

Fall 2013
W 2-4 pm
TLF 1103

HIST 408G Environmental History of Eurasia

Prof. Sarah Cameron
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Office hours: M 1:30 pm-3:30 pm & by appointment
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The “taiga,” or coniferous forest, near the city of Tomsk in Western Siberia.



Source: Retrieved July 2, 2013 from http://www.windows2universe.org/earth/taiga_ecosystem.html

This senior seminar will consider the environmental history of the world’s largest landmass, “Eurasia.” This immense region is home to large deposits of oil, gas, coal and iron. It holds approximately a quarter of the planet’s forest reserves and a quarter of the earth’s fresh water. It is home to a considerable diversity of plant and animal species.

Soviet rule over this territory, however, left deep scars of environmental degradation. Arguably, reactions to this destruction, including conservation movements, were among the forces that led to the Soviet Union’s demise in 1991.

In the course, students will examine the changing relationship between humans and the natural world in this region, with a focus on the last two centuries of Russian imperial and Soviet rule. We will evaluate major “environmental” interpretations of Russian history, including the idea that Russia’s cold climate or

predominately agrarian nature stunted its growth. We will also examine how the Soviet Union's legacy of environmental destruction fits into longer-term patterns in Eurasian history. Where appropriate, we will compare the experiences of Eurasia with that of other regions.

NB: There are many different definitions of "Eurasia." This course will focus primarily on the territories of the Russian empire and Soviet Union, although we will consider broader definitions of "Eurasia" as necessary.

Environmental history is an interdisciplinary field. Course materials will include secondary works by historians, geographers, and historians of science, as well as primary sources, including films, travelers' accounts and novels.

The following three questions will guide this course:

1. What is environmental history?
2. How might this approach alter our understanding of a particular region's history?
3. What new topics or ideas does the study of Eurasia bring to the field of environmental history?

This course is a capstone seminar for senior history majors. It will culminate in a fifteen- to twenty-page research paper on some aspect of Eurasian environmental history.

In May 2013, I attended a workshop sponsored by the Chesapeake Project, a campus-wide initiative to promote the teaching of ideas related to sustainability. We'll be talking more about the concept of sustainability, as well as its applicability to various periods in Eurasian history over the course of the semester.

Required Texts:

(available at the University Book Center and on reserve at McKeldin Library)

Svetlana Alexievich, *Voices from Chernobyl: The Oral History of a Nuclear Disaster* (2005)

ISBN 0312425848

Valerian Albanov, *In the Land of White Death: An Epic Story of Survival in the Siberian Arctic* (1912, 2000) ISBN 067978361X

Kate Brown, *Plutopia: Nuclear Families, Atomic Cities and the Great Soviet and American Plutonium Disasters* (2013) ISBN 0199855765

William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists and the Ecology of New England* (1983, 2003). ISBN 0809016346

Loren Graham, *The Ghost of the Executed Engineer: Technology and the Fall of the Soviet Union* (1996) ISBN 0674354370

Materials uploaded to CANVAS (indicated on the syllabus with an asterisk)

Grading:

Participation and attendance: 25%

Response Paper: 15%

Short presentation: 10 %

Final Paper Prospectus: 10 %

Final Paper Rough Draft: 20 %

Final Paper: 20%

If your final grade for the course is borderline (ie, in between two different grades), your class participation grade will be the deciding factor.

Major Deadlines and Other Details:

1. Short Response Paper (Due October 9, by 5 pm). Five pages. You will receive the assignment for this response paper in class on October 2nd. It will ask you to draw upon the first four weeks of class discussion and reading.
2. Class Presentation. Each student will give a brief (ten minute) presentation on one of the week's readings. A sign-up sheet will be available in week two.
3. Final paper prospectus (Due October 23, at the beginning of class). Two to three pages. Includes an overview of your proposed topic, your major research questions and a sample bibliography. I strongly encourage you to come to my office hours and discuss your proposed topic *in advance* of submitting your paper prospectus.
4. Rough draft of your final paper (Due Wednesday November 27 by 5 pm). Fifteen to twenty pages. As part of the rough draft process, you will exchange drafts with a partner and provide your partner with feedback. Your active and constructive participation in this peer review process is part of your grade for both your rough draft and your final paper. Further details on this process will be provided later in the semester.
5. Final paper (Due Monday, December 16 by 5 pm). Fifteen to twenty pages.

Late work: The policy for late work in this class is as follows: Late work will be penalized one full grade (for example, from an "A" to a "B") for each day that it is late. If an assignment is more than three days late, I will no longer accept it.

Class Absences: Please be advised that any absence from class will bring down your class participation grade (25 % of your total grade). If you miss a class due to a medical illness or a family emergency, I will try to be flexible. You must discuss the situation with me prior to the class meeting.

University policies excuse the absences of students for religious observances and for participation in activities at the request of University authorities. Students are responsible for notifying the instructor of projected absences within the first two weeks of the semester.

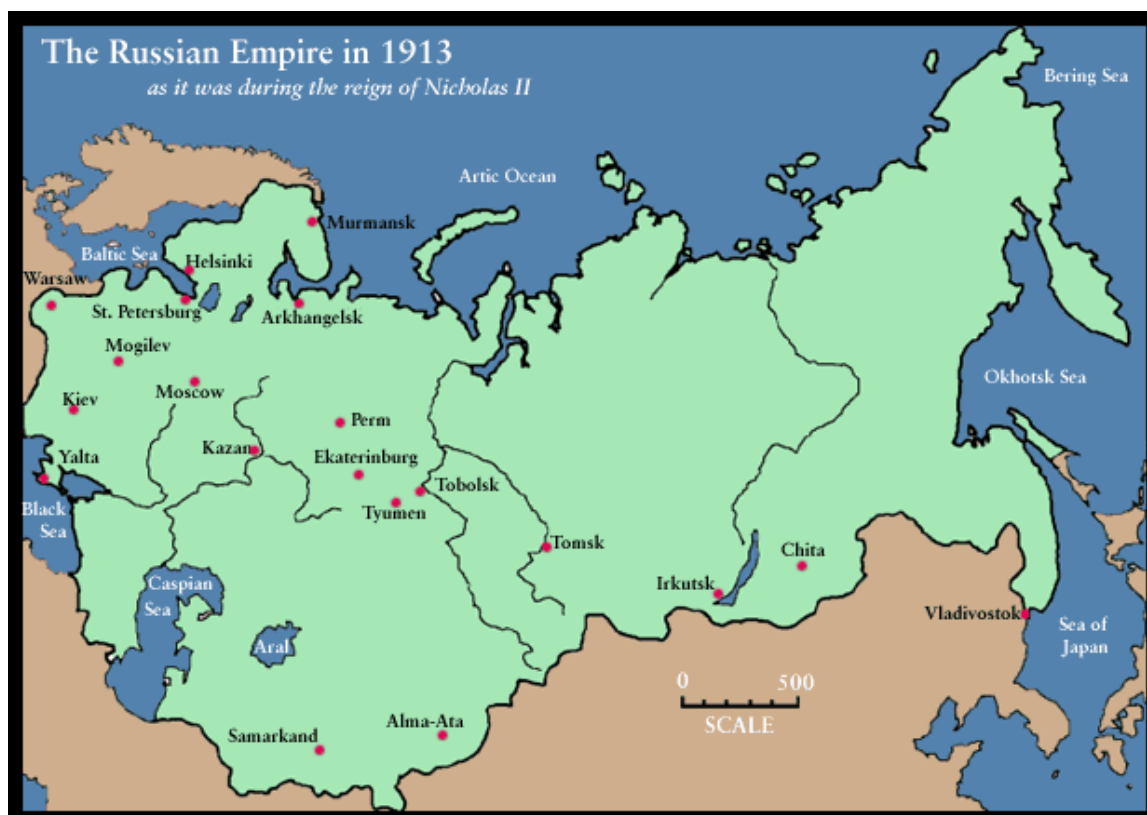
Important: Please bring the course materials with you to class. **This includes printing that week's CANVAS uploads.** I encourage you to print double-sided and to reuse and recycle all course materials.

Media Policy: Please note that laptops and other electronic devices (including cell phones) are **not permitted** in class. If you would like to take notes during the seminar, please do so by hand.

Academic Dishonesty: Please familiarize yourself with the University's Code of Academic Integrity. A summary can be found here: <http://www.testudo.umd.edu/soc/dishonesty.html> Academic dishonesty includes cheating, fabrication, the facilitation of academic dishonesty and plagiarism. These are serious offenses that may result in suspension or expulsion from the University.

Students with Disabilities: Students with disabilities must first register with the University's Disability Support Service Office (DSS), 4-7682 or dissup@umd.edu. They should present the instructor with a letter from DSS by the end of the drop/add period.

Syllabus: Please be advised that the syllabus is subject to change at the discretion of the instructor.



Source: Retrieved December 1, 2009 from <http://www.nicholasandalexandra.com/virtual1999/images/russmap.gif>

September 4: First Class Meeting**September 11: What is Environmental History?**

William Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, pages TBA

September 18: Eurasia and the Environment

Richard Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime* (NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974), 1-26.*

Denis J.B. Shaw, "Russia's Geographical Environment," in *Cambridge History of Russia*, Vol. 1, ed. Maureen Perrie (NY, 2006), 19-43.*

Samuel Collins, *The Present State of Russia* (London, 1671), 74-86*

<http://myweb.uiowa.edu/mapoe/Publications/Collins.pdf>

Murray Feshbach and Alfred Friendly, *Ecocide in the USSR: Health and Nature Under Siege* (New York, 1992), 1-25.*

September 25: Exploiting the Natural World, Encounters with New Peoples

John Richards, "The Hunt for Fur in Siberia," in *The Unending Frontier: An Environmental History of the Early Modern World* (Berkeley, 2003), 517-46.*

J.R. Gibson, "Diversification on the Frontier: Russian America in the Middle of the Nineteenth Century," in *Studies in Russian Historical Geography*, Bater and French, eds., vol. 1 (New York, 1983), 197-239.*

Stepan P. Krasheninnikov, *Explorations in Kamchatka* (1735-41), trans. E.A.P. Crownhart-Vaughan (Portland, 1972), 191-276.*

October 2: What is Environmental History? Part II

Donald Worster, "Doing Environmental History," in *The Ends of the Earth: Perspectives on Modern Environmental History*, ed. Donald Worster (Cambridge, 1998), 289-307.*

William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," in *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York, 1995), 69-90.*

Finish remainder of *Changes in the Land*

October 9: No class meeting. Response paper due on October 9 by 5 pm via email.

Begin exploring potential subjects for your final paper. Use the "helpful literature" list as an initial guide. You should come to the library orientation session (held in the second half of class on October 16) with your questions about doing research, such as "How can I find sources about X?" or "How can I order this book?," already prepared.

October 16: Empire

Movie: *Derzu Uzala* (1975, Akira Kurosawa) (141 mins)

First part available here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R1MmSjMofOY&wide=1>

Second part available here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ucXmCDHt-B4&wide=1>

(If English-language subtitles do not immediately appear, you can add them in using the “cc” icon on the lower right-hand corner)

John Richards, “Frontier Settlement in Russia,” in *The Unending Frontier: An Environmental History of the Early Modern World* (Berkeley, 2003), 242-273.*

Leo Tolstoy, “The Wood-Felling.” Available in *Sevastopol and Other Military Tales* (1860), 154–205, available as ebook:

<http://books.google.com/books?id=oZsrAAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA154&dq=tolstoy+wood-felling&ei=fI2SZ2CLpH6lQSH7ZXGCw&client=safari#PPR4,M1>

Library orientation session

October 23: The Arctic

Valerian Albanov, *In the Land of White Death* (1912, 2000), all

Prospectus Due

October 30: The Importance of Place. Local and Regional History

Catherine Evtuhov, *Portrait of a Russian Province* (Pittsburgh, 2011), 1-44*

Individual meetings with the instructor in the second half of class. Sign-up sheet available on 10/23

November 6: Agriculture, Food Supply and Famine

Esther Kingston Mann, “The Peasantry,” in *Cambridge History of Russia*, Vol. 3, ed. Ronald Suny (NY: Cambridge UP, 2006), pages TBA *

Loren Graham, “Stalinist Ideology and the Lysenko Affair,” in *Science in Russia and the Soviet Union: A Short History* (New York, 1993), 121-134.*

T.D. Lysenko, “The Situation in Biological Science; Proceedings of the Lenin Academy of Agricultural Sciences of the U.S.S.R., July 31-August 7, 1948. Verbatim report. (Moscow, 1949), 11-51.*

November 13: Technology and the State

Loren Graham, *The Ghost of the Executed Engineer: Technology and the Fall of the Soviet Union* (1996), all

Watch the following documentary about the Aral Sea disaster:

<http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/aljazeeraworld/2012/08/2012857324531428.html>

November 20: Comparisons. The United States and the Soviet Union.

Kate Brown, *Plutopia: Nuclear Families, Atomic Cities and the Great Soviet and American Plutonium Disasters* (2013), pages TBA.

November 27: No class meeting.

Rough Draft of Final Paper due Wednesday, November 27 by 5 pm, via e-mail. Exchange of drafts with your partner.

December 4: Chernobyl and Conservation Movements

Douglas Weiner, "The Changing Face of Soviet Conservation," in *The Ends of the Earth: Perspectives on Modern Environmental History*, ed. Donald Worster (Cambridge, 1998), 252-273.*

Svetlana Alexievich, *Voices from Chernobyl: The Oral History of a Nuclear Disaster*, pages TBA

Prior to class, examine the following photos from an exhibit, "Inside the Chernobyl Zone, 25 Years Later"

<http://www.time.com/time/photogallery/0,29307,2067393,00.html>

December 11: Post-Soviet Legacies.

TBA

Final paper due Monday, December 16 by 5 pm

Helpful Literature:

James Andrews and Asif Siddiqi, eds. *Into the Cosmos: Space Exploration and Soviet Culture* (Pittsburgh, 2011).

J. H. Bate and R. A. French, eds. *Studies in Russian Historical Geography*. Vols. 1 and 2. (New York, 1983)

Kendall Bailes, *Technology and Society Under Lenin and Stalin: Origins of the Soviet Technical Intelligentsia* (Princeton, 1978)

Jane Costlow, *Heart-Pine Russia: Walking and Writing the Nineteenth Century Forest* (Ithaca, 2012)

Jane Costlow and Amy Nelson, eds. *Other Animals: Beyond the Human in Russian Culture and History* (Pittsburgh, 2010).

William Cronon, ed. *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature* (New York, 1995)

Christopher Ely, *This Meager Nature: Landscape and National Identity in Imperial Russia* (DeKalb, IL, 2002).

Catherine Evtuhov, *Portrait of a Russian Province: Economy, Society and Civilization in 19th Century Nishnii Novgorod* (Pittsburgh, 2011)

Murray Feshbach and Alfred Friendly, *Ecocide in the USSR: Health and Nature Under Siege* (New York, 1992),

Loren Graham, *Science in Russia and the Soviet Union: A Short History* (New York, 1993)

Laura Henry, *From Red to Green: Environmental Activism in Post-Soviet Russia* (Ithaca, 2003)

Paul Josephson et al, eds. *An Environmental History of Russia* (New York, 2013)

Paul Josephson, *Red Atom: Russia's Nuclear Power Program from Stalin to Today* (New York, 1999).

Michael Khodarkovsky, *Russia's Steppe Frontier: The Making of a Colonial Empire, 1500-1800* (Bloomington, 2004)

Stephen Lovell, *Summerfolk: A History of the Dacha, 1710-2000* (Ithaca, 2003)

J.R. McNeill, *Something New Under the Sun: An Environmental History of the Twentieth-Century World* (New York, 2000)

David Moon, *The Plough that Broke the Steppes: Agriculture and Environment on Russia's Grasslands, 1700-1914* (New York, 2013)

Mary Mycio, *Wormwood Forest: A Natural History of Chernobyl* (Washington, DC, 2005)

John Richards, *The Unending Frontier: An Environmental History of the Early Modern World* (Berkeley, 2003)

Alison Smith, *Recipes for Russia: Food and Nationhood under the Tsars* (DeKalb, 2008)

Douglas Weiner, *A Little Corner of Freedom: Russian Nature Protection from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Berkeley, 1999).

Donald Worster, ed. *The Ends of the Earth: Perspectives on Modern Environmental History* (New York, 1998)