

Course 79-387 (Fall 2003)
Shaping Modernity's Landscapes in Latin America

Meeting times: Tues/Thurs, 10:30-11:50 AM

Location: Porter Hall A19A

Instructor: John Soluri

Office Hours: by appointment

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Course Description

This course explores the history of interactions between people and their environments in Latin America. Through readings, discussions, lectures, films, and field trips, I will challenge you to question your assumptions about “nature” in order to encourage you to conceptualize environments as dynamic places shaped by both biological and cultural processes. Throughout the term we will strive to understand how environments shape and are shaped by the power of states, systems of production, commodity markets, and changing meanings of nature. The course will be run as a seminar; I will lecture on occasion but most meetings will include discussions.

Some Key Questions and Objectives

The following are intended to give you a sense of some of the big questions that will form the basis for lectures and discussions.

- 1) How does culture shape our understanding of nature?
- 2) What is the relationship between history and ecology?
- 3) What accounts for the ecological diversity found in Latin America?
- 4) Did the indigenous people of the Americas live “in harmony” with their environments?
- 5) What was the Columbian Exchange and why is it important for understanding environmental history in the Americas?
- 6) How did the emergence and evolution of international markets for various commodities (silver, wool, sugar, beef, bananas, oil) transform landscapes and livelihoods in Latin America?
- 7) How did the emergence of nation-states shape ideas about nature in 19th century Latin America?
- 8) Why are Latin American cities growing so quickly and what are the environmental impacts of urbanization?
- 9) In the age of so-called “globalization,” what alternatives exist to refashion relationships between people and their environments?
- 10) How can historical perspectives inform efforts to create environmental policies?

Required Texts

Nigel J. H. Smith, *Amazon Sweet Sea: Land, Life, and Water at the River's Mouth* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002). ISBN: 0292777701. Available from amazon.com for \$28 new, less for used copies.

All other readings will be distributed in class. Additional copies will be available in the History Department (Baker Hall 240).

Course Requirements

1. **Homework (1/3 of final grade):** For weeks 1-9, you will turn in a two-page, typed (double-spaced, standard font size) homework responding to a question that I will email to you one week ahead of time. In general, the questions will be open-ended and focused on a broad theme or concept. Homework will be graded on a five-point system (I will throw out your lowest score). In order to receive full credit, you must hand in your homework in class. I will accept homework until 5 P.M. on the Thursday that it is due, but it will be marked down one point. Place late assignments (hardcopies only!) in my mailbox in the History Department (Baker Hall 240).
2. **Participation (1/6):** Attendance and active participation are basic requirements of this course. Come prepared to discuss readings and other materials. Note that effective participation involves not just sharing your position, but listening and responding to the thoughts of classmates.
3. **Midterm Exam (1/6):** The exam (in class, October 16th) will consist of short-answer identifications of key concepts, events, and actors and one synthetic essay. A study guide will be made available one week before the exam.
4. **Action Project (1/3):** This assignment will require that you incorporate historical perspectives about Latin American environments into contemporary issues. Working either individually or in a small group, you will be asked to define, research, and present (in both oral and written forms) a small-scale “advocacy” project designed to intervene in some way with on-going debates over environmental problems. I will work with you closely to define and research your project. More detailed instructions will be handed out in early October. Note the following due dates:

In class, Oct. 30th: Project definition and preliminary bibliography

In class, Nov. 6th: Revised bibliography and methods

5pm, Dec. 11th: Final Write-up

Note: Acts of plagiarism (including downloading papers off the web and/or paraphrasing from another source without proper citation) will lead to harsh, nasty consequences such as failure to receive credit for the course. If you are unclear what constitutes plagiarism, please consult with me or your copy of *The Word*, the Carnegie Mellon student handbook.

Course Calendar

Week Number Themes/Readings/Due Dates

- 1 8/26 INTRODUCTIONS TO THE COURSE
- 8/28 RE-INTRODUCING NATURE
 READINGS: William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness,"
 And Ramachandra Guha, "Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness
 Preservation: A Third World Critique."
- 2 9/2 LATIN AMERICAN GEOGRAPHICAL DIVERSITY
 READINGS: Maps and John Vandermeer, "Ecosystems in Space and Time."
- 9/4 LINKING HISTORY AND ECOLOGY: SOME KEY CONCEPTS
 READINGS: Bruce Winterhalder, "Concepts in Historical Ecology."
- 3 9/9 PRECOLOMBIAN LANDSCAPES
 READINGS: William Denevan, "The Pristine Myth: The Landscape of the
 Americas in 1492."
- 9/11 MESOAMERICA: MAYAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT
 READINGS: Thomas Whitmore and B. L. Turner, *Cultivated Landscapes of
 Middle America on the Eve of Conquest*. Chp. 8.
- 4 9/16 AN ECOLOGICAL REVOLUTION? THE "COLUMBIAN EXCHANGE"
 READINGS: Alfred Crosby, "Metamorphosis of the Americas;" and documents
- 9/18 FIELD TRIP TO PHIPPS CONSERVATORY
- 5 9/23 COLONIAL LANDSCAPE 1: MINING IN POTOSI
 READINGS: Peter Bakewell, *Miners of the Red Mountain*, chps. 1 and 5.
- 9/25 COLONIAL LANDSCAPE 2: LIVESTOCK IN CENTRAL MEXICO
 READINGS: Elinor Melville, "Environmental and Social Change in the Valle
 del Mezquital, Mexico, 1521-1600;" and Karl Butzer and Elisabeth Butzer, "The
 Sixteenth-Century Environment of the Central Mexican Bajío."
- 6 9/30 IMAGINING "NATIONAL" LANDSCAPES IN LATIN AMERICA
 READINGS: Domingo F. Sarmiento, *Civilization or Barbarism*, Chp 1; and
 primary source material related to Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego.
- 10/2 CIVILIZING CITIES: THE CASE OF RIO DE JANEIRO
 READINGS: Teresa Meade, "Civilizing Rio de Janeiro;" and José Drummond,
 "The Garden in the Machine."
- 7 10/7 COMMODITIES AND ECO-SOCIAL CHANGE 1: BANANAS
 READINGS: John Soluri, "Bananas, Mass Markets, and Panama Disease;" and
 Gary Paul Nabhan, "Tequila Hangovers and the Mescal Monoculture Blues," in
 Cultures of Habitat (Washington DC: Counterpoint, 1997).

- 10/9 COMMODITIES AND ECO-SOCIAL CHANGE 2: BEEF CATTLE
 READINGS: Robert W. Wilcox, "Zebu's Elbows: Cattle Breeding and the Environment in Central Brazil, 1890-1960."
- 8 10/14 OIL AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN MEXICO AND ECUADOR
 READINGS: Myrna Santiago, "Rejecting Progress in Paradise;" and Paul Sabin, "Searching for Middle Ground."
- 10/16 MIDTERM EXAMINATION – IN CLASS**
- 9 10/21 LIFE AND DEATH IN AMAZONIA
 READINGS: Nigel J. H. Smith, *Amazon Sweet Sea* (book)
- 10/23 LIFE AND DEATH IN AMAZONIA
 VIDEO: "The Death of Chico Mendes"
- 10 10/28 "MEGA-CITIES" AND CHANGING URBAN SPACES
 READINGS: J. Timmons Roberts and Nikka Demetria Thanos, *Trouble in Paradise*, chp. 4; and Carolina Maria de Jesus, *Child of the Dark*, excerpts.
- 10/30 ACTION PROJECT WORKSHOP: Definition and Bibliography Due**
- 11 11/04 "GLOBALIZATION" AND LATIN AMERICAN ENVIRONMENTS
 READINGS: Wendy Call, "Pacific Coast Communities Confront Shrimp Farm Threat," *Report on the Americas* (May/June, 2003).
- 11/06 ACTION PROJECT WORKSHOP: Revised bibliography and Methods Due**
- 12 11/11 CONSERVATION AND ECOTOURISM
 Martha Honey, "Giving a Grade to Costa Rica's Green Tourism," *Report on the Americas* (May/Jun 2003); and Jill M. Belsky, "The Meaning of the Manatee." Guest speaker: Mario Perez, ecotourism operator from Costa Rica.
- 11/13 ACTION PROJECT WORKSHOP DAY
- 13 11/18 FAIR TRADE IN SUPPORT OF "ALTERNATIVE AGRICULTURE"
 READING: TBA
- 11/20 ACTION PROJECT WORKSHOP DAY
- 14 11/25 INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS
 READINGS: Readings: Beth Conklin and Laura Graham, "The Shifting Middle Ground: Amazonian Indians and Eco-Politics."
- 11/27 THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY – NO CLASS**
- 15 12/02 ACTION PROJECT WORKSHOP DAY
 12/04 ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY: WHAT IS IT GOOD FOR?
- 16 **12/11 ACTION PROJECT WRITE-UPS DUE, 5 PM**