

## **Health, Environment, and Civil Rights**

HIST488RW-000 / HLTH 485W

Emory University • Spring 2016

Thurs 3:00 – 5:30 pm • Rm TBA

Instructor: Prof. Elena Conis, Department of History

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### **Piedmont Project Course Redesign Statement**

This upper-division writing-intensive seminar began as a course on the historical interactions among environmental change, human health, and individual social and political rights in the U.S. from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century through the 20<sup>th</sup> century. (See **Course Overview**, below.) As a consequence of participating in the Piedmont Project, I have modified the course in two key ways. First, I have added new emphasis on the theme of how norms, decisions, choices, and policies that are defined and shaped by the historical moment in which they are (or were) made affect the state of human health and the environment into the future; this includes emphasizing how past choices (at all scales) affect the current state of health and the environment, and how current decisions will do the same for futures not yet realized. This revision of the course is reflected in the topics covered, in new course readings, and through the addition of several experiential learning components. The inclusion of experiential learning is the second major change I've made to the course. The course will now include two types of "field trips," to communities and locales in Georgia where environmental changes have had material impact on (or posed a significant threat to) human health, and to repositories of historical information (government documents, industrial archives, etc.) on the affected communities. This experiential learning component of the course will provide the foundation for research projects students will complete over the course of the semester, in which they will reconstruct, through primary research and reporting (both oral and written), how these environments were altered, why, and by whom, as well as who was affected, for how long, and how.

### **Course Overview**

This colloquium examines, in depth, the intersection of the histories of the environment and health in the U.S. Through a series of case studies, we'll explore how the health impacts of natural and man-made environmental factors have been negotiated by laypeople, corporations, and government actors at different points in time; how environmental values have been reflected in changing understandings of ill health and disease; and how ever-evolving health concerns have played a role in shaping environmental politics and beliefs. We will also examine how illness experiences have shaped physical environments and how physical environments have shaped perceptions of the body, its functions, and its malfunctions over time. Students in the course will also come away with an understanding of how the consequences of environmental

change and health are determined by class, race, ethnicity, and gender, with specific ramifications for communities defined by such categories. Additionally, we will look at the connections between past and present challenges to “sustainability” – a generation’s efforts to preserve quality resources for future generations – as well as past and present solutions to sustainability challenges at the intersection of health, environment, and rights.

This is a seminar-style, discussion-based course. Students must come to every class meeting prepared to contribute meaningfully and with specificity to discussions of the assigned readings and film. This is also a writing-intensive seminar; students will complete 20 pages of polished (that is, revised) writing over the course of the semester. Lastly, this course includes several “field trips.” We’ll take to field trips to sites of industrial contamination just outside the metro Atlanta area, one of which has been fully “remediated” and another at which clean-up and restoration has not yet begun. Our other two trips will be to repositories of historical documents—MARBL and The Georgia Archives—where we will conduct primary source research on these two industrial clean-up sites, by identifying relevant government reports, correspondence, surveys, raw public health and toxicological data, and the like.

Each student will write two Reading Response papers (5 pages each) and two Primary Source Analyses (5 pages each). Class-time will be split between discussion of assigned readings and media and workshop-type activities focused on honing research and writing skills.

### **Readings**

Required course texts, indicated by an asterisk in the COURSE SCHEDULE & READINGS LIST, below, are available at the campus bookstore; many are also available as e-books. Reserve copies of each required text will be made available at Woodruff Library; so will assigned films. Other assigned readings will be posted to Blackboard.

### **Evaluation**

This course requires thoughtful participation in weekly discussions, independent research in primary source documents, active participation in class workshops, and completion of twenty pages of revised writing.

***Participation in discussion of course readings is worth 25% of the final course grade.*** Each class meeting is worth two participation points. Students must contribute thoughtfully and meaningfully, to both discussions of the readings and workshop sessions, in order to earn the points for each class meeting. One discretionary participation point will be awarded only to students whose participation is consistently exemplary over the course of the semester.

***Participation in course workshops is worth 25% of the final course grade.*** Students will have to produce something specific at the end of each workshop, whether it is a map, a primary document, or a critical review of a peer’s written assignment. Some of these will be due at the

end of class; some in the following week's class; specific instructions will be announced in class and posted to Blackboard.

***Written assignments are worth 50% of the final course grade.*** The first two assignments (Reading Response 1 and Primary Source Analysis 1) are each worth 10%; the subsequent two assignments are each worth 15%. All written assignments will undergo peer review and revision.

### **Participation Policy**

Participation comprises a significant portion of your grade in this course. Attendance alone does not constitute participation. All students are required to contribute to class discussions and activities in a thoughtful and respectful manner. Failure to participate verbally during class meetings will hurt your final grade. If you have trouble participating—because you are reserved, the material is challenging, or for some other reason—please speak to me before the beginning of Week 3 so we can come to a working solution.

### **Course Policies**

I have strict policies governing participation, attendance, technology use, and more. Please consult the “Course Policies” document on Blackboard early in the semester. There may be a pop quiz on these policies at some time in the first few weeks of class.

### **Academic Honor Code**

The Honor Code is in effect at all times. Instances of academic misconduct, including plagiarism, may be grounds for receiving an F in the course and being expelled from Emory.

All material submitted by a student in fulfillment of his or her academic course of study must be the original work of the student. Written assignments submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for this course will be analyzed using plagiarism detection software. Plagiarism includes:

- copying any material (a phrase, sentence, paragraph, entire paper, etc.) verbatim from any other person's work without placing the material in quotes and including a citation indicating where the original work was found.
- the paraphrasing of another's work or ideas without citation.
- The submission of any work not completed by the student (e.g., essays purchased from a vendor; essays produced by a peer or employee of the student submitting the paper, etc.).

For further definitions and examples of plagiarism, see the Plagiarism link on Blackboard. Ignorance about the definition of plagiarism will not excuse instances of plagiarism. For details on the Honor Code, see: [http://college.emory.edu/home/academic/policy/honor\\_code.html](http://college.emory.edu/home/academic/policy/honor_code.html).

*Late assignments will not be accepted under any circumstance and will receive a grade of zero.*

## **COURSE SCHEDULE & READINGS**

### **Nature, Health, and the “Environment” in the American Imaginary**

#### Week 1

- William Cronon, “[The Trouble with Wilderness, or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature](#)” in *Uncommon Ground*, pp. 69-90.
- Vermonja R. Alston, “[Environment: Keywords for American Cultural Studies](#),” NYU Press, 2014.
- *Workshop*: Introduction to guiding questions and defining historical research questions

#### Week 2

- Jennifer Price, “[Thirteen Ways of Seeing Nature in L.A.](#),” *The Believer*, April 1996.
- David B. Morris, “[The White Noise of Health](#),” in *Literature and Medicine* 15.1 (1996), pp. 1-15.
- Dana Goodyear, “[The Dying Sea](#),” *The New Yorker*, May 4, 2015, pp. 22-27.
- *Workshop*: Introduction to research methods; identifying and locating primary sources
- *Field trip*: MARBL

### **Industrial Production and Health**

#### Week 3

- Claudia Clark, *Radium Girls: Women and Industrial Health Reform* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).\*
- *Field Trip*: [Luminous Processors](#) (read materials at link thoroughly; bring a camera)

#### Week 4

- Dan Fagin, *Toms River* (New York: Bantam, 2013), *passim*. \*
- Olga Pomar, “Toxic Racism on a New Jersey Waterfront,” in *The Quest for Environmental Justice*, pp. 125-141.
- *Workshop*: Mapping environmental degradation by theme (place, industry, contaminant)
- *Turn in*: Reading Response 1

#### Week 5

- Ellen Griffith Spears, *Baptized in PCBs* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2014), *passim*. \*
- Connor Bailey, et al., “Environmental Politics in Alabama’s Black Belt,” in *Confronting Environmental Racism*, ed. R. Bullard, (Cambridge: South End Press, 1993), pp. 107-122.
- *Field Trip*: [Armstrong World Industries](#) (read link thoroughly; bring a camera)

### **The Postwar Chemical Environment**

#### Week 6

- Nancy Langston, “Before World War II: Chemicals, Risk, and Regulation,” *Toxic Bodies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), pp. 17-27.
- Rachel Carson, “A Fable for Tomorrow,” *Silent Spring* (Houghton Mifflin 2002), *passim*.

- William Souder, “Miss Carson’s Book,” *On a Farther Shore* (Crown 2012), pp. 3-20.
- Maril Hazlett, “Voices from the Spring: Silent Spring and the Ecological Turn in American Health,” in *Seeing Nature Through Gender*, ed. V. Scharff (Kansas 2003), pp. 103-128.
- *Workshop*: Research in historic newspapers and periodicals
- *Workshop*: Peer review of Reading Response 1

#### Week 7

- David Rosner and Gerald Markowitz, “Better Living Through Chemistry?” and “Evidence of an Illegal Conspiracy by Industry,” in *Deceit and Denial* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2XXX), pp. 139 – 194.
- David Rosner and Gerald Markowitz, “Industry Challenges to the Principle of Prevention in Public Health: The Precautionary Principle in Historical Perspective,” *Public Health Reports* 117.6 (2002), pp. 501-512.
- *Workshop*: Research in government documents and archives, including EPA reports, ATSDR toxicology profiles, and Congressional hearings.

#### Week 8

- Judith Helfand and Daniel B. Gold, *Blue Vinyl*, 2002.
- Judith Helfand, “When the Personal is Environmental: The Legacy of *Blue Vinyl*,” July 17, 2007, MediaRights.org. CP, 249-254.
- Judith Helfand interviewed by Adina Back and Pennee Bender, “Connecting the Dots: Workers, Families, and Toxic Exposure, Past and Present,” *Radical History Review* 80 (2001): 121-133, 191-204.
- *Workshop*: Finding visual and audio primary source material
- *Turn In*: Primary Source Analysis 1

#### Week 9

- Atul Gawande, “The Cancer Cluster Myth,” *The New Yorker*, February 8, 1998, pp. 34-37.
- Steve Zaillian, *A Civil Action*, 1999.
- *Field Trip*: The Georgia Archives

### **Agricultural Production and Health**

#### Week 10

- Angus Wright, *The Death of Ramon Gonzalez* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990, 2005). \*
- Linda Nash, “Introduction” and “Modern Landscapes and Ecological Bodies,” in *Inescapable Ecologies* (University of California Press, 2006), pp. 1-15, 127-168.
- *Turn In*: Primary Source Analysis 2
- *Workshop*: Peer review of Primary Source Analysis 1

Week 11

- Seth Holmes, *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013). \*
- Monica Campbell, "[What's It Like to Be a Migrant Farmworker?](#)" *PRI's The World*, February 6, 2015.
- *Workshop*: Locating demographic source material

**Environmentalism to Environmental Justice**

Week 12

- Lois M. Gibbs, "The Problem at Love Canal," in *Love Canal: My Story*, 1-46.
- Allan Mazur, "Accounts," *A Hazardous Inquiry: The Rashomon Effect at Love Canal* (Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 1-120. \*
- Elizabeth D. Blum, *Love Canal Revisited: Race, Class, and Gender in Environmental Activism* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008), pp. 31-119. \*
- *Turn In*: Reading Response 2
- *Workshop*: Preparing Primary Source Presentations, Part I

Week 13

- Eileen McGurty, *Transforming Environmentalism* (Rutgers University Press, 2009). \*
- Robert Bullard, "Neighborhoods Zoned for Garbage," in *The Quest for Environmental Justice*, pp. 19-42.
- *Workshop*: Preparing Primary Source Presentations, Part II

Week 14

- Christopher Sellers, "'The Environment' as a Suburban Place," *Crabgrass Crucible* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2012) pp. 243-284.
- Robert Bullard, "Environmental Justice in the Twenty-First Century," in *The Quest for Environmental Justice*, pp. 19-42.
- Giovanna di Chiro, "Nature as Community: The Convergence of Environment and Social Justice," in *Uncommon Ground*, pp. 298-320.
- *Workshop*: Preparing Primary Source Presentations, Part III

**Course Conclusions**

Week 15

- Primary Source Presentations
- Course conclusions

**FINAL PAPERS**

Turn final revised papers in to the box outside Dr. Conis's office (115 Bowden) by  
**5pm on Fri May 1.**