

Spring 2018
HI 351/GE 394: Environmental History of Africa
Prof. James McCann

Tuesday/Thursday 3:30-4:45:

232 Bay State Road # 505

Office Hours:

Monday 10-12; Tuesday 1-2:45 and by appointment

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This course will focus on the evolution of African environmental and ecological systems over the past 200 years. Subjects will include aspects of the physical environment visible through changes in climate and hydrology, as well as key issues of human/environmental interaction, such as agriculture, deforestation, conservation, famine, disease (malaria), and the role of colonialism and economic development in environmental change. The course will also examine the ways in which outsiders have created myths about the African environment and how Africans have managed their natural resources over time. The course will examine the causes and social effects of famine, vector-borne disease and the impact of political ecology of globalization on African environmental management. Course assignments will cover most geographical regions of Africa, but with special attention to East Africa. Materials available to students will include readings and lectures, but will also include films and other visual resources.

Prerequisites:

While there are no formal course prerequisites, it will be assumed that students have a basic knowledge of African geography and/or at least have completed advanced work in history or another discipline related to environmental studies. Taking at least one previous course with African content will be helpful in that regard but is not required.

Teaching Method

As an advanced undergraduate course, HI351/GE394 will use a combination of lectures, reading, focused discussion, and film to present and analyze course content. Beyond the historical content of the course, students will be given experience in expository writing, library research, and group discussion skills.

In addition to lectures, class meetings will consist of group discussions and a final project that illustrates an aspect of environmental change in Africa. Each class member will also be a member in a discussion group that will serve as a basis for discussing readings and historical context of recent trends. In the first half of the course groups will discuss readings and questions posed by the instructor. Group discussions of readings will be organized around questions provided by the instructor in advance.

Evaluation

Grades will consist of performance on written work, participation, and group work. Written work will include at least two short (3-4 page) opinion papers that will integrate reading assignments with lecture material and group discussion. Each discussion group will organize and present a joint research project in the form of a website in the final class session. Each student will write up a project research report in lieu of a final exam. That report will be due on May 8 by noon in the instructor's mailbox in the African Studies Center (#503 of African Studies Center, 232 Bay State Road).

Reading

Students are expected to have read the week's readings in advance of the sessions for which they are assigned.

First session reading: http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/21/science/us-to-protect-african-lions-under-endangered-species-act.html?emc=eta1&_r=0

The following books have been ordered from the bookstore:

Kjekshus, *Ecology Control and Economic Development in East African History* (Athens, OH).

Adams and McShane, *The Myth of Wild Africa* (Berkeley).

Maddox, Giblin, and Kimambo, *Custodians of the Land* (Athens, OH).

McCann, *Green Land, Brown Land, Black Land: An Environmental History of Africa* (Portsmouth and Oxford).

McCann, *Maize and Grace: Africa's Encounter with a New World Crop, 1500-2000* (Cambridge, MA, 2005).

*Leach and Mearns, *The Lie of the Land*. Out of Print but on Blackboard.

JSTOR and Periodical Database Resources:

Course readings will also include several readings from a library packet available on Blackboard course site. These papers may also be downloaded from JSTOR using reference materials via the website of the Mugar library. Consult that website or the Mugar Library Reference Desk. On Blackboard are two readings:

Richard Waller, "Tsetse Fly in Western Narok, Kenya," *Journal of African History*,
Allan Hoben, Christopher Matthews, and Robert Kaplan *The New Republic* (January 1985).

Attendance and Class Rules

Like all courses at Boston University, attendance in HI351/GE 394 is required. Students who miss class because of illness should notify the instructor as soon as possible after the absence. Other absences should be reported ahead of the class to be missed. Whenever possible written notification should be provided (health center slip, note from academic advisor, etc.). Please observe university regulations against consuming food or drink during class sessions.

Plagiarism and Academic Honesty

All students are expected to adhere to the [CAS Graduate School Conduct Code](#). plagiarism represents not only a serious violation of academic ethics, they also represent a breach of that essential trust. I will report all such incidents to the student academic conduct committee of the College of Arts and Sciences; any violation of that code will result in a final grade of F for the course.

Class Weekly Schedule

January

Week 1

Th 18th Pt. 1: Images and Realities of African Environment (s)
Introduction: Environmental history/Environmental Stories?

Week 2 Images and Realities of Africa's Environment

T 23rd Pt. 2: Africa's environmental systems/Group discussion of images
Film excerpt: King Solomon's Mines/Discussion

Assignment for discussion: Whence Cecil the Lion? Surf the NYT coverage of the Zimbabwe lion hunting incident (search Cecil and Lion) and another site for op-ed and news coverage. First session reading: <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/21/science/us-to-protect-african-lions-under-endangered-species-act.html?emc=eta1& r=0>

(Discussion groups formed)

Th 25th Africa's environmental systems/Group discussion of images of the African environment

Class will meet with African Studies Library staff in Rm #513 of Mugar Library

Reading:

McCann, *Green Land*, pp. 1-51.

Maddox, Giblin, and Kimambo, *Custodians of the Land*, 175-99.

Week 3

T 30th Sources for environmental history

Population in African History: Boserup versus Malthus

Reading:

Kjekshus, *Ecology Control*, 1-50.

Maddox, et. al, *Custodians*, 15-65.

February

Th 1st Population and African Agency

Maragoli: Film and Discussion on Population, Choice, and Gender in Africa
(Questions distributed for group discussion)

Reading:

Adams and McShane, *The Myth of Wild Africa*, 1-36.

Maddox, Giblin, and Kimambo, *Custodians of the Land*, 1-14.

Week 4

T 6th Desertification: Creeping Desert, Human Hands?

Film and Discussion: The Desert Doesn't Bloom Here Anymore

Reading: McCann, *Green Land*, 55-78.

Th 8th Group discussion and questions on Desertification evidence from film

Reading:

Maddox, et. al., *Custodians of the Land*, 96-122.

Week 5

T 13th Second Nature: Film and Group Discussion

Th 15th A Tale of Two Forests: Deforestation in Ethiopia

Reading: McCann, *Green Land*, 79-108.

Week 6

T 20st Lecture: The Serengeti: Static Narratives and Ecosystem Change

Th 22nd Film: Africa: the Serengeti and Group Analysis/Discussion

Reading:

Adams and McShane, *The Myth Wild Africa*, 37-84.

Week 7

T 27th The Atlantic World: the Columbian Circulation

Th 29 Big Bang in the Upper Guinea Forest: 1500-1900

Reading:

Leach and Mearns, *Lie of the Land*, Introduction and Chapter 6 (posted on Blackboard).
McCann, *Maize and Grace*, 1-93.

Week 8 Spring Break (March 3-11)

Week 9

T 13th Maize and Grace in Africa: Lecture and Group Discussion

Th 15th Disease as History in Africa (from Sleeping Sickness to Ebola)

Reading:

McCann, *Green Land*, 109-140. *Maize and Grace*, 174-96.

Group meetings

Week 10 African Environment and World Systems

T 21th (A Tuesday but Monday schedule)

Th 22rd

Sacred Waters: Cultural Ecology of Ethiopia's Upper Nile

Group Discussion: Disease and African Environment Control

Reading:

Maddox, et. al., *Custodians*, 127-151.

Waller, "Tsetse Fly in Western Narok, Kenya," [JSTOR]

Kjekshus, *Ecology Control*, pp. 51-79

Written Assignment Distributed (due April 5th).

Week 11 Ecologies of Famine (Three Approaches)

T 27th Famine: Ethiopia's Agricultural Paradox

Th 29th African Famine and the Media, Film: Consuming Hunger

Reading:

Hoben, Matthews, and Kaplan [JSTOR].

April

Week 12 The Ecologies of Famine

T 4th Ethiopia after the Famine, Film/Discussion

Th 5th Lecture: Oxfam, The Ox Plow Project

Reading: Leach and Mearns, *Lie of the Land*, Hoben's Chapter 11 (on reserve).

Group Assignment: Use Web to find three contemporaneous accounts of the 1984-85 Ethiopian famine for group discussion. Each student will turn in copies of the accounts they find.

Week 13 The Ecology of Famine: Three Approaches

T 10th Political Ecology of the African Environment:
How Africa's Maize Turned White

Th 12th Maize and Malaria: Agroecology of Tropical Disease (film/discussion)

Week 14

T 17th Film and Discussion: Film: Darwin's Nightmare (Part 1)

Th 29th Film and Group Discussion: Darwin's Nightmare (Part 2)

Reading:

McCann, *Maize and Grace*, 94-119, 174-96.

Adams and McShane, *The Myth of Wild Africa*, 161-263.

Week 14

T 1th Last class: Group Reports

Group Reports and Review (final class)

Final Exam/Paper Due Monday May 7th (by noon in McCann mailbox in African Studies Center)