

Syllabus for History 294-01
The Amazon: A Cultural History
Macalester College, Fall 2011
TR 3:00-4:30 Main 010

Professor: Ernesto Capello (ecapello@macalester.edu)
Office: Old Main 302 (x6772)
Office Hours: MW 2:30-3:30 and by appt.

Overview

This course seeks to trace cross-cultural encounters in and surrounding the Amazon rainforest. It will emphasize the interlacing of cultural representation within distinct socioeconomic models – slavery, commodity extraction, internal colonization, and environmental activism and tourism. In focusing upon the intertwined nature of the forest’s natural, economic, racial, and representational history, the course hopes to evoke the similarities and distinctions between historic discourses and contemporary politics.

It will be organized according to a roughly chronological engagement with three key allegories of lasting import in the history of the forest:

1. The Amazon as biological and cultural maelstrom;
2. The Amazon as untapped economic resource;
3. The Amazon as a-historical paradise (or hell).

In engaging these thematics we will be concerned primarily with exploration narratives, programs of imperial or national grandeur, the imaginary of the noble (or not so noble) savage, and the problematic of a-historicity and what Fabian terms the “denial of coevalness.” We will also be paying special attention to visual culture including several filmic representations of the Amazon.

Readings

The following books are available at the Macalester Bookstore and on library reserve:

- Todd Diacon, *Stringing Together a Nation* (Duke 2004)
- Euclides da Cunha, *The Amazon: Land without History* (Oxford 2006)
- Blanca Muratorio, *The Life and Times of Grandfather Alonso* (Rutgers 1991)
- John Hemming, *Tree of Rivers: The Story of the Amazon* (Thames and Hudson, 2009)

Other readings, along with the course syllabus and other administrative materials, will be uploaded onto the course moodle site. Login to Moodle with your Mac username and password at <http://moodle.macalester.edu/>. Once you have logged in, click on the course link in the My Courses section (i.e., History 294-01). This is a cross-listed course with Latin American Studies, please note that only the History site will be updated on a regular basis.

Assessment

You will be assessed on the following:

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|---------------------------|-----|
| 1. Reflective Essays | 50% |
| 2. Final Research Project | 25% |
| 3. Participation | 25% |

Reflective Essays 50%

These consist of four short reflective essays asking you to consider overarching themes regarding class readings/topics. They should be analytic in focus and incorporate some outside research on your own, with the exception of the first essay.

The first essay (3 pages) will consist of a reflection on the initial introductory readings from the first week. It must include a thesis statement, it must include body paragraphs with examples from the readings, and a conclusion. Unlike the other three, it will be based on a question you determine. Moreover, it also serves as a diagnostic essay and will be worth 5 % of your grade.

The other three essays will each ask you to reflect on the first three units of the course. They will be in response to prompts shared by Prof. Capello and should be 5 pages each and each worth 15% of your final grade.

Attendance/Participation 25%

1. General Participation (15%)

The success of our class depends upon your regular attendance and participation. Discussions will be one of the driving forces of this class – I expect you to have done the reading and be ready to courteously discuss the issues raised in readings. No cell phones, no loud foods, no laptops. If you are chronically absent, no matter how good you do on your papers, you will not pass the course.

2. Class Facilitation (5%)

Each student will be expected to facilitate discussion on one reading over the course of the semester. This will require you to summarize the reading for the day, drawing out its main points, and providing a series of questions that may serve to spark class discussion. The week before you are supposed to facilitate discussion, you must arrange to meet with Professor Capello regarding your thoughts on the class. These will then be emailed to the class list (Hist-294-01@lists.macalester.edu) by Sunday (for Tuesday classes) or Tuesday night (for Thursday classes). A sign-up sheet will be circulated at the end of the second week of classes.

3. Contemporary History Briefing (5%)

The relevance of the historical to the contemporary is paramount. In order to help draw out the legacies and inflections of the past in the present day, you will be asked to present an oral report on an issue of relevance to the contemporary Amazonian history. Your briefings may incorporate multi-media presentations, powerpoints, or simply consist of writing a few notes on the board. Please restrict yourself to no more than five-ten minutes. Further guidelines and suggested topics, as well as a sign-up sheet, will be distributed in late September. (5%)

Final Research Project

25%

During the second half of the semester you will be asked to delve further into a particular facet of Amazonian history. There are several steps to crafting a research project, which include selecting the topic, reading over the materials you have gathered, organizing your thoughts on the matter, and presenting them publicly in either a written or creative fashion. You will be asked to fulfill the following steps:

Step 1: Proposal (5% of total grade)

The first step will consist of choosing a topic for your research and proposal for the project as a whole. The topic should broadly reflect the aims of the class as a whole. Once you have chosen a topic, you must identify a series of at least 4 secondary (critical) sources and 3 primary sources (original accounts) concerning your topic. This will be done in consultation with Professor Capello – we shall schedule individual meetings after Fall Break.

Your paper will be a traditional monographical treatment of a given subject of approximately 10 pages (9 is ok, so is 11). Further guidelines will be distributed to facilitate crafting your proposal, which will be due on November 18 by 6:00 pm.

Step 2: Oral Presentation (5% of total grade)

One of the critical aspects of historical scholarship is sharing your work with your peers. During the last two weeks of the term, beginning December 1st, you will present the state of your research and preliminary conclusions. Your presentation should consist of a brief (5-10 minute) discussion of your topic. This will also represent a moment to get feedback from your peers and Professor Capello to help with finalizing the project itself.

Step 3: Research Paper (15% of total grade)

Your research paper is due (on Moodle) by December 17 at 6 pm.

Writing Assignment Format

All your writing assignments must be formatted properly – double-spaced, medium-sized 12 point font (Times New Roman is the college suggestion), page numbers. You should cite

your sources and should use one of the following formats: Chicago Style, APA, or MLA. I suggest you use the format that is most proper to your own major discipline. Historians prefer Chicago, literature and most social science disciplines use MLA or APA. Guidelines for citations in each format can be easily found online or via the reference desk at the library.

Lateness Policy

Papers should be uploaded to the course Moodle Site by 6:00 pm on their due date. Emailed papers will **NOT** be accepted. Response essays and final papers can be turned in late but you will be penalized 1/3 of a letter grade per day late. Under extraordinary circumstances I will consider extensions if contacted in advance.

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism in any form will not be tolerated. Be sure that your written work reflects your own ideas and be sure to properly attribute the work of others. For guidelines on how to avoid plagiarism, see <http://www.macalester.edu/max/writinghandbook/plagiarism.html>.

Constitutional Clause

Note, this syllabus represents an amendable document, which is ultimately responsive to student interest as well as the framer's intent. Changes in assignments, including cancelled, or added readings will be announced in class and by email.

Syllabus

After an introductory mini-unit, the course unfolds in four units, each focused on a particular framework of representing Amazonian history. The four units are:

- I. Exploration Narratives
- II. Extraction, Empire, Nation
- III. Indigeneity, Within and Without the State
- IV. Imaginaries of Paradise (Lost)

While each is tied particularly to a given historical moment, i.e., exploration is more directly tied to the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries while indigenous-state relations are more directly tied to the state building processes of the 19th-20th centuries, each bleeds into the other. As a result, each unit will include information across eras. Nevertheless, there will be a rough chronological emphasis to the course, with Unit 1 focused upon the 16th-19th centuries, Unit 2 on the 19th and early 20th centuries, Unit 3 on the 20th century and Unit IV on the late 20th century.

Reading Assignments

Introductory Unit

9/8 – Intro and Syllabus

9/13 – General Impressions

- Da Cunha, *The Amazon*, 3-18
- Slater, *Entangled Edens*, “The Meeting of the Waters; “El Dorado”

9/15 – A Forest with History

- Cleary, “Towards an Environmental History of the Amazon”

Unit I: Exploration Narratives

9/20 – Enter Europe

- Hemming, *Tree of Rivers*, Chapter 1
- Carvajal, “The Discovery of the Amazon”
- **Reflective Essay 1 Due**

9/22 – Class Meeting Cancelled

“Aguirre: Wrath of God.” Film Screening TBA

9/27 – An Expanding El Dorado

- Hemming, *Tree of Rivers*, Chapter 2
- Raleigh, “The Discovery of Guiana”, selections
- Waller, “Aguirre, Wrath of God”

- 9/29 – The Consumerism of Science
- Safier, “An Enlightened Amazon”
 - Isabel de Godin’s letter
 - Hemming, *Tree of Rivers*, Chapter 3 (Recommended)

- 10/4 – Naturalist Travelogues: Humboldt and Bates
- Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, selections
 - Raffles, “Bates of the Amazons”
 - Humboldt selections

- 10/6 – Naturalist Travelogues: Spruce and Orton
- Hemming, *Tree of Rivers*, 137-68
 - Spruce selections
 - Orton selections
 - FORUM: Exploration Narratives

Unit 2: Extraction, Empire, Nation

- 10/11 – Extraction and State Expansion
- Lane, “Mining at the Margins”
 - Hemming, *Tree of Rivers*, 97-117
 - Safier, “Every Day that I travel”
 - **Reflective Essay 2 Due**

- 10/13 – Nations, Missionaries, and Rubber
- Muratorio, *The Life and Times of Grandfather Alonso*, 72-98
 - Hemming, 117-128, 175-85

- 10/15 – The Great Rubber Boom
- Hemming, 185-97
 - Yungjohann, *White Gold*

- 10/18 – The Dark Side of the Rubber Boom
- Hemming, Chapter 7
 - Muratorio, 99-132

- 10/20 – Nations in Amazonia
- Diacon, *Stringing Together a Nation*, 1-51

- 10/25 –FORUM: Extraction, Empire, Nation
- **Reflective Essay 3 Due 10/27**

10/27 – Fall Break. No class.

Unit III. Indigeneity, Within and Without the State

- 11/1 – Indians and Indianist Epics in the 19th-century
- Padron, “*Cumanda* and the Cartographers”
 - Treece, *Exiles, Allies, Rebels*
 - Da Cunha, “Rivers in Abandon”
- 11/3 – Positivism Regained
- Diacon, *Stringing together a Nation*, Chapters 3-5
- 11/8 – Indian Policy and State Ritual
- Diacon, *Stringing Together a Nation*, Chapter 6& 7
 - Garfield, The Roots of a Plant that is Today Brasil
- 11/10 – Mid-century States of Gold
- Muratorio, *Life and Times*, Intro, ch 9-13
 - Hemming, *Tree of Rivers*, 289-295
- 11/15 – Utopias, Guerrillas, Activism
- Brown, *War of Shadows* selections
 - Yashar, “The Bolivian Amazon and CIDOB”
 - Sawyer, “Subterranean Techniques”
 - Muratorio, *Life and Times*, Chapter 14 (recommended)
- 11/17 – Science Museum Field Trip
- 11/22 – Politics of Reportage
- Joe Kane, “With Spears from All Sides”
 - Fieweger, “Narcissus and the Noble Savage”
 - Whitten et al, “Return of the Yumbo”
 - FORUM: Indigeneity, Within and Without the State
- 11/24 – Thanksgiving

Unit IV: Imaginaries of Paradise (Lost)

- 11/29 – Save the Amazon!
- Slater, “Fire in *El Dorado*”
 - Mendes, “The Destruction of our Rainforest”
 - Hemming, *Tree of Rivers*, 295-324 (Recommended)
 - Berlinger, “Crude” – Screening 11/28
- 12/1 – Capitalists and Missionaries
- Grandin, *Fordlandia* (selections)
 - Colby, *Thy Will be Done* (selections)
 - Matthiessen, *At Play in the Fields of the Lord* (selections)

12/6 – Madness!

- Herzog, “Conquest of the Useless”
- “Fitzcarraldo” screening 12/4
- RESEARCH REPORTS BEGIN

12/8 – RESEARCH REPORTS

- Readings TBA

12/13 – FORUM: Imaginaries of Paradise (Lost)

- RESEARCH REPORTS CONCLUDE
- Da Cunha, *The Amazon: A Land Without History*