

**Course title: Historicizing the African Environment (AFH 3931)**

Instructor: Professor Miles Larmer. Office: 427 Grinter Hall. Tel: 352-392-2183. Email: [m.larmer@ufl.edu](mailto:m.larmer@ufl.edu).

Office hours: Wednesdays, 2-4pm.

General description:

The interaction between sub-Saharan Africa's peoples and its natural resources has been central to its modern history. The continent's abundance of flora, fauna and mineral wealth fueled economic and cultural exchange between African societies and the growth of powerful states. This wealth attracted external interests and drove Western colonization and exploitation of the continent, in which the mobilization of African labor, land and minerals was central. Colonial systems demarcated the use of African environments for specific uses – conservation, mining and commercial agriculture among others - trapped African societies in a dependent relationship on the export of raw materials to the West. In the last sixty years, independent African nation-states have sought but often struggled to achieve meaningful sovereignty over their land and resources. Local African communities, today as in the past, have made meanings out of their relationship to their environment, and tried to maintain that relationship in the face of attempted alienation and exploitation of its riches.

While the study of modern African history has usually focused on political and social efforts to overcome external repression, develop the continent's economy and raise living standards, the central role of the continent's ecological systems in all such efforts has not until recently been the focus of historical study. The growing centrality of the environment to the historical study of humans – and non-humans – creates the opportunity to recenter the history of modern Africa on the complex relationship between its peoples and the environment they have shaped and that shapes them.

Course objectives:

This course will enable students to better understand the importance of the environment to historical change in modern Africa, and to explain why its importance has often been neglected in historical study of the continent. Students will analyze key environmental changes and conflicts – including land use and farming, extractive industries and dam-building, national parks and urbanization – and be able to explain both colonial and African understandings of human interaction with the environment.

There is no required textbook for this course.

Recommended books:

William Beinart, 'African History and Environmental History', *African Affairs*, 99 (2000), pp. 269-203

William Beinart and Peter Coates, *Environment and History: The Taming of Nature in the USA and South Africa* (1995)

Jane Carruthers, 'Africa: Histories, Ecologies and Societies', *Environment and History*, 10 (2004), pp. 379-406.

M. Leach, & R. Mearns (eds.), *The Lie of the Land: Challenging Received Wisdom on the African Environment* (1996)

Gregory H. Maddox, *Sub-Saharan Africa: An Environmental History* (2008)

James McCann, *Green Land, Brown Land, Black Land: An Environmental History of Africa, 1800-1990* (1999)

Graeme Wynn, Jane Carruthers and Nancy J. Jacobs (eds.), *Environment, Power, and Justice: Southern African Histories* (2022)

William Beinart and JoAnn McGregor, *Social History and African Environments* (2003)

Gufu Oba, *Climate Change Adaptation in Africa: An historical ecology* (2014)

### **Weekly course schedule**

- Week 1 (8/23): Introduction: thinking about the African Environment
- Week 2 (8/26-30): The Deeper Past of African Environmental History
- Week 3 (9/2-6): Reading the Environment into Africa's Colonial Annexation and Resistance
- Week 4 (9/9-13): The 'Science' of Early Colonial Ecological Thought
- Week 5 (9/16-20): Making African Colonialism work Part I – Plantations and Settler Agriculture
- Week 6 (9/23-27): Making African Colonialism Profitable Part II – Mining
- Week 7 (9/30-10/4): Conservation and Hunting in early colonial Africa
- MIDTERM takes place on October 4th
- Week 8 (10/7-10): Making Africa 'modern': late colonial developmentalism
- Week 9 (10/14-18): The environment in anti-colonial thought and activism
- Week 10 (10/21-25): After Independence: land, agriculture and development
- Week 11 (10/28-11/1): After independence: dams and energy supply
- Week 12 (11/4-8): After Independence: extractive industries
- Week 13 (11/11-15): Conservation and animal-human relations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century
- Week 14 (11/18-22): Africa's environmental movements, from independence to the 1990s
- NO classes in Thanksgiving week.
- Week 15 (12/2-4): Contemporary African environmental movements, course wrap up
- Final exam takes place 13/11.

### **Assignments and Grading Percentages**

- Attendance & Participation (15% of grade) - participation means active and attentive engagement with the course material. Ideally, it also means contribution to in-class discussion, including asking questions.
- Short paper (25% of course grade) – due on Nov 10<sup>th</sup>.
- Midterm exam (25% of course grade) – will take place in normal class on Oct 4<sup>th</sup>.
- Final exam 400 pts (35% of course grade) – on Dec 11<sup>th</sup>.

## Grading scale

Letter Grade	GPA Equivalent
A	4.0
A-	3.67
B+	3.33
B	3.0
B-	2.67
C+	2.33
C	2.0
C-	1.67
D+	1.33
D	1.0
D-	0.67
E	0

## Policies and expectations

- Late work will not be accepted unless circumstances are severe and beyond the student's control. Please let your instructor know of any adverse circumstances that may affect your ability to complete assignments on time.
- Attendance Policy for this course is consistent with UF policy: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/attendance-policies/>. It is expected that you will be present at all class sessions unless unavoidable circumstances make attendance impossible. If you must miss a class, please make arrangements with another student to get notes. But remember: if you miss a substantial number of classes, your participation grade will suffer proportionately. You will be permitted three absences over the course of the term; every unexcused absence thereafter each unexcused absence will lower your grade by one third.
- **Special Accommodations:** Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the Disability Resource Center. See the "Get Started With the DRC" webpage on the Disability Resource Center site. It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester. Any student requesting special accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc>) during the first week of the semester.
- **Plagiarism** is a serious violation of the Student Honor Code and is not tolerated at the

University of Florida. For a full description of the University's policy regarding plagiarism, see <https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-studentconduct-code/>

- **Online course evaluation:** Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at: <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

- **In-Class Recording:** Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal education use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor. A "class lecture" is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by an instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentation such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or guest lecturer during a class session. Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To "publish" means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless, of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third-party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code.