This course is an introduction to global environmental history through an examination of selected episodes and themes, with emphasis on the nature and role of resources, on the one hand, and cultural conceptions of the natural world, on the other. The course asks the general question, What light can the life and earth sciences shed on human history?, while also drawing upon the perspectives of social, cultural, and political history, anthropology, economic theory, and the history of technology. Humans have been shaped by their environments over the course of their history, and they have obviously altered their environments, often drastically so. The purpose of the course is neither to document environmental gloom and doom nor to cast particular people or practices as good or evil on the basis of currently acceptable standards of stewardship or sustainability. Rather it is to understand the role that the natural environment has played in human history and the roles that perceptions of nature have played in shaping human institutions and practices, even as we humans have altered and shaped *natural* environments.

The format for the course will be discussions based on readings, brief informal lectures supplemented by slides or videos, and possible museum visits and a guest speaker.

**Course goals and objectives.** It is impossible to predict in advance what any given student may come away with from any given course, but if you keep up with the assigned readings, pay close attention in class, and take the writing assignments seriously, it is my sincere hope that you may

1) gain a more than superficial understanding of the important roles that the natural environment, natural resources, and perceptions of such have played in human history  
2) gain a familiarity with the kinds of questions to ask when seeking historical explanations  
3) come to appreciate some of the ways in which scientific knowledge and methods can be applied to understanding historical phenomena  
4) develop an appreciation for the historical background behind many current environmental controversies

**Course requirements.**
1) Regular attendance and participation (as determined by several criteria, not just speaking up regularly in class)  
2) Weekly ungraded forum contributions/response papers on the course readings (see details on the next page)  
3) Two 6-7 page essays based on course readings, due Oct. 7 and Nov. 18 (tentative dates)  
4) Participation in a group session, Dec. 7-14 (topics to be determined by consensus of class)  
5) A mini research paper (approx. 10 pages) based on your group session topic, due after classes end, Dec. 19

**Basis for evaluation.** The breakdown for your final grade will be as follows: attendance and participation, including forum contributions/response papers (15%); two short essays (25% each); research paper, including participation in group session, (35%).

Gene Cittadino  
1 Washington Place, Room 412  
Office hrs: Tues. 10:30-12:30; Weds. 12:30-1:30 & 5-6  
992-7774; ec15@nyu.edu
Texts. The following required texts are available at the NYU Bookstore and have been placed on two-hour reserve in the Bobst Library (you may request reserve books at the circulation desk):


Lynn White, Jr., *Medieval Technology and Social Change* (Oxford University Press, 1964) any edition is fine

Peter Nichols, *Oil and Ice: A Story of Arctic Disaster and the Rise and Fall of America’s Last Whaling Dynasty* (Penguin Books, 2010; originally titled *Final Voyage* in hardcover; any edition is fine


In addition to the above texts there will be a number of shorter reading selections made available on the course NYU Classes site or as class handouts.

Forum posts/response papers. You are required to post your responses to course readings once each week to the forum on NYU Classes. Beginning with the second week of classes, there will be a forum set up for each class date. You have the choice of submitting your post on Monday or Wednesday, and your comments should relate to the readings assigned for the given date. Your responses should be about a paragraph in length. Feel free to probe, criticize, and speculate, but your forum comments should show serious reflections on the readings. You must post your response by 2:30 p.m. on the day of the class so that the various forum posts can be taken into consideration for class discussion. Earlier posts are strongly encouraged. **Note:** If you are uncomfortable with posting to the forum you may submit your response as an email attachment (Word or pdf to ec15@nyu.edu) or, if you prefer, submit it in print at the beginning of class on the date due. The forum posts/papers will not be graded individually, but I will take them into consideration collectively in evaluating the participation component of your grade.

Student-run (group) sessions. On the schedule below there are four class periods indicated as student-run sessions. If enrollment justifies it, we may have to expand to five sessions. Everyone will be required to take part in one of these sessions, in which a small group of students will organize and direct the discussion. Each group should assign one or two short readings to be distributed in advance on NYU Classes. Everyone is responsible for doing the readings in advance and forums will continue as usual.

Ground rules. **Attendance and etiquette.** I take attendance and expect you to attend every class. The class begins promptly at 3:30. Please respect your classmates and arrive on time; late arrivals always disrupt the atmosphere of a classroom, as do mid-class exits and re-entries. Expect to remain for the full 75 minutes. The success of this class depends upon open discussions. Feel free to speak your mind, but also be prepared to listen and respect the opinions of others. **Turn off electronic devices (cell phones, laptops, notebooks, iPads, tablets, etc.).** The only legitimate reason for using an electronic device is to view the course readings, in which case you must check with me first. **Late papers.** Unless the paper is late due to documented illness or an emergency, it will be downgraded one grade (A- to B+, B- to C+, etc.) for each day late.

**Documentation and plagiarism.** Do your own work. Respect yourself, your classmates, your professor, and the integrity of the academic enterprise! Otherwise, there will be serious consequences. I will assume that all written work is your own and that you understand the basic rules for acknowledging your sources. If you don’t, please ask; İam more than happy to assist you. Also, you should consult the official statement of academic integrity on the Gallatin School website: [http://gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policies1/academic-integrity.html](http://gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policies1/academic-integrity.html)
SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS

We will try to keep as close to the following schedule as possible, but expect a few changes from time to time. Readings listed on any given date are the readings you should be prepared to discuss on that date. Readings preceded by an asterisk (*) will be made available on NYU Classes.

I. Setting the stage: “lessons” from prehistory/ancient history?

W Sept 7  Introductions; Easter Island and the voyages of Zheng He

M Sept 12  The nature of civilization — lessons from Gilgamesh
*Gilgamesh, Books I & II; *Marks, Origins of the Modern World, Introduction (Note: this book is a course text; the introduction is available on NYU Classes for students who have not yet obtained the text)

W Sept 14  Speculations on the origins of agriculture — old and new
*Harlan, The Living Fields, excerpts; *Tudge, Neanderthals, Bandits, and Farmers: How Agriculture Really Began

M Sept 19  The Pleistocene extinctions — why we should care
*Martin, Twilight of the Mammoths, excerpt; *Lyell, Principles of Geology II:9

II. Case study #1: resources, technology, & social change in the Middle Ages

W Sept 21  The stirrup and the shape of feudalism: a theory
White, Medieval Technology and Social Change, chap. I

M Sept 26  Plows, oxen, horses, and crop rotation: the transformation of agriculture
White, Medieval Technology, chap. II

W Sept 28  Mechanical technology and medieval society
White, Medieval Technology, chap. III (selections); *Hoffmann, Medieval Use, Management, and Sustainability of Local Ecosystems

M Oct 3  Two views from the dawn of the environmental movement
*White, The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis
*Hardin, The Tragedy of the Commons

W Oct 5  The White and Hardin theses re-evaluated
*Hoffmann, on White; *Hoffmann, This Belongs to Me

F Oct 7  First essay due (not a class day)

M Oct 10  NO CLASS — Columbus Day

III. The “rise of the West” re-examined

W Oct 12  The Columbian exchange and a theory of anthropogenic climate change
*Crosby, Germs, Seeds, & Animals, chaps. 5-7; *Ruddiman, Plows, Plagues, & Petroleum, chaps. 13 & 14
M Oct 17  The "biological old regime"
Marks, Origins of the Modern World, chap. 1; *Marks, Two Thousand Years of Environmental Change in South China

W Oct 19  The polycentric world: China, India, and Islam
Marks, Origins, chap. 2; *Williams, The Role of Deforestation in Earth and World-System Integration

M Oct 24  The other consequence of 1492: silver, sugar, and slaves
Marks, Origins, chap. 3; *Moore, Silver, Ecology, and the Origins of the Modern World, 1450-1640

W Oct 26  The Industrial Revolution re-examined
Marks, Origins, chap. 4; *Hornborg, Footprints in the Cotton Fields

M Oct 31  The myth of the "rise of the West" explained
Marks, Origins, pp. 127-173

W Nov 2  The post WWII world and the shape of the future
Marks, Origins, pp. 173-218; *Muradian & Giljum, Physical Trade Flows of Pollution-Intensive Products

IV. Case study #2: Whales, oil, and the Protestant work ethic

M Nov 7  The business of whaling: an unromantic view
Nichols, Oil and Ice (Final Voyage), Prologue-chap. 4

W Nov 9  Transformations: Nantucket and New Bedford at the center of the world
Nichols, Oil and Ice, chaps. 5-9

M Nov 14  Asceticism, affluence, and decline
Nichols, Oil and Ice, chaps. 10-14

W Nov 16  Lessons from the decline of an industry?
Nichols, Oil and Ice, chap. 15-Epilogue

F Nov 18  Second essay due (not a class day)

M Nov 21  Interlude: New York City environmental history
Readings to be determined

W Nov 23  NO CLASS  Thanksgiving holiday begins

V. Case study #3: Maize in Africa – social and ecological implications

M Nov 28  The ecology of Zea mays, and its consequences
McCann, Maize and Grace, Preface-chap. 3

W Nov 30  New World crop in the Old World, north and south
McCann, Maize and Grace, chaps. 4 & 5 plus selections in chaps. 6 & 7
M Dec 5          Maize and malaria; reflections on the social implications of maize in Africa
                   McCann, *Maize and Grace*, chaps. 8 & 9

VI. Group sessions

W Dec 7          Student-run session 1 (topic to be determined)

M Dec 12         Student-run session 2 (topic to be determined)

T Dec 13         (Classes follow Monday schedule) Student-run session 3 (topic to be determined)

W Dec 14         Student-run session 4 (topic to be determined)

M Dec 19         (not a class day)  **Research paper due**