

Prof. Jackson
Fall 2011
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Office Hours: Mon and Thurs 2:00 PM - 4:00 PM

Nature, Disaster, and History

Objectives: This course explores the histories of several “natural disasters” to discover how humans have understood and responded to environmental events beyond their control. The course begins with a conceptual conversation about the relationship between environment and society within the context of disaster, and then proceeds to explore the stories of several events -- such as hurricanes, earthquakes, floods, and fires. We will also consider how disasters are woven into the historical memories of various societies and used as reference points to understand both the past and the future. Each student will conduct research and make a significant oral presentation as part of the course.

Books to Purchase:

The following books are available in the campus bookstore for purchase. Additional readings are in my Faculty Folder on the Acad_Dept_Pgm Volume on the campus server.

- Lee Clarke, *Worst Cases: Terror and Catastrophe in the Popular Imagination*
- Nicholas Shrady, *The Last Day: Wrath, Ruin, and Reason in the Great Lisbon Earthquake of 1755*
- Jeffrey H. Jackson, *Paris Under Water: How the City of Light Survived the Great Flood of 1910*
- Matthew Mulcahy, *Hurricanes and Society in the British Greater Caribbean, 1624–1783*
- Karen Sawislak, *Smoldering City: Chicagoans and the Great Fire, 1871-1874*
- David Herlihy, *The Black Death and the Transformation of the West*

Student Presentations:

Students in this course are required to conduct research on a “natural disaster” not covered on the syllabus and to make an oral/visual presentation using Powerpoint of no fewer than 30 minutes in class. Presentations must articulate an original interpretation of the historical significance of the event using at least 12 primary sources (at least 6 must be visual) as well as relevant secondary sources.

Presentations should accomplish the following:

- Describe the basic events of disaster
- Analyze responses to the disaster
- Analyze how the disaster is remembered
- Interpret the significance of the disaster within the historical/cultural context
- Use at least 6 pieces of visual evidence (photographs, video, paintings, illustrations, etc.) as primary sources to support your interpretation
- Be clear, precise, logical, easy to follow, to the point, and lively

Each student is also required to evaluate the presentations of other members of the course.

Possible disasters include (this list is far from exhaustive):

1923 Japan earthquake
1900 Galveston hurricane
1883 Krakatoa volcano
Pompeii
1985 Mexico City earthquake
1989 Loma Prieta earthquake
Hurricane Camille
1909 Messina earthquake
Blizzard of 1978 in New England and Ohio
Hurricane of 1938 in New England
1970 Bangladesh cyclone and floods
London fog of 1950s
1887 Yellow River flood in China
Yellow Fever epidemics, including in Memphis
Cholera epidemics in Europe
Plague in London
Chicago heat wave of 1995

To assist you in your research, you should consult the following resources:

- University of Delaware's Disaster Research Center database:
<http://dspace.udel.edu:8080/dspace/handle/19716/35>
- University College London's Aon Benfield UCL Hazard Centre
<http://www.abuhrc.org/Pages/index.aspx>

Written Assignments:

(1) **Annotated Bibliography:** Students must complete an annotated bibliography which identifies the books, articles, images, and/or interviews they will use for their research. Accompanying each item, students will write a short paragraph explaining how that item will contribute to the larger research project. Students should also contextualize this item within a broader understanding of the literature on the subject.

(2) **Essays:** Students will also write short (1500-2000 word) essays on 2 of the 5 books for the course. The goal of each essay is to interpret the main argument and ideas of the book within the context of the other readings of the course. Each essay should answer the questions: "How does this book contribute our understanding of natural disasters, and how does it fit with the other readings we have done in the course?" Students should advance their own argument about the larger significance of the reading in answering these questions. **Each essay is due one week after our class discussion of the book.**

General Guidelines: Every essay must conform to the following guidelines in order to be accepted.

All essays must include:

- (1) A signed honor code pledge;
- (2) An engaging title which captures the main thrust of your argument. I will **not** accept papers with titles like "Paper #1." You must also include your name and the date;
- (3) A **final word count** of the body of your essay (not including footnotes, endnotes, bibliography, or title). This word count must be indicated on your first page of your essay;
- (4) Appropriate citations, either footnotes or endnotes, which follow the *Chicago Manual of Style*. Copies of this style manual are in the library and the history department office. The style manual commonly known as "Turabian" (i.e. Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*) is a shortened version of the Chicago style guide and is acceptable;
- (5) Appropriate American-style punctuation and general formatting as indicated in the *Chicago Manual of Style*;
- (6) Sequential page numbers at the bottom of each page beginning with page 1. All notes should also use numbers, not symbols or letters;
- (7) An introductory paragraph which clearly states your interpretive claim (i.e. thesis) and answers all of the following questions: (a) what is the paper about, (b) what is the reader going to find out, (c) why is this paper worth reading -- i.e. the "so what" question.

Grading:

Oral Presentation	40%
Annotated Bibliography	10%
Short Papers (2)	30%
Class Participation	20%

I define "participation" as active engagement with the ideas, readings, and conversations that are an integral part of this course. Class attendance is necessary for class participation, since you cannot participate if you are not here. However, you do not earn your participation grade simply by showing up to class. Rather, you must actually participate by joining in the class discussion, posing questions, sharing ideas, and interpreting the readings with your classmates in a thoughtful and reflective way.

I reserve the right to call on any member of the class so that they might contribute to our discussion. I recommend bringing questions that you have about reading assignments or about the previous class meeting if what we discussed is not entirely clear to you. I also recommend bringing a list of comments that you wish to make during class discussion so that you will be ready to contribute. If you are someone who has difficulty speaking in class for whatever reason, please speak to me about alternative ways of participating.

I may also randomly appoint students to be discussion leaders for a particular day. Sometimes, I will give notice of that leadership, but at other times, I will not. Therefore, you need to be prepared to participate every day you attend class.

An Important Definition: What is “analysis?”

When historians analyze something, they do not repeat information that everyone already knows about events or documents. Nor do they simply state obvious conclusions based on a quick set of observations. Analysis -- the heart of the historians' craft -- means taking something apart, looking at it from the inside-out, subjecting it to an intense investigation from many facets, juxtaposing it with other issues or facts that are both similar and different, identifying patterns and processes that are not necessarily easily seen or obvious, and arriving at original conclusions that will inform, enlighten, and educate the reader of your essay. Analysis is not easy, and it does not happen quickly. It requires a serious commitment to critical thinking that only comes when a scholar devotes time and energy to finding out something new rather than simply repeating what others have said. Please follow this definition of “analysis” throughout this syllabus and this course.

Our Schedule for the Semester

R	8/25	Introduction
T	8/30	Thinking About Natural Disaster Theodore Steinberg, "What Is a Natural Disaster?" <i>Literature and Medicine</i> 15 (1996): 33-4 Anthony Oliver-Smith, ““What is a Disaster?": Anthropological Perspectives on a Persistent Question” Junot Diaz, “What Disasters Reveal” http://www.bostonreview.net/BR36.3/junot_diaz_apocalypse_haiti_earthquake.php E.L. Quarantelli, “Emergencies, Disaster, and Catastrophes Are Different Phenomena” Shankar Vedantam, “The Key to Disaster Survival? Friends and Neighbors” http://www.npr.org/2011/07/04/137526401/the-key-to-disaster-survival-friends-and-neighbors?
R	9/1	Thinking About Natural Disaster Lee Clarke, <i>Worst Cases</i> , Introduction, Chapters 1, 2 Gaelle Clavandier, “Getting to Grips With Disaster” http://www.booksandideas.net/Getting-to-Grips-with-Disaster.html
T	9/6	Making Oral Presentations
R	9/8	Thinking About Natural Disaster Lee Clarke, <i>Worst Cases</i> , Chapters 4, 5, Conclusion Philippe Simay & Florent Guénard, “From Risk To Disaster: A New Paradigm” http://www.booksandideas.net/From-Risk-To-Disaster.html
T	9/13	Earth Nicholas Shrady, <i>The Last Day: Wrath, Ruin, and Reason in the Great Lisbon Earthquake of 1755</i>

- R 9/15 **Earth**
Nicholas Shrady, *The Last Day: Wrath, Ruin, and Reason in the Great Lisbon Earthquake of 1755*
- T 9/20 **Earth**
Ted Steinberg, *Acts of God*, chapter 1-3
- R 9/22 **Representing Disaster**
Lee Clarke, "Panic: Myth or Reality?" *Contexts* (Fall 2002): 21-26.
Lee Clarke, *Mission Improbable: Using Fantasy Documents to Tame Disaster*
Jeffrey H. Jackson, "Envisioning Disaster in the 1910 Paris Flood"
Quarantelli vs. Frailing, "Looting After a Natural Disaster: A Myth or Reality?"
Film: *Twister* (on Moodle)
- M 9/26 Annotated Bibliography Due
- T 9/27 **Wind**
Video: *Hurricane Katrina: The Storm That Drowned a City*
Marc Landy, "Mega-Disasters and Federalism"
The Following Articles found at: <http://understandingkatrina.ssrc.org>
1. Havidán Rodríguez; Russell Dynes, "Finding and Framing Katrina: The Social Construction of Disaster"
2. Susan Cutter, "The Geography of Social Vulnerability: Race, Class, and Catastrophe"
3. Scott Frickel, "Our Toxic Gumbo: Recipe for a Politics of Environmental Knowledge"
4. E.L. Quarantelli, "Catastrophes are Different from Disasters: Some Implications for Crisis Planning and Managing Drawn from Katrina"
- R 9/29 **Special Guest: Prof. Arleen Hill, University of Memphis**
Jerry T. Mitchell, Deborah S. K. Thomas, Arleen A. Hill, and Susan L. Cutter, "Catastrophe in Reel Life versus Real Life: Perpetuating Disaster Myth through Hollywood Films," *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters*, 18 (November 2000): 383-402.
- T 10/4 **Special Guest: Prof. Tait Keller**
David Herlihy, *The Black Death and the Transformation of the West*
- R 10/6 **Special Guest: Prof. Art Carden**
Art Carden, "Disastrous Anti-Economics and the Economics of Disasters"
- T 10/11 **Special Guest: Prof. Jennifer Dabbs Sciubba**
Jennifer Dabbs Sciubba, *Future Faces of War*, Chapter 6
- R 10/13 **Research Day**
- T 10/18 **FALL BREAK**

R	10/20	Wind Matthew Mulcahy, <i>Hurricanes and Society in the British Greater Caribbean, 1624–1783</i>
T	10/25	Wind Matthew Mulcahy, <i>Hurricanes and Society in the British Greater Caribbean, 1624–1783</i>
R	10/27	Water Jeffrey H. Jackson, <i>Paris Under Water: How the City of Light Survived the Great Flood of 1910</i>
T	11/1	Water Jeffrey H. Jackson, <i>Paris Under Water: How the City of Light Survived the Great Flood of 1910</i>
R	11/3	Water Craig Colton, <i>Unnatural Metropolis: Wrestling New Orleans from Nature</i> Video: <i>Fatal Flood</i> (on Moodle)
T	11/8	Fire Karen Sawislak, <i>Smoldering City: Chicagoans and the Great Fire, 1871-1874</i>
R	11/10	Fire Karen Sawislak, <i>Smoldering City: Chicagoans and the Great Fire, 1871-1874</i>
T	11/15	Student Presentations
R	11/17	Student Presentations
T	11/22	Student Presentations
R	11/24	THANKSGIVING
T	11/29	Student Presentations
R	12/1	Student Presentations
T	12/6	Student Presentations

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Philosophy

I believe that we are a community of scholars actively working together to discover something new about our world and ourselves. To achieve those goals, we must struggle together, asking questions about what we don't yet know and challenging our assumptions about what we think we know and believe. Teaching is also a team effort. I am asking each of you to accept a certain amount of responsibility in this class for contributing to our intellectual commonwealth by being willing to question, to challenge, and to propose new ideas and interpretations. In other words, I am asking you to be a good citizen of Rhodes College and of this classroom by contributing to the success of everyone in it.

History is not a list of facts and events, but an ongoing series of debates about what those facts and events mean. In taking this class, you are joining in a world-wide discussion that continually asks about the ongoing meaning and significance of life's events both past and present.

But while teaching and historical debates are group activities, learning is, in the end, an individual act. No one can make another person learn something if they do not want to, and only you can choose to receive something from your time in this class. To that end, think carefully about how you prepare each day for class, how you study for exams, and how seriously you approach your essays. Your grades will reflect your individual performance, and the amount of effort you apply will directly affect your outcomes.

My personal goals for all my classes are: (1) that everyone succeeds to the best of their abilities, (2) that everyone improves in their capability to think analytically and creatively, and (3) that everyone grows in their capacity to express themselves, to create knowledge, and to engage with their world.

Class Policies and Procedures

General

1. I expect you to come to each class prepared to listen, ask questions, discuss readings, and take notes. You should bring all necessary materials to class including all reading assignments for the day, your reading notes, notes from previous classes, and materials that I may ask you to prepare for a particular class session.
2. I expect each of you to be actively engaged in the functioning of this class, and you should come prepared to participate in our ongoing class discussion. I reserve the right to call on any member of the class so that they might contribute to our discussion. I recommend bringing questions that you have about reading assignments or about the previous class meeting if what we discussed is not entirely clear to you. I also recommend bringing a list of comments that you wish to make during class discussion so that you will be ready to contribute. If you are someone who has difficulty speaking in class for whatever reason, please speak to me about alternative ways of participating.
3. You should come to every class session. There is no such thing as an "excused absence" (with the possible exception of a medical leave that is officially approved by the College administration). Absences for athletics or other extra-curricular activities are not "excused" even if they are officially announced. Therefore, you are allowed to miss ***the equivalent of one week's worth of class time*** (for Monday/Wednesday/Friday classes, three (3) class periods; for Tuesday/Thursday classes, two (2) class periods; for classes which meet once a week, one (1) class period) for any reason. Additional absences will adversely affect your grade for the course since you cannot participate in our community of scholars if you are not here.

If you are absent from class, it is ***your responsibility*** to talk to me and to fellow classmates to find out what you have missed. I frequently distribute handouts or make additional assignments in class, so you need to check with me to find out if I have done so for the day of your absence. You are still responsible for all material covered in each class period regardless of whether you attended it.

I will take attendance at the beginning of every class meeting to establish your presence. If you are not present when attendance is taken, you may be counted absent, so please arrive to class early or on-time.

4. Each of you is bound by the Honor Code as elaborated in the Student Handbook, and no violation will be tolerated. Please review the Student Handbook if you are unclear about the details of the Honor Code, particularly the definitions in Article I, Section 3. If you are unfamiliar with the definition of "plagiarism," you can find it there. On every assignment, you should reaffirm the Honor Code by writing the entire honor pledge and signing your name. No work will be accepted

without an Honor Code pledge. Studying together and reading one another's papers is always a good idea, but make sure that your work is your own. Collaboration on an assignment that results in remarkably similar results, whether intentional or accidental, is a violation of the honor code.

5. I reserve the right to make changes in the syllabus as the semester progresses, but I will always make changes known to you as soon as possible, and I will make reasonable accommodations for assignment due dates should the schedule changes warrant. I also reserve the right to give unannounced quizzes in class or to make short assignments for the next class period with no advance notice.

6. All assignments must be turned in to be eligible for a passing grade in this course. No student will be allowed to pass without having turned in every assignment.

Essays

7. Essays are due in class as indicated on the syllabus. No papers will be accepted under my door, in my mailbox, under my office door, or electronically except in the event of extreme circumstances which must be approved by me in advance of the due date. I will accept papers only from students who are present in class on the date on which the paper is due; I will not accept papers submitted by proxy. Late papers will not be accepted except in extreme circumstances which must also be approved by me in advance of the date on which the paper is due.

You are responsible for keeping a backup copy of each writing assignment for the course. In the unlikely event that I misplace your essay, I will ask you for another copy as soon as I realize that I need it. If you cannot provide a copy of any assignment to me upon request, you will forfeit your entire grade for that assignment.

Courtesy

8. Turn off all cell phones during class time unless I have approved their continued activation in advance. If you leave the classroom to answer a cell phone call, do not return.

9. Learning happens when done in an environment in which everyone feels free to express themselves openly without fear of ridicule or recrimination. I will not tolerate any disrespect of other students or their viewpoints during class.

Disabilities

10. I am happy to make reasonable accommodations to people with **documented** disabilities. Please consult the appropriate College administrators before coming to see me. Once you have done so, please discuss your particular needs with me as soon as possible.

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Evaluation of Student Presentations

1. How well does the presenter describe the basic events of disaster? Summarize them based on listening to the presentation.
2. How well does the presenter analyze responses to the disaster? Summarize the presenter's analysis based on listening to the presentation.
3. How well does the presenter analyze how the disaster is remembered? Summarize the presenter's analysis based on listening to the presentation.
4. How well does the presenter interpret the significance of the disaster within the historical/cultural context? Summarize the presenter's interpretation based on listening to the presentation.
5. How does the presenter incorporate at least 6 pieces of visual evidence (photographs, video, paintings, illustrations, etc.) as primary sources? How well does the presenter analyze those documents to support the interpretation?
6. Is the presentation (1 is lowest/5 is highest):

Clear	1	2	3	4	5
Precise	1	2	3	4	5
Logical	1	2	3	4	5
Easy to follow	1	2	3	4	5
To the point	1	2	3	4	5
Lively	1	2	3	4	5
7. What is your overall assessment of the presentation?

