HI589/MET/ML595  
Nature’s (Re)past: Histories of Food, Environment and Society  

Spring 2016  W 6-9  
226 Bay State Road (History) #504

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Course Topic: Histories of Food, Environment and Society
The purpose of this seminar is to examine the ways that historians understand and describe the interactions between humans and their physical world, an interaction that expresses itself in terms of landscapes of vegetation, population, disease, built settings of cities, and, especially cooking as an act of environmental knowledge. Environmental history has its methods defined by the parameters of science and the natural world –flora, fauna, topography, seasons—as well as human elements of technology, demography, and social organization. Cooking and cuisine is at the apex of these interactions. This course will examine the work of key historians in the emerging field of environmental history and the role of food/cooking in that human/nature interaction.

The course begins with historical/cultural landscapes and ends up in Boston’s landscape of food in bistros, food trucks, groceries, and storefront restaurants. It will include 3 group sessions in that will focus on particular dishes from Africa, the American South, and Italy as examples of the movement of ingredients, ideas, and techniques. The goal is to explore ingredients and the ecologies of cuisine.

This course at its core is a reading seminar that will also provide students with an opportunity to evaluate scholarly and popular writing in the field of environmental history. The course will include reading exercises, two short writing assignments, weekly précis and a final project that will take the form of a 15-20 page research paper on the Historical Ecology of a Recipe that analyzes the environmental context of a cooking team’s project in the final weeks of the course, That writing project will include each student’s exploration of a body of primary sources, secondary literature, and research methods. In this format students will gain exposure to several approaches to environmental history as well as to focus on their own areas of geographic and thematic interest. This course contains more than 25% Africa content as well as comparative materials in North American, Atlantic, and European content.

Assignments and Final Project:  
The principal written assignments for the course will include a group classroom presentation ten-page research proposal that describes a topic in food/environmental history, a set of primary sources appropriate to that topic, and a literature review that indicates the context of the research (historical writing, and/or science-based literature).
In addition, students will prepare each week a short précis on the core reading. Twice over the course of the semester, each student will prepare a book review that describes and evaluates one of the readings from the comparative list provided for each of the themes.

Book precis statements (one page)  Choose 4 of 8
3 Comparative Book/film reviews  30%
Final class presentation  20%
Final paper (Ecological History of Recipe)  35%
Class participation  weekly  15%

All written assignments will be doubled spaced, using bibliographic formats from the *Chicago Manual of Style* (15th edition) and 10 or 12 point fonts and one-inch margins.

**Course Requirements:**
At Boston University class attendance is not optional. Students are expected to attend class except in the case of illness or other valid excuse approved by the instructor. Students should submit missed or delayed assignments as soon as possible. Unexcused late submissions will receive a half grade reduction (e.g. B+ becomes B) for every day they are late. Students should, however, always submit late work as soon as possible. Students must submit all written work in hard copy. If a student cannot submit the paper in class he/she should place it in the instructor’s mail box (270 Bay State Road, #440).

Finally, students must adhere to the highest standards of academic honesty as outlined in the College of Arts and Sciences *Academic Conduct Code*, copies of which are available in CAS 105. If you are unsure what constitutes plagiarism, please consult the instructor or your academic advisor.

**Seminar Schedule**
(Readings should be completed by the day for which they are listed):

- **Week 1 (Jan 27)**   Food and Environmental History
  Key concepts: What is environmental history? What is culinary history?

  Core Reading (distributed via e-mail prior to first seminar):

  “Polenta vs Cous Cous. Legally Banning Ethnic Food from Northern Italy” *i-Italy*, April 9, 2010.

  - Allocation of weekly comparative reading reports and kitchen team assignments

**SECTION ONE: ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY**

- **Week 2 (Feb 3)**   America: East and West
Core Reading: Steven Stoll, *Larding the Land*.
Comparative Reading:

Assignment:
- Write a one-page (double-spaced) précis of the Core Reading
- Two short presentations on comparative readings

Week 3 (Feb 10) Global Perspectives
Core Reading: Alfred Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1972).
Comparative Reading:
Assignment:
- Write a one-page précis of the Core Reading
- Presentation on comparative reading

Week 4 (Feb 17) Africa and the Atlantic World
Comparative Reading:
Assignment:
- Write a one-page (double-spaced) précis of the Core Reading
- Presentation on Comparative Reading
- Film: *Darwin’s Nightmare* (available from African Studies Outreach Library). Write a one-page film review based on question distributed in class

Week 5 (Feb 24) Modern Europe and America
Comparative Reading:
Michael Pollan, *The Botany of Desire*
Assignment:
Write a one-page précis of the Core Reading
Presentation of reports on Comparative Reading

Week 6 (March 2) Human and Political Ecology of Food Commodities

Comparative Reading:


Assignment:
- Write a one-page précis on Core Reading

Presentation of reports on Comparative Reading

March 9 (Spring Break)

**SECTION TWO: FOOD AND COOKING AS ECOLOGY**

Week 7 (March 16) Political Ecology of Food and Cooking in the United States
Core Reading: Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore’s Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (New York: Penguin, 2006).

or

Comparative Reading/Film:

Assignment:
Write a one-page (double-spaced) précis of one of the Core Reading books
Presentation of reports on Comparative Reading
Film: *Fast Food Nation* (DVD available from NetFlix and rental). Write a one-page film review based on question distributed in class

Week 8 (March 30) History and Cuisine in the American South
Core Reading: Frederick Douglass Opie, *Hog and Hominy: Soul Food from Africa to America* (New York, 2008).


Comparative Reading:

Assignment:
- Write a one-page (double-spaced) précis of the Core Reading that contrasts their approaches and conclusions
-Find a cookbook that features cooking of the American south and/or Soul Food and identify iconic ingredients and a recipe that demonstrates ecological knowledge or an aspect of social class (guidelines passed out in class the week before).

Week 9 (April 6) Africa
Core Reading:
Comparative Reading:
Assignment:
-Write a one-page (double-spaced) précis of the Core Reading
-Find a cookbook that features cooking of all or part of the African continent and identify iconic ingredients. Choose one recipe to analyze as ecological knowledge.

Lecture: Dr. Valentina Peveri alternative cuisines in Ethiopia

Organization of groups for final project “Historical Ecology of a Recipe”

Week 10 (April 13) Italy and the Adoption of Exotic Foods
Core Reading: Flandrin and Montanari, Food: A Culinary History (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), Chapters 5, 9, 10, 11,24, Index (p. 573).
McCann, Maize and Grace “Seeds of Subversion in Two Peasant Empires”
Lecture: Lilly Havstad on Middle Class Food in an African City (Maputo)
Class viewing of Tree of the Wooden Clogs

April 20 No seminar (Monday schedule of classes)

Week 11 (April 27) 3 team presentations on Ecology of Cuisines
Preparation and cooking of Iconic Dish (Southern U.S.)
Assignment:
Team Presentation: on Historical Ecology of the Recipe and Ingredients
Final paper on Historical Ecology of a Recipe assignment will be passed out due December 18
Final individual project papers are due in my mailbox by noon of the official day scheduled for the final exam in the University calendar.
**Readings (books available at the Boston University Bookstore (*) or on reserve):**


**Recommended, Comparative and Reference books, shopping, and restaurants:**


Boston Area Restaurants
Hungry Mother (Kendall Square) Southern American
Bob the Chef’s (South End), Soul food, southern American (closed but see website)
La Morra (Brookline Village), northern Italian
Addis Red Sea (Cambridge/Porter Sq). Ethiopian
Teranga (South End) Senegalese

Shopping:
Whole Foods (various locations)
East Cambridge St. (small grocery shops on south side of street)
Tropical Foods (South End/Roxbury)
Shop and Shop (Dorchester)
Shaws (Comm Ave, West Campus)
Pace Market (North End)
Sessa’s Market (Davis Square)