Prelim Exam: Global Environmental History

Spring 2015

For this exam, we ask that you respond to three of the six below questions. Your written responses should include clear arguments, persuasive analyses, and well-chosen historical and historiographical evidence. Good luck!

1. Perhaps more so than other field, environmental history has been shaped and driven by certain key archetypal studies over the course of its development as a field. For instance, William Cronon’s *Changes in the Land* not only reshaped the way historians think about colonial history and Indians, but also spawned a number of studies that similarly examined landscape change in a colonial context. Identify key works in environmental history that have shaped or inspired entire areas of inquiry over the course of time. Is the field still being shaped by such key works today? If so, what are they? If not, why is this so?

2. One key focus of environmental history has been in the history of indigenous peoples. Identify key works in the environmental history of indigenous peoples across the globe. What have been the central motivating questions of this kind of history, and how has environmental history added new dimensions to Indigenous studies or Native studies? What if any limitations remain in the ways environmental history and historians have approached the history of Native peoples?

3. You are teaching at a small liberal arts college and you have the opportunity to teach an upper-division seminar on the topic of “global environmental history.” Explain how you would approach this class. What key readings would you assign? How would you structure the class, chronologically and thematically? What would be the assignments, and why? As you develop your answer, explain how this class would handle the difficulty of simultaneously introducing a field of history along with what for many students will be a new mode of thought, new methods, new questions, etc.

4. Pollution, climate change, invasive species are but a few topics addressed by environmental historians that easily elide the political and social borders that define other fields of history. What are key studies in environmental history that apply a trans-regional or transnational approach? What are the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches to environmental history?

5. One important topic in environmental history focuses on the production, distribution, and consumption of commodities. What have been the central motivating questions of this kind of history? How has environmental history added new dimensions to the study of commodities that differentiates it from economic, geographical, and/or anthropological approaches to commodities? What are the strengths and weaknesses of this sub-field of environmental history?

6. In recent years, the sub-field of “environmental justice” has emerged to examine issues related to social justice and the writing of environmental histories from “below.” What criticisms is this new sub-field responding to? How has this sub-field attempted to answer those critics? And, what are the strengths and weaknesses of this sub-field of environmental history?