Environmentalism used to be understood as the privilege of affluent “first worlders,” an exercise in protecting nature from those too uncivilized or too ignorant to care for it by themselves. But this is no longer the case. In the past several decades, environmentalists—and environmental historians who study the history of human-nature relationships—have begun to acknowledge and account for the diverse “environmentalisms” that are practiced by both “first worlders” and “third worlders,” by both rich and poor, both workers and capitalists, between the global north and the global south as well as within small-town communities, villages, and cities across the world. That class is one of the key determinants in how different people experience and care for the environment is gaining acceptance among social scientists and is inspiring exciting new research in the field of environmental history. This course will explore the relationships among environmentalism, class, and power in human history, as well as the consequences of these relationships for poor and working class peoples. A class-conscious history of globalization—in which “globalization” is understood as the rise of a globally-interwoven capitalist economy over the past two centuries—reveals the various ways in which “environmentalism” has served the powerful while impacting the lives of the less powerful. At the same time, we will examine the resistance strategies of working class peoples the world over, to see how environments can be reclaimed by and for the poor. We will work collectively in this class towards developing a “poor people's environmentalism”: a blueprint for thinking about global nature and the responsibilities of the powerful and privileged in alleviating poverty and supporting poor people's rights to, and in, the environment.

Course information

Instructor: Gregory Rosenthal, Department of History, SUNY Stony Brook  
email: grosenthal@middlebury.edu  
Class meetings: M 11am-12pm  
W 9am-11am  Th 10am-12pm  F 11am-12pm  
Office hrs. (Hlcst 207): Tu 9am-10am  W 9am-11am  F 11am-12pm  and by appt.

Course objectives

- Students will bring to this course their passion for environmental leadership and social justice.  
- Students will bring to this course issues, actions, and projects that interest them and that they are potentially working on or will work on in the future. We will incorporate these into class discussion.  
- Students will walk away from this course with a better sense of how both class and a global perspective shape all environmental conflicts at all levels of society. Understanding the history of environmentalism and globalization from poor peoples' perspectives will cultivate the skills necessary to turn class solidarity and cross-class empathy into meaningful change to benefit all.

Readings

– Additional readings will be made available as PDFs on the class Moodle site or through links to online sources.

**Assessment**

1) Engagement: *expectations will be determined in Week 1* (25%)
2) Tracing our Global Footprints (personal reflection essay) – due Week 2
   - *tying in with the first week’s readings and the “big ideas” discussed in Week 1, this assignment asks students to write about both 1) how your own experiences of the environment locally are shaped by class relations and global processes, and 2) how your actions locally impact working-class peoples and environments across the world* (20%)
3) Disaster Analysis (op-ed) – due Week 5
   - *building on our readings of Mike Davis's Late Victorian Holocausts, this assignment asks students to denaturalize a recent “natural” disaster: to write about the role of social class and global capitalism in shaping different peoples' experiences of disasters and recovery* (20%)
4) Film Introduction & Discussion (public speaking) – due throughout the semester
   - *students will select one of the four films featured in this course, then prepare an introduction to that film to present before its screening. Students will also help facilitate discussion of the film* (15%)
5) Group Final Project – due Week 6
   - *TBD as a group* (20%)

**Grading**

Grades will be assigned on a straight percentage basis: 90-100% is an A, 80-89% is a B, 70-79% is a C, 60-69% is a D, and <60% is an F, with + and - grades assigned to high and low scores within those ranges.

**Calendar**

**Week 1** (June 23-27): *What are we talking about?*
Read: Martinez-Alier, “The Environmentalism of the Poor”
   White, “‘Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?’: Work and Nature”
   Guha, Introduction and “Part One: Environmentalism’s First Wave”
Introduce Assignment: Tracing our Global Footprints (due Week 2)
Introduce Assignment: Film Introduction & Discussion (due at various times)
Discuss Group Project (due Week 6)

Mon, June 23: introductions
Wed, June 25: Martinez-Alier & White
Thurs, June 26: Guha

**Week 2** (June 30-July 4): *Commodities: Labor and Consumption*
Global Footprints Reflection Essay Due!
Read: Marx, on commodities
   Soluri, “Accounting for Taste”
   Klingle, “Spaces of Consumption”
   reading on lake perch?
   Guha, “Part Two: Environmentalism's Second Wave”
Mon, June 30: 1 hr. class: Marx & Klingle

Wed, July 2: 2 hr. class: Soluri, Rome, Guha, & lake perch?
evening: film

Thurs, July 3: 2 hr. class: Guha cont'd

**Week 3** (July 7-11): “Natural” Disasters: Colonialism and Vulnerability

Read:  
- Zoltan Gluck, “Race, Class, and Disaster Gentrification”

Introduce Assignment: Disaster Analysis (due Week 5)

Film:  

Mon, July 7: 1 hr. class: Davis (preface & Ch. 1)

Wed, July 9: 2 hr. class: Davis (Ch. 2 & 3) & Pritchard

Thurs, Jul 10: 2 hr. class: Davis (Ch. 4-6) & Gluck
evening: film

**Week 4** (July 14-18): Dispossession: Enclosure and Exploitation

Read:  
- Marx, on dispossession
- Excerpt from Pai, *Scattered Sand: The Story of China's Rural Migrants*
- Jacoby, selection from *Crimes Against Nature* [read online]
- Davis, selection from *Planet of Slums*
- Rosenthal, “People and Nature in Motion”

Films:  

Mon, July 14: 1 hr. class: Marx & Jacoby

Wed, July 16: 2 hr. class: Davis, Pai, and Rosenthal
evening: *public film screening* w/ Neil McArthur

Thurs, Jul 17: 2 hr. class: discussion w/ Neil McArthur

**Week 5** (July 21-25): Resistance: Fight the Power

Disaster Analysis Op-Ed Due!

Read:  
- Davis, “Part Three: Decyphering ENSO” and “Part Four: The Political Ecology of Famine”
- NYT article series on China

Film:  

Mon, July 21: 1 hr. class: Davis (ch. 7 & 8)

Wed, July 23: 2 hr. class: Davis (ch. 9 & 10) & NYT articles
Watch on your own: *The Warriors of Qiugang*

Thurs, Jul 24: 2 hr. class: Davis (ch. 11 & 12)
evening: film

**Week 6** (July 28-August 1): Summary and Next Steps

Group Final Project Due!

Mon, July 28: 1 hr. class: TBD

Wed, July 30: 2 hr. class: TBD

Thurs, Jul 31: 2 hr. class: TBD