Cultural History of Disasters
HIST 370
Tuesday, Thursday: 2:30-3:45
MSS 216

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Office Hours: Tuesday 1:00 – 2:00p or by Appt.
Office: MSS 243D

Overview

Topic
Using methodological approaches from history, sociology, environmental science, and the digital humanities, this course will address the study of disasters through a variety of case studies. By the end of the semester, students will gain a familiarity with the historical processes that form disasters (social, cultural, political, and ecological), and how in turn disasters act as historical agents. In exploring humans’ relationship to their environment (and vice versa), students will also examine the socially- and politically-constructed distinction between normalcy and emergency, and examine how cultural mores, societal tensions (race, class, poverty, ethnicity), and political aspirations shape, and are shaped by, catastrophic events. Finally, the course will explore the relationship between scientific development, the growth of technocratic approaches to nature in the 19th and 20th centuries, and the potential for disaster mitigation. By tracing the multitude of historical perspectives in any given disaster, students will learn how to interpret “catastrophic” situations and their uneven social and cultural consequences, and begin to question whether any natural disaster is natural at all.

Themes

• Historical disasters and their cultural causes and repercussions [SLOs 1,2,5,6]
• Distinguishing between natural/unnatural disasters, technological disasters, and social disasters [SLOs 1,2,3,4]
• The causes and contours of an emergency situation: emerging, emergent, and emergency [SLOs 1,2,3,4]
• Lasting societal effects of disasters (race, class, poverty, ethnicity) [SLOs: 5,6]
• The intersection of ecology, culture, and politics: natural rhythms, human schedules, and built environments [SLOs: 1,2,3]
• The rhythm of disaster and the rhymes of disaster response [SLOs 1,2,3,4]
• Disasters, local contingencies, and the development of a global economy

Guiding Questions

• Does a disaster mark a rupture or continuity? [SLO 1]
• What do disasters tell us about society? [SLOs 1,2,3,4]
• How do disasters affect different parts of the population in different ways? [SLOs: 5,6]
• How do socioeconomics and politics influence how a disaster unfolds? [SLOs: 5,6]
• What makes a disaster and why/how do they happen? [SLOs 1, 4]
• What do disasters look like in a global context?

Required Texts

Reader available at UNR e-Reserves (https://ares.library.unr.edu/)
Films – Volcano (1997), rent for $2.99 from Amazon (http://www.amazon.com/Volcano-Tommy-Jones/dp/B000I9YXWO/)

Grade Distribution

• 10% -- Discussion Posts
  A  93-100  C+  77-79  D-  60-62
  A- 90-92  C  73-76  F  0-59
  B+ 87-89  C-  70-72
• 15% -- Weekly Participation / Leading Discussion
  B  83-86  D+ 67-69
  B- 80-82  D  63-66
• 25% -- Midterm Exam and Essay
• 25% -- Final Exam
• 25% -- Final Omeka Project
Silver Core Objectives (COs)

**CO 9: Science, Technology, and Society:** Students will be able to connect science and technology to real-world problems by explaining how science relates to problems of societal concern; be able to distinguish between sound and unsound interpretations of scientific information; employ cogent reasoning methods in their own examinations of problems and issues; and understand the applications of science and technology in societal context.

Course SLOs: 1, 2, 3, 4

**CO 10: Diversity and Equity:** Students will develop a set of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills and characteristics that support effective and appropriate attentiveness to and analysis of diversity and equity

Course SLOs: 5, 6

Student Learning Objectives (SLOs)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students will be able to:</th>
<th>SLO</th>
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<tr>
<td>• describe how scientific and technological developments affect society and the environment, particularly with regard to deforestation, ecological terraforming, and climate change</td>
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<tr>
<td>• articulate ways in which society is transformed by science and technology, particularly with respect to disaster mitigation, control over nature, and sources of energy (nuclear, fossil fuels, dams, etc.)</td>
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<td>• demonstrate a knowledge of scientific and technological advancements and their impact on environmental hazards and human risk in modern society</td>
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<td>• analyze the scientific debates and ethical concerns of such issues as global warming, industrial agriculture, urban development, and the rise of a global economy</td>
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<td>• articulate an awareness of some of the central historical and present diversity issues addressed in the course, including race, ethnicity, and social class</td>
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<td>• describe the perceptions, viewpoints, or life experiences of people in at least 1 society or culture outside of the United States or in non-dominant or marginalized groups within the United States</td>
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Assignments and Assessments

Attendance and Participation [Assessment for SLOs 1-6]
Attendance is absolutely mandatory. Our common goal should be to create a friendly atmosphere that is conducive to discussion and questions. Regular attendance is essential to this goal. In addition, please note that the examinations are based on classroom lectures, discussions, handouts, and all assigned primary and secondary sources. Lectures are also designed to facilitate the analysis of the required texts and documents and the essays associated with them. Consequently, excessive absences will seriously hinder your ability to do well on the exams and the assignments. Every absence beyond three will result in your final course grade being lowered by one half of a letter grade. (A to A-; B+ to B; B to B-; B- to C+).

Each week, we will discuss the week’s readings and compare it to the cumulative list of theories and case studies presented to that point. On multiple occasions, we will read primary source documents in class and evaluate them using the historical and sociological theories presented in lecture (these activities are marked in the schedule of classes). We will then compare these primary sources against historical accounts provided by secondary sources, exploring the differences that exist between primary and secondary accounts (confusion vs. hindsight, inherent values that shape experience, author’s bias, audience, etc.). Participation and questions in class are greatly encouraged and expected. Please ask if there is anything that is unclear. Also, your participation in class and online constitute 10% of your grade.

Readings and Discussion Leaders (due every Thursday) [Assessment for SLOs 1-6]
You will be assigned a selection of secondary readings that complement the lectures and form the basis for our discussion that week. These readings must be completed by class on Thursday. There will also be pop quizzes to ensure that you have read.

Completing the readings is important, because the readings
(1) demonstrate key concepts about how to study natural disasters
(2) will form the basis of our weekly discussion
(3) will be on the course’s midterm and final
(4) help contextualize disasters and how to write about them as we complete our final projects

Discussion Board – Weekly Assignment (due every Monday and Wednesday at midnight) [Assessment for SLOs 1-6]
Each week, you will need to write a one- to two-paragraph response to the readings on Webcampus. In addition to summarizing and analyzing the readings, you will also be expected to pose your own questions: whether they are questions of clarification from the lecture, issues you find interesting, parts of the reading you find difficult, etc. It will be up to the class to answer those questions as they are posed, as well as up to the instructor during class time. Please note, your contributions are tracked, and participation is 20% of your final grade. More importantly, however, you and your classmates will be collectively creating your study guide for the two exams. Active and consistent participation online will help everyone tremendously throughout this course.

Discussion Leading
Each week, two people will be assigned to present on that week’s key themes and readings. This presentation will take place at the start of class on Thursday, and it may pull in outside sources. The duo will then lead a discussion on the readings and weekly course themes with the entire class (with help from the instructor). This makes up 15% of your final grade.

Examinations [Assessment for SLOs 1-6]
Two examinations will assess your knowledge of the material presented in lectures, handouts, images, readings, and discussions. Examinations will incorporate a variety of question types such as identification, short answer, short essay, or long essay. To do well on the two examinations, always attend class regularly and read carefully. Take copious notes during lectures, discussions, and activities.

Midterm: The midterm will include a short-answer and ID section that must be completed during class, as well as a take-home essay to be completed over the weekend.
Final: The final will include a variety of question types such as identification, short answer, and essay, and it must be completed entirely in class.
Capstone Digital Project – Online Museum Exhibit [Key assessment for SLOs 1-6]

You will be required to “do history” by creating a digital historical project on a disaster of your choosing. The assignment will be done in pairs throughout the semester, though each individual will be held accountable for his or her own work. We will be using the online platform “Omeka” from the Center for History and New Media.

Through this project, you will use web design and interactive media to collect and present primary and secondary sources to a public audience. First you will enter your sources into the platform, describing each in as much detail as possible using the Dublin Core Standards. You must also complete the item specific metadata. Then you will use the sources you’ve collected to create a source-based narrative about the disaster. This historical narrative will include multimedia and embedded source material, and will be presented as part of an online museum exhibit that will be hosted at digitalhistory.acs.unr.edu/chd.

Your historical narrative must pull upon the historical and sociological theories presented over the course of the semester in order to explain the cultural and societal causes and effects of a disaster of your choosing. It must also address the following:

- **Introduction**
- **Description/Overview of the Disaster**
- **Locations involved**
- **Causes**
  - Ecological/Environmental/Circumstantial
  - Cultural/Political/Social/Technological
- **Consequences**
  - Ecological/Environmental/Circumstantial
  - Cultural/Political/Social/Technological
- **Discretionary Discussion**
  - Based on the courses themes: What is most important according to your research team?
- **Conclusion**
  - Why does this event matter in human history?
  - What did we learn about society? About nature? About culture? About technological “progress”?
  - How does this disaster compare to other case studies discussed this semester?
  - How do your findings tie into the course’s themes and guiding questions?

**Required Elements**

**Must include**

- Sound historical analysis based on primary sources and framed by the course readings
- Images and other illustrations that demonstrate and evidentiate the key arguments of your exhibit
- Quotes (primary and secondary sources)
- Maps and other visualizations
- Minimum of 20 primary and 5 secondary sources, aside from the course readings
- Clear, concise language appropriate for an educated public

**May include**

- Videos (either primary sources or documentary)
- Interviews (if the event is more recent)

**Peer Assessment**

- Since you will be working in pairs, every source loaded into the web platform must be attributed to an individual. This will enable me to evaluate the equitable distribution of workloads.
- When you turn in your project, you will also evaluate your team member. Your team member’s evaluation of you will be considered in the final determination of your grade. Please note that your peer evaluation is entirely private and will not be disclosed.
Course Rules and Guidelines

Papers and Assignments
Papers, projects, and other assignments are due in class on the dates stipulated. No late papers or assignments will be accepted.

Cellphones and Computers.
Please remember to turn off your cell phones during class. You are welcome to utilize a computer to take notes during lectures; however, it should not be utilized to check your email, your Facebook account, or play games, etc. while in class. Please be courteous and wait until our class is over to engage in such activities.

Packing Up
Please refrain from packing books and other items until the instructor formally ends the class.

Email Correspondence
Please make sure that you identify yourself when you send a message to the professor, as well as use proper salutations (i.e. “Dear Dr. Church / Dear Professor Church”). Also, please allow 48 hours for a response.

If your question is about content or course logistics, check the syllabus and Webcampus before emailing me.

Students with Disabilities
The University of Nevada, Reno is committed to equal opportunity in education for all students, including those with documented physical disabilities or documented learning disabilities. If you have a documented disability and will be requiring assistance, please contact the instructor and the Disability Resource Center (Thompson Building Suite 101) as soon as possible to arrange for appropriate accommodations.

Taping Class
Surreptitious or covert video-taping of class or unauthorized audio recording of class is prohibited by law and by Board of Regents policy. This class may be videotaped or audio recorded only with the written permission of the instructor. In order to accommodate students with disabilities, some students may have been given permission to record class lectures and discussions. Therefore, students should understand that their comments during class may be recorded.

Academic Assistance
Tutoring Center (784-6801 or www.unr.edu/tutoring-center) and University Writing Center (784-6030 or http://www.unr.edu/writing-center) are available to assist you. You also have access to the History Writing Center (see below).

The Department of History Writing Center
The History Writing Center (MSS 109) helps students address all issues related to historical writing. Come prepared to discuss organization, argument, style, evidence, analysis, citations or any other concern connected to your class papers and theses. Sessions run between 30-45 minutes. For appointments, please contact: Ryan Powell (rpowellunr@gmail.com).

Plagiarism
Plagiarism is a serious form of academic misconduct and it will not be tolerated in this class. Plagiarism, according to the UNR catalog, is defined as “submitting the language, ideas, thoughts or work of another as one's own.” The “work of another” includes any material used in your essays (e.g. books, articles, internet sites, documents, lecture notes, or handouts from this and other courses, etc.) Acknowledge all such material – even if you paraphrase it or summarize certain sections and don't quote it directly.

Please note that plagiarism will result in a grade of F for the course.
Writing Guidelines

How to Avoid Plagiarism (taken from owl.english.purdue.edu.)

A. Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of somebody else’s words or ideas.

B. When does a writer need to document or cite information?

1. When using or referring to somebody else’s words or ideas from a magazine, book, newspaper, song, TV program, movie, Web page, computer program, letter, advertisement, or any other medium;

2. When using information gained through interviewing another person;

3. When copying the exact words or a “unique phrase” from somewhere;

4. When reprinting any diagrams, illustrations, charts and pictures; and,

5. When using ideas that others have given you in conversations, lectures or email.

Quotations must be identical to the original and must be cited.

Paraphrasing involves putting a passage or information from source material into your own words. Paraphrasing must be cited.

Summarizing involves putting the main idea(s) or points of another author into your own words. Summarizing also must be cited.

Quality Guidelines for All Written Assignments

A is an exceptional grade reserved for work of exceptional quality. This grade is for essays that have all the qualities of the B essay, and in addition are well written and display analytical skills and/or originality. The last two criteria are extremely important. A essays do not merely summarize material from the readings or lectures. In addition, ideas must be expressed clearly, no matter how insightful or interesting they are.

B denotes work that is above average in quality. It demonstrates that the student knows and understands the material covered in class and being analyzed, and that s/he is capable of synthesizing it into a competent essay. It is accurate, detailed, and well organized, with an introduction, an argument, and a conclusion. Usually, either writing problems or a lack of analysis is what prevents a B essay from being an A.

C is given for work that is average. The student shows familiarity with the material, answers the central questions posed, and is mostly accurate, but lacks the sophistication of either the B or A student. The C essay might make general points but fail to support them with specific evidence or details, or it might have problems with organization or writing style. Sometimes a C essay is merely a collection of facts, with no coherent theme or thesis.

D is given for work that is inadequate. It omits important points, contains more than a few inaccuracies, and is badly organized. It does not answer the central questions posed in the assignment. It suggests one of three things: 1) the student has barely been paying attention to the course, 2) s/he has problems understanding the material, 3) s/he has problems expressing ideas in writing.

Please feel free to come and discuss a work with me before the assignment is due. I would also gladly look over rough drafts as long as they are given to me in a timely fashion.
Style Requirements for All Written Assignments

1. Utilize 1 inch margins on all sides. Use 12 point type font in Times New Roman. The print must be dark; print not easily readable will be rejected.

2. Assignments should be double spaced or single spaced as specified in the syllabus (except in the case of a lengthy direct quotation; see #4 below).

3. Direct quotations should be used sparingly to emphasize a particular point. Papers or essays that consist of a string of long quotations from the text without any (or only cursory) analysis will be returned as unsatisfactory.

4. Single space and double indent quotations over 4 lines in length.

5. Remember: do not plagiarize. Ask me if you are ever in doubt.

6. Number all pages.

7. Do not place spaces between paragraphs.

8. Please remember that one or two sentences do not make a paragraph - usually five do.

9. Please use spell check and proof for grammatical errors such as sentence fragments and run-on sentences. It is true that this is not an English grammar course; but, sloppy writing distracts from otherwise interesting ideas and intriguing critical analysis.

Suggested Readings and Secondary Sources by Theme

Setting the Stage, or Who is in Charge? : Environment as an Historical Agent, and the Human as Environmental Agent

Alfred Crosby, Ecological Imperialism: the Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900
Timothy Mitchel, Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity.

Defining Disaster

Ted Steinberg, "What is a natural disaster?" Literature and Medicine, 15: 1. (1996), p. 33-47
David Alexander, Confronting Disaster.

Defining a Cultural History of Disaster: the Role of Cultural Attitudes, Political Aspirations, and Social Class

Peter Burke, What is Cultural History?
Mike Davis, Ecology of Fear.
Mike Davis, City of Quartz


Jeff Jackson, Paris under Water: How the City of Light Survived the Great Flood of 1910
Phil Fradkin, The Great Earthquake and Firestorms of 1906: How San Francisco Nearly Destroyed Itself
Charles Perrow, Normal Accidents: Living with High-Risk Technologies
Matthew Mulcahy, Hurricanes and Society in the British Greater Caribbean

Disaster, Politics, and Society: Civil Unrest and Political Change

John M. Barry, Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and How it Changed America.
Bonham Richardson, Igniting the Caribbean’s Past
Peter Gould, Fire in the Rain: the Democratic Consequences of Chernobyl (selections)

Climate Change: Reacting to Emerging Emergencies

Geoffrey Parker, Global Crisis: War, Climate Change and Catastrophe in the Seventeenth Century.
Overview: Defining a Cultural History of Disaster

Week 1 -- Syllabus and Introduction: Introduction to Environmental History [SLOs 1, 3]

Tu: Welcome to the class!

Th: Introductory Lecture

Week 2 -- Who put the Mosquito in Charge? Environment as an Historical Agent, and the Human as Environmental Agent [SLOs 1]

Tu: Lecture: Environment as an Historical Agent, and the Human as Environmental Agent

Th: Discussion: Slaves, Maroons, Revolutionaries, Mosquitos, and the Status Quo [SLO 5,6]

Primary Source Activity: 18th Century Medicine, Disease, and Revolution

Week 3 -- Defining Disaster: The Intersection of Human Activity and Ecological Hazards [SLOs 1, 2]

Tu: Lecture: Sociological Definitions of Disaster and Risk Management

Th: Discussion: Cloud Seeding, Conspiracy Theories, and Causality

[V] – Begin watching Volcano at home
Primary source activity: Evaluating disasters against modern sociological definitions

Week 4 -- Culture of Disaster: Socioeconomics, Urban Development, and the L.A. Metro [SLOs 2, 3, 5]

Tu: Lecture on the Development of the L.A. Metro, socioeconomics, and the 1992 Riots

Th: Film Discussion -- Volcano -- (watch before class – only excerpts will be shown in class)

[R] - Mike Davis, Ecology of Fear (Ch.1 + 6, selections)
[V] – Volcano (watch before class)

Week 5 – Big Capital, Bourgeois Ennui, and Immigrant Enclaves | Final Project Introduced

Tu: Lecture | Discussion – 1906 San Francisco Earthquake, Infrastructure Failure and Inequitable Effects [SLOs 2, 3]

[R] – Rosario, “Or how Americans learned to love disaster” (selection)

[R] – Begin Reading Paris Under Water for next week

Th: Omeka Project Introduced | Omeka Workshop

Are Disasters Ever Natural?

Week 6 -- Environmental Cycles and Human Agency: What makes a disaster un/natural? [SLOs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5]


Th: Discussion: Technological Developments before and since 1910 and the Persistence of Risk

[R] - Jeff Jackson, Paris under Water: How the City of Light Survived the Great Flood of 1910 (selection of 40pgs)

[V] – begin watching The Storm, Hurricane Katrina (watch before class)
Week 7 – Race, Social Class, and Disaster: Hurricane Katrina and its Antecedents [SLO 5, 6]

Tu: Lecture - Race, Social Class, and Disaster in Hurricane Katrina

Th: Discussion – History, Pop History, Political Bias, and Journalism
  [V] - The Storm (watch before class)
  [R] - Rosario, “A Reckoning: Hurricane Katrina.” (pp. 209 - 218)

Week 8 -- The Artifice of Disaster: Technological Advances and the Increase in Risk [SLO 1, 2, 4, 6]

Tu: Lecture – Nuclear Power, Normal Accidents, and Human Consequences

Th: Discussion: Japan, System Accidents, and International Consequences
  [R] - Charles Perrow, Normal Accidents: Living with High-Risk Technologies (Intro, pp. 3 - 13)
In class debate: Fukushima Dai-ichi (Time Magazine) and the viability of nuclear power [SLO 2, 5, 6]

Week 9 – Midterm

Tu: Review

Th: In-class midterm portion and take-home essay distributed (due following Tuesday)

Week 10 – Disaster, Politics, and Society [SLO 6]

Tu: Lecture: How Disasters Precipitate Societal Shifts: 1755 Lisbon Earthquake and the Scientific Enlightenment
  Take-home essay collected

Th: Discussion: Disaster and Radical Political Change in Latin America [SLO 5, 6]
  [R] – Begin reading next week’s readings
Primary Source Activity: Candide, the Lisbon Earthquake, and 18th Century Societal Shifts (Science/Religion)

Week 11 – The Economic Culture of Disaster: Catastrophe and the Making of Inequity [SLOs 5, 6]

Tu: Lecture
  1st Omeka Check – Must have 15 sources (10 primary; 5 secondary) by this date

Th: Discussion – The Starving and the Rich (Opportunities Afforded by Disaster) [SLOs 5, 6]
  [R] - Naomi Klein, The Shock Doctrine (pp. 3 - 21)
  [R] – Kevin Rosario, Disasters and the Making of American Capitalism, Culture of Calamity (75-100)

Week 12 – Climate Change Then and Now: the Little Ice Age and Global Warming [SLOs 1, 6]

Tu: Lecture: the Global Consequences of the Little Ice Age

Th: Discussion: Global Warming and Anthropogenic Disasters – What can we do? [SLOs 5,6]
  [R] - Geoffrey Parker, Global Crisis: War, Climate Change and Catastrophe in the Seventeenth Century.
Writing a Cultural History of Disaster: Digital Project

Week 13 – *Digital Project / Putting it all together [SLOs 1-6]*

**Tu:** Discussion – Local Events and their Global Effects  

**Th:** Omeka Work Day

Week 14 – *Digital Project / Putting it all together [SLOs 1-6]*

**Tu:** Discussion – Disaster and History, What Story Do We Tell? Whose story (wealth, ethnicity, race, and global power dynamics)? | Omeka Work Day

**Th:** Thanksgiving (no class)

Week 15 – *Digital Project [SLOs 1-6]*

**Tu:** Omeka Work Day

**Th:** Omeka Work Day | Peer Review

Week 16 – *Review [SLOs 1-6]*

**Tu:** Omeka Presentations | Final Exam Review

Week 17 – *Final Exam [SLOs 1-6] and Omeka Projects Due*