

Marine Environmental History

SEA 3023 (4 credit hours)

~68 contact hours

Course Overview

Marine Environmental History (MEH) is a four-credit course that begins and ends in Woods Hole and includes a seagoing component in the middle. We will begin by exploring the links between Indigenous whaling and colonial historical trends that span the northwest Atlantic. Our work will continue with consideration of the extractive nature of colonial endeavors. In addition, we will trace the development of Environmental History, Environmental Science, and the rise of Environmental Justice movements in their marine contexts.

Course Instructor

SEA Professors

Contact me anytime to discuss your progress in class, ways to improve learning, or other topics!

Course Footprint

Component	Duration	Location
Shore	May 21-May 29, June 7-June 12	Woods Hole, MA
Sea	May 29-June 7	SSV <i>Corwith Cramer</i> with port stops in Nantucket, Provincetown

Land Acknowledgement

We see that we in Falmouth are on the traditional homeland of the Wampanoag people who live and continue to thrive here after thousands of years of residence. We also acknowledge the painful history of Colonization that has enacted forced assimilation, slavery, genocide, and efforts by many to eliminate the Wampanoag people along with their culture. We respect and honor the indigenous people still connected to this land and are willing to learn from the Wampanoag way of life. We recognize that these words are not enough and need to be followed with action steps. Whose Land Are You On? Check out [Native Land](#).

Course Philosophy and Approach

Over the six-week Woods Hole component, this course introduces and calls for the analysis of secondary and some primary readings that range from accounts of early interactions in the Americas to the forced and free circulation of people and ideas throughout the Atlantic. From revolutions on the mainland and islands of the Americas, particularly the one in Haiti, to the development of modern high-capacity cargo and passenger ships, class discussions will center on

people from a variety of social and economic backgrounds. As these people engaged in activities connected to migration, trade, and navigation, they helped shape the history of the Eastern Seaboard of the United States, the Caribbean islands and, along the way, the broader Atlantic and global developments from the 15th century to today. Much of that history involved enormous amounts of exploitation of human and material resources. In this class, we will highlight and discuss how this exploitation shaped, and continues to shape, calls for environmental and social justice in the Atlantic World.

Course Goals and Learning Outcomes

1. Understand the complex interplay of the environment, societal developments, and historical events in the New England whaling industry and whale conservation over time.
2. Trace the impact and influences of maritime culture and policy through literature, oral traditions, art, artifacts, legal documents, and the physical environment.
3. Apply interdisciplinary techniques and approaches to environmental studies.
4. Develop and support a thesis based on work with primary and secondary materials.
5. Contribute to a collaborative research and writing environment: present ideas for group feedback and offer and exchange constructive critiques of written work in a peer revision process.
6. Interrogate and evaluate arguments and conclusions developed during Woods Hole research through in situ learning with local experts throughout island visits.
7. Learn or hone skills in critical reading and writing of history.

How Learning will be Assessed:

Assignment	Goal of Assignment	Course Goal	% of Grade
Shore Component/Full			
Active Participation	Demonstrate engagement with course themes and readings (see “Succeeding in this Course” above).	1, 2 5-7	25
Journaling	Synthesize and make connections between class themes and readings.	1-7	25
Article	Develop and support a thesis. Make use of historical sources drawn from class and independent research.	1-4, 7	25
Group Project and Presentation	Identify and examine environmental history issues and connect them to modern efforts related to conservation and development.	1-4 5, 7	25

Assignments:

SEA Writer Magazine Story

Due: June **, Wednesday, inserted into Google folder: Word doc (not .pdf)

Sub-deadline: First full draft before you go to sea, **; bring 2 hard full draft hard copies to class

Length: 1,200-1800 words

Audience: General readership for non-science but newsy audience reading a feature, eg *The Guardian* or *Smithsonian* magazine

Images: 2-4, including perhaps one the paper itself, one historical image, one you create (without AI), and one from your time aboard the *Corwith Cramer* or on a field trip

Sources: No footnotes or endnotes, simply a “Further Reading” section at the end in this format: First Name Last Name, *Title* (Place: Publisher, Year) or First Name Last Name, “Article Title,” *Journal Name* vol/# (date year): pp-pp. [Include in brackets the link to the paper.]

Specifications & Guidance:

This feature article is part science reportage of a recent peer-reviewed research paper, but leans heavily into the historical context necessary to understand the current research. Choose a paper from the Google folder provided; first come/first serve, add your name in caps to the title in the folder. Or choose your own in consultation with Brooke or Rich.

Examine the who/what/when/where/how—what are the findings and what implications are there from this research, how might it affect people and/or nonhuman populations and ecosystems? This, if you like, can be an essay of advocacy, concluding with a recommendation on action or policy decisions. Ideally you’ll have a quote or two from the researchers, either from the paper or from an interview. Look to our Google doc of notes and considerations and look to the models we’ve read in class. ***Tell the story of this research project and why it matters and what is the historical context that is essential to understand how we got here.***

Expectations and Requirements:

Punctual **attendance** is **required** at every class meeting.

Active participation in class discussion is expected.

Late assignment submissions are not accepted without prior approval.

The policy on academic accuracy, listed below, will be strictly followed in this class.

The essay and other written and verbal work that you submit/present in this course must all be ***your original work***. You must take care to distinguish your own ideas and knowledge from wording or substantive information that you derive from one or more of your sources. The term “sources” includes not only published primary and secondary material, but also information and opinions gained directly from other people, AI tools, and text that you consult or use from any site on the Internet.

The responsibility for learning the proper forms of citation lies with you. Quotations must be placed properly within quotation marks and must be cited fully. In addition, all paraphrased material must be acknowledged completely. Whenever ideas or facts are derived from your reading and research, the sources must be indicated. (choose and conform to a particular style of citation. Consult your home institution’s library or speak to me for guidance.)

Considerations for use of internet sources:

As you browse websites, assess their usefulness very critically. Who posted the information and why? Can you trust them to be correct? Authoritative? Unbiased? (It’s okay to use a biased source as long as you incorporate it knowingly and transparently into your own work.) Keep track of good sources that might be useful for subsequent assignments, and annotate in your bibliography any sites you

use. Your annotation should include the name of the author or organization originating any material that you reference. If you can't identify the source, don't use it!

Course Calendar for Shore and Sea Components

The next two pages contain our proposed course calendar which is **subject to change** in response to our learning pace, class cancellations due to weather, etc. Any changes in the course calendar, including due dates for assignments, will be announced verbally in class, written on the whiteboard in the class, and posted on Blackbaud.

Required readings should be completed before class in order to get the most out of the class lectures, discussions, and activities.

Course schedule					
Day	Date	Time	Topic	Required Readings	Assignment Due Dates
Thurs	May 21		Intro to Marine Environmental History Class	MEH Syllabus	Select scientific article to use for Sea Writer
Fri	May 22	All day	New Bedford Whaling Museum		
Sat	May 23		Indigenous New England Histories of Whales and Whaling Magazine Intro	Shoemaker 2014 & 2015	
Sun	May 24		Woods Hole Visit Whalers and World	King, Finley	
Mon	May 25		The End of American Whaling		
Tue	May 26	(shorter sessions/	Conservation Beginnings	Dunbar-Hester	
Weds	May 27	(shorter sessions/	Whaling and Wars in the 20 th Century	Horowitz	
Thurs	May 28		Tourism and Recent Histories	Hingham, Bejder, and	Initial draft for Sea Writer due
May 29-June 7 At sea aboard SSV <i>Corwith Cramer</i>; port stops in Nantucket and Provincetown					
Sun	Jun		Return from Sea		
Mon	June 8		Sea Component Discussion	Smith, Sigler	
Tues	June 9		History of Whaling in the Present Cape Cod National Seashore Field Trip	Thoreau, Cumbler	

Weds	June 10		Futures of Conservation	Moore; Giggs	Final Draft for SEA Writer due
Thurs	June 11		Magazine Workshop and Design Day		
Fri	June 12		Final Symposium (in-person with online		

SEA COMPONENT ABOARD SSV CORWITH CRAMER	
Date(s)	
May 29	Boarding and orientation
May 30	Orientation and sail
May 31	To Nantucket
June 1	Ashore in Nantucket
June 2	To Provincetown
June 3	Ashore in Provincetown
June 4	To Gloucester
June 5	Return trip
June 6	Cape Cod Canal
June 7	Leave <i>Cramer</i> and return to campus

Readings and Course Material Selected from the Following:

Bolster, W. Jeffrey, *The Mortal Sea*, 2012.

Carson, Rachel, *Silent Spring*, 1962.

Cumblor, John, *Cape Cod*, 2014.

Davis, William, *Nimrod of the Sea*, 1874.

Dunbar-Hester, Christina, *Save the (White) Whale: Whalesong, the Cetacean Sensorium, and Exceptional Brains*, 2022.

Finley, Skip. *Whaling Captains of Color: America's First Meritocracy*, 2020.

Giggs, Rebecca, *Fathoms: The World in the Whale*, 2020.

Higham, James, Lars Bejder, and Rob Williams, *Whale-watching: Sustainable Tourism and Ecological Management*, 2014.

Horowitz, Joshua, *War of the Whales: A True Story*, 2015.

King, Richard J. *Ahab's Rolling Sea: A Natural History of Moby-Dick*, 2019.

King, Richard J. *et al.* "Captain Joy's Last Voyage," *Earth Island Journal*, 2023.

Kroll, Gary. *America's Ocean Wilderness*, 2008.

Labaree, Benjamin, *America and the Sea*, 1998.

Melville, Herman, *Moby-Dick*, 1851.

Moore, Michael. *We are All Whalers: The Plight of Whales and Our Responsibility*, 2021.

Senier, Siobhan, *Dawnland Voices: Indigenous Writings from New England*, 2014.

Shoemaker, Nancy, *Living with Whales: Documents and Oral Histories of Native New England Whaling History*, 2014.

Shoemaker, Nancy, *Native American Whale Men and the World: Indigenous Encounters and the Contingency of Race*, 2015.

Sigler, Mia (SEA S'283). "When We See Whales: Transcribing Captain Lawrence's Logbook." *Sea History*, 2019.

Smith, Tim, *et al.* "Spatial and Seasonal Distribution of American Whaling and Whales in the Age of Sail." *PloS ONE*, 2012.

