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### **FYSP 132: The Body in Environmental History**

Fall 2003  
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 3:00-4:15  
Lewis Center 104

It is through the body that humans most directly experience and influence their environments, and those experiences and influences have changed dramatically over time. As we study how technology, environment, and culture have changed and been changed by the human body, bodily experiences, and ideas about human bodies, it will become clear that our bodies are as much a part of our natural world as trees and rivers, and that they have an environmental history just as rich. We will look at how changes in diet, labor, and landscape have affected the physical body; how changes in medicine, politics, and law have affected ideas about the body; and how those ideas -- and ideas about sex, gender, race, power, and modernity -- have affected people's understandings, experiences, and manipulations of their own bodies, the bodies of others, and their broader environments.

#### **Reading:**

The following books are required reading, and are available at the Oberlin College Bookstore, and are on reserve at Mudd Library:

Christopher Lawrence and Steven Shapin, eds., *Science Incarnate: Historical Embodiments of Natural Knowledge*  
Alfred Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492*  
Conevery Bolton Valencius, *The Health of the Country: How American Settlers Understood Themselves and Their Land*  
Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*  
Eric Klinenberg, *Heat Wave: A Social Autopsy of Disaster in Chicago*

In addition, a number of shorter readings are available both on reserve at the library and on electronic reserve (ERES): <http://eres.cc.oberlin.edu> (password FYSP132)

#### **Class Discussion and Participation**

Active participation on the part of every seminar member is crucial to the success of this class. This is not a lecture class; rather, it is a course in which the primary focus of our meetings will be our discussions of the course readings and our own research and writing. Each student is expected to have mastered that day's readings before class, and to be prepared to engage in intelligent discussion of those readings. Occasional brief in-class writing exercises will also be a component of the discussion and participation grade. Overall, class attendance and active participation will account for 40 percent of the final course grade.

## Writing

The most significant piece of writing for this course will be a twelve-page research paper on a topic of your choosing relevant to our course themes. You will turn in a formal proposal for the final paper by October 16, you will present your findings to the class in early December, and your final paper will be due at 5 pm on the last day of reading period, which is Monday, December 15. The paper proposal will be worth 5 percent of your final grade, your presentation will be worth 5 percent, and the final project will be worth 30 percent.

In addition, you will write two two-page papers based on our course readings, with the option of writing a third. The due dates for rough drafts and final drafts of all three possible papers are included in the syllabus. Everyone will turn in a rough draft of a paper on September 30, and a final draft on October 7. You will then be able to choose between turning in one or both of the papers due on Oct 30 (rough)/Nov 4 (final) and Nov 13 (rough) /18 (final). The average of your grades on these papers will be worth 20 percent of your final grade.

Guidelines for all writing assignments will be distributed during the second week of class.

Papers should be submitted in hard copy, and should be double-spaced, with one-inch margins, and a twelve-point font. Page limits should be taken seriously: writing concisely is an important skill.

Due dates should be taken seriously. Papers will lose one-third of a letter grade for every 24-hour period they are late. That means, for example, that a paper that normally would have received a B+ would receive a B if it were turned in the morning after it was due.

Students must complete and turn in all written work in order to pass the course. That means, for example, that a student who has received an A on every assignment but one, but neglects to turn in that one, will fail the entire course.

## Grading

To summarize, the course will be graded as follows:

Class participation, including discussion and in-class writing:	40%
Two or three 2-page papers:	20%
Research paper proposal:	5%
Research presentation:	5%
Final research paper:	30%

## Writing Assistance

One of your most valuable resources in this class will be your writing assistant, Robin Weeks. Robin is a skilled writer who has been trained to work with you on your writing assignments. Be sure to draw on her expertise as frequently as you can. Contact her by e-mail at [rweeks@oberlin.edu](mailto:rweeks@oberlin.edu), or drop by her office hours on Monday afternoons from 1:30 to 3:30 pm on the Science Center balcony.

Schedule of Classes and Assignments

**Week One**

**Introductions and Definitions**

Tuesday, September 2

Introductions

Thursday, September 4

What is Environmental History?

Reading:

William Cronon, "Kennecott Journey: The Paths out of Town," from William Cronon, George Miles and Jay Gitlin, eds., *Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America's Western Past* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992), 28-51. (ERES)

William Cronon, "The Trouble With Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," in William Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground*, 69-90. (ERES)

**Week Two**

**Who Cares About Bodies?**

Tuesday, September 9

Embodied History

Reading:

Caroline Bynum, "Why All the Fuss about the Body? A Medievalist's Perspective," *Critical Inquiry* 22 (Autumn 1995): 1-33. (ERES)

Lawrence and Shapin, *Science Incarnate*, introduction and chapters 1 and 3.

Thursday, September 11

Embodied Environmental History?

Reading:

Christopher Sellers, "Thoreau's Body: Towards an Embodied Environmental History," *Environmental History* 4:4 (1999): 486-514. (ERES)

Lawrence and Shapin, *Science Incarnate*, chapter 7.

**Week Three**

**Does it all Come Down to Bodies?**

Tuesday, September 16

Biological Conquest?

Reading:

Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange*, 3-121.

Jared Diamond, *Guns Germs and Steel*, 131-175. (ERES)

Wednesday, September 17

7 pm: Lecture by Michael Ruse:

"Darwinism and Atheism: A Marriage Made in Heaven?"

Thursday, September 18

Biological Determinism?

Class led by Michael Ruse and David Sepkoski

Reading:

Michael Ruse, *The Evolution Wars: A Guide to the Debates* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 203-260.

**Week Four**

**Thinking as Environmental Historians**

Tuesday, September 23

Library Workshop

Reading:

Valencius, *The Health of the Country*, 1- 108.

Thursday, September 25

Writing Workshop: Choosing a Research Topic

Reading:

Valencius, *The Health of the Country*, 109-190.

**Week Five**

**Bodies as Metaphors, or Material Objects?**

Tuesday, September 30

Metaphor

Reading:

Valencius, *The Health of the Country*, 191-264.

(first drafts of Valencius papers due)

Thursday, October 2

Materiality

Reading:

Lisa Herschbach, "Prosthetic Reconstructions: Making the Industry, Re-Making the Body, Modeling the Nation," *History Workshop Journal* 44 (1997): 23-57. (ERES)

Neil Maher, "A New Deal Body Politic: Landscape, Labor, and the Civilian Conservation Corps," *Environmental History* 7, no. 3 (2002), 435-61. (ERES)

**Week Six**

**Writing as Environmental Historians**

Tuesday, October 7

Library workshop (have a topic in mind)

(final drafts of Valencius papers due)

Thursday, October 9

Writing workshop: refining a research topic

**Week Seven**

**Constructing a Life?**

Tuesday, October 14

Birth, Disease and Death as social constructions

Reading:

Jeffrey Baker, *The Machine in the Nursery: Incubator Technology and the Origins of Newborn Intensive Care* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 1-24 and 152-174. (ERES)

Charles Rosenberg, "Framing Disease: Illness, Society and History," in Charles Rosenberg and Janet Golden, ed., *Framing Disease: Studies in Cultural History* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1992), xiii-xxvi. (ERES)

Thursday, October 16

Environmental Histories of Dead Bodies  
Reading:  
Newspaper articles to be distributed  
(Research proposals due)

**Week Eight**

**Fall Recess**

Tuesday, October 21

No Class: Fall Recess

Thursday, October 23

No Class: Fall Recess

**Week Nine**

**Toxins and Bodily Change**

Tuesday, October 28

Bodies in Changing Environments  
Reading:  
Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*, 1-184.

Thursday, October 30

Toxic Bodies  
Reading:  
Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*, 187-297.  
  
(first drafts of *Silent Spring* papers due)

**Week Ten**

**Whose Bodies? Producers and Consumers**

Tuesday, November 4

Producing Bodies  
Reading:  
Richard White, “ ‘Are You and Environmentalist or Do You Work For a Living?’: Work and Nature,” in William Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground*, 171-185. (ERES)  
  
(final drafts of *Silent Spring* papers due)

Thursday, November 6

Consuming Bodies  
Reading:  
Jennifer Price, “Looking for Nature at the Mall: A Field Guide to the Nature Company,” in William Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground*, 186-203. (ERES)  
Susan Davis, “‘Touch the Magic,’ ” in William Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground*, 204-217. (ERES)

**Week Eleven**

**Environmental History, Bodies, and Policy**

Tuesday, November 11

Bodies and Power  
Reading:  
Klinenberg, *Heat Wave*, 1-128.

Thursday, November 13

Environmental Justice and the Body  
Klinenberg, *Heat Wave*, 129-242.

(first drafts of *Heat Wave* papers due)

**Week Twelve**

**Focusing on the Final Project**

Tuesday, November 18

Library Workshop  
  
(final drafts of *Heat Wave* papers due)

Thursday, November 20

Writing workshop

**Week Thirteen**

**Bodies in the News**

Tuesday, November 25

Reading the news as environmental historians: new questions?  
Readings:  
Current newspaper articles

Thursday, November 27

No Class: Thanksgiving

**Week Fourteen**

**Presentations**

Tuesday, December 2

Presentations of Projects

Thursday, December 3

Presentations of Projects

**Week Fifteen**

**Presentations and Conclusions**

Tuesday, December 9

Presentations of Projects

Thursday, December 11

Conclusions and Evaluations

Monday December 15:

**Final Project Due, 5 pm**