEK FOUR: The Columbian Exchange

(9/13-9/15)

Impacts in the Americas, Europe, and Beyond

Reading: Marks, *The Origins of the Modern World*, Chapter 3

Article: Paula De Vos, "The Science of Spices: Empiricism and Economic Botany in the Early Spanish Empire," *Journal of World History*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (Dec., 2006), pp. 399-427.

WEEK FIVE: The Industrial Revolution & Energy

(9/20-9/22)

Reading: Marks, *The Origins of the Modern World*, Chapter 4

Article: Matthew Osborn, "The Weirdest of All Undertakings": The Land and the Early Industrial Revolution in Oldham, England," *Environmental History* vol. 8, no. 2 (2003): 246-269.

**9/20 Summary Paper #2 due on "The Science of Spices" article**

WEEK SIX: Urban Environments and Industrialization

(9/27-9/29)

Reading: Marks, *The Origins of the Modern World*, Chapter 5

Documentary Film: *Journey to Planet Earth: The Urban Explosion*

WEEK SEVEN: Colonialism and Environmental Exploitation

Case Study: Irish Potato Famine

(10/4-10/6)

Reading: Article: Thaddeus Sunseri, "Reinterpreting a Colonial Rebellion: Forestry and Social Control in German East Africa, 1874-1915," *Environmental History*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (Jul., 2003), pp. 430-451. \*Note: There is no summary paper due for this article, but it will appear in some fashion on the mid-term exam.

**10/4 Summary Paper #3 due on "The Weirdest of All Undertakings" article**

WEEK EIGHT

(10/11) Review for Mid-term Exam

**10/11 Summary Paper #4 due on *Journey to Planet Earth: The Urban Explosion* film**

**10/13 MID-TERM EXAM**

**SECOND HALF OF COURSE: 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

WEEK NINE: The Rise of Industrial Agriculture  
(10/18-10/20)

**10/18 NO CLASS: FALL BREAK**

10/20 Documentary Film: *Food, Inc.* (<https://vimeo.com/35413948>)

WEEK TEN: Massive Development Projects & Agriculture  
(10/25-10-27)

Reading: Marks, *The Origins of the Modern World*, Chapter 6

Article: David A. Sonnenfeld, "Mexico's "Green Revolution," 1940-1980: Towards an Environmental History," *Environmental History Review*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (Winter, 1992), pp. 28-52.

**10/27 Summary Paper #5 due on *Food, Inc.* film**

WEEK ELEVEN: Over-Consumption & Pollution  
(11/1-11/3)

Reading: Ackerman, *The Human Age*, Part 1 (pp. 3-67)

Documentary Film: *Homo Toxicus*

**11/1 Summary Paper #6 due on "Mexico's "Green Revolution" article**

WEEK TWELVE: "Natural" Disasters  
(11/8-11/10)

What is Natural about a Natural Disaster?: Case Studies

Reading: Ackerman, *The Human Age*, Part 2 (pp. 71-108)

Article: Shujh Cao, Yushang Li, and Bin Yang, "Mt. Tambora, Climatic Changes, and China's Decline in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of World History* vol. 23, no. 3 (Sept. 2012), pp. 587-607

**11/8 Summary Paper #7 due on *Homo Toxicus* film**

**11/10 NO CLASS – I AM AT AN ACADEMIC CONFERENCE**

WEEK THIRTEEN: Invasive Plant & Animal Species / The Rise of Environmentalism  
(11/15-11/17)

Reading: Ackerman, *The Human Age*, Part 3 (pp. 111-167)

**11/15 Summary Paper #8 due on "Mt. Tambora, Climatic Changes, and China's Decline in the Nineteenth Century" article**

WEEK FOURTEEN: Conservation & National Parks & Eco-tourism  
(11/22-11/24)

Reading: Ackerman, *The Human Age*, Part 4 (pp. 171-239)

**11/24 NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING**

WEEK FIFTEEN: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Concerns: Global Warming & more  
11/29-12/1

Reading Marks, *The Origins of the Modern World*, Conclusion & Ackerman, *The Human Age*, Part 5 (pp.243-end)

**12/1 PAPER BASED ON ACKERMAN, *THE HUMAN AGE* DUE**

**Tuesday, December 13 @ 12:00 noon: FINAL EXAM**