

History 89 Environmental History of Africa

Fall 2020

Professor Timothy Burke

History 89 in the fall of 2020 will be taught remotely. We will primarily be meeting for live discussions on Zoom twice a week (Monday and Friday) usually 75 minutes or so. At the end of October, we will have three “asynchronous” sessions in which students will be working collaboratively at their own pace and time on several exercises. There are also a few prerecorded lectures for September 11th. If I decide that at some point some form of additional lecture or explanation might be helpful, I may add those but for the most part this is a discussion-based class.

This course does not provide a single comprehensive narrative overview of Africa’s environmental history. Instead, we will focus for much of the semester on understanding competing frameworks for investigating and interpreting the environmental history of the African continent and the human societies that have inhabited the continent. We will be trying to ask both about how we should come to know and understand African environmental history and how (or whether) it is possible to separate that knowledge from numerous misrepresentations and stereotypes of African environments that were primarily created by European colonial rule.

In the last quarter of the semester we will focus more intently on several important themes in environmental studies focused on Africa. Students will also be developing a final project focused on one such theme of their own choosing. This semester our thematic focus in class sessions will be on climate change, new trends in agricultural history in sub-Saharan Africa, wildlife preserves and game parks and the politics of environmental activism in African nations. After November 20th, we will transition to work on these final projects. Students will participate asynchronously in the workshoping of developing projects and we will meet for two final sessions of live presentations of projects followed by discussion during the first week of December.

Following summer discussions of planning for this fall, the faculty have reaffirmed that this semester will be graded normally. Assessment of your work in this class will be based on the following:

20% Active attendance and participation in Zoom discussion sessions

20% Short response paper due in October

10% Work on the three asynchronous sessions

50% Final project (including participation in workshoping other projects)

I am appreciative of the difficulties involved in this mode of study and will keep those in mind in grading. Please do let me know as soon as possible if you have difficulties connecting to our live class sessions or other challenges in completing your work. I would prefer that students turn on cameras while on Zoom but that is your decision and I understand completely if there are reasons in a given class session or throughout the semester that you feel uncomfortable doing so.

We are not doing any timed exams or other exercises of this sort. If you have concerns about accommodations, please speak with the Office of Disability Services at your earliest possible convenience.

Most of our readings will be available on the course Moodle. There are two books for purchase:

Jacob Dlamini, *Safari Nation*

Tabitha Kanogo, *Wangari Maathai*

Please do get these books (the Kanogo is only available in a print edition). Swarthmore has a textbook assistance program that can help you with the cost of book purchases.

Our final theme-based projects will have to be based off of materials based online. That's not a strong constraint—it mostly means you will not be able to consult older print-only monographs or books available in Tripod or use ILL.

Our Zoom URL for the semester is <https://swarthmore.zoom.us/j/94197289607>

Between September 2-6: Talk a walk in Africa. In my introductory email to you sent on September 2nd, there will be attached instructions for this “walk”. Be prepared to talk about your walk as per those directions at our first class. Our first reading is for September 11th.

Week 1 (Sept. 7-11)

Monday September 8th

Welcome to Environmental History of Africa (Zoom)

1. Introductions
2. Describe your walk
3. Quick overview of the course

Friday September 11 (Zoom)

Before class, watch the following 2 lectures (30 minutes each). (Moodle)

1. Environmental histories: an overview
 - a. Annales school: longue duree, conjunctural, episodic
 - b. “Big history”
 - c. Human agency and the agency of things
 - d. The Anthropocene: in which human agency *becomes* the environment
2. Africa: An overview of environments, ecologies and histories
3. Discuss: Quammen, Pangolin essay <https://www-newyorker-com.proxy.swarthmore.edu/magazine/2020/08/31/did-pangolins-start-the-coronavirus-pandemic>

Week 2 (Sept 14-18)

Monday September 14 Frameworks: Determinism (Zoom)

Reader, *Africa: A Biography of a Continent* (Moodle)

Friday September 18 Determinism (Zoom)

Diamond, *Guns, Germs and Steel* (Moodle)

Christiansen, *Maps of Time* (Moodle)

Week 3 (Sept 21-25)

Monday September 21 Determinism (Zoom)

Scott, *Against the Grain* (Moodle)

Monocausal and multicausal determinism

Friday September 25 Frameworks: Colonialism and Environment (Zoom)

McCann, *Green Land Brown Land Black Land: An Environmental History of Africa* (Moodle)

Week 4 (Sept 28-Oct 2)

Monday September 28 Colonialism and Environment (Zoom)

Tilley, *Africa as a Living Laboratory* (Moodle)

Friday October 2 (Zoom)

Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa* (Moodle)

Week 5 (Oct 5-9)

Monday October 5 Colonialism and Environment (Zoom)

Aggrawal, *Environmentality* (Moodle)

Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts* (Moodle)

Friday October 9 Frameworks: Ethnohistories (Zoom)

Robert Harms, *Games Against Nature* (Moodle)

Week 6 (Oct 12-16)

Monday October 12 Ethnohistories (Zoom)

Giles-Vernick and Rupp, "Visions of Apes" (Moodle)

WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 14: 2-3 page response paper due

Friday October 16 Ethnohistories

Mavhunga, The Mobile Workshop Introduction and Chapter 1 (Moodle)

Week 7 (Oct 19-23)

Monday October 19 Frameworks: Integrations

Conte, "Forest History" (Moodle)

Giles-Vernick, "We Wander Like Birds"

Friday October 23 Integrations

McCann, *Maize and Grace*

Jacobs, *Birders of Africa*

Submit 3 ideas for possible themes for final project

Week 8 (Oct 26-30)

Monday October 26

"The Land Beneath Our Feet" (Streaming Video)

Friday October 30

ASYNCH 1: Framework preferences

Week 9 (Nov 2-6)

Monday November 2

ASYNCH 2: FRAMEWORK FLOW CHARTS

Friday November 6

ASYNCH 3: THEMES in African Environmental History

Week 10 (Nov. 9-13)

Monday November 9 Conservation

Jacob Dlamini, *Safari Nation*

Friday November 13 Export Agriculture and Food Security

Styles, *Roses From Kenya* (Moodle)

Brautigam *Will Africa Feed China?* (Moodle)

Week 11 (Nov. 16-20)

Monday November 16 Climate Change

Livingstone, *Self-Devouring Growth* (Moodle)

De Wit, *Global Warning* (Moodle)

Friday November 20 Environmental Activism

Tabitha Kanogo, *Wangari Maathai*

First week of December

Theme presentations (2 asynchronous meetings, 2 synchronous meetings)

Final paper or project on theme due by December 15

See handout on Moodle for assignment details.