Course Syllabus

A6989 HIST

Nature and Infrastructure
3 PTS
M 11 AM – 1 PM  409 AVERY HALL

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Office Hours: By appointment

Description of Class
This course pushes back against the notion of infrastructure as a technological elixir or an agent of global capital inserted into landscapes like a deus ex machina. Instead, readings approach infrastructure and nature as intertwined theoretical categories as well as material and conceptual systems upon which industrialization and modernization depended. Beginning in the 19th century, readings explore colonial aesthetics of environmental improvement; the political deployment of the sublime and the picturesque, the hygienic modernity of early 20th century architecture; landscape’s role in agricultural and industrial development in the new nation-states; ‘tropical’ modernism of the post-war period; and contemporary discourses around sustainability and ecological infrastructures.

Aims of the class
This course aims to excavate the theoretical and conceptual claims around the themes of, infrastructure, landscape, and nature that are currently emerging from the field of architectural history, while also introducing students to current discourse in South Asian art, architectural, and urban thought. Readings are drawn from multiple disciplinary frameworks and aim to provide the grounds from which to pursue research in architectural history.

Course Requirements
Attendance is mandatory and you are expected to do the required readings as well as participate in discussions in class.
Presentation of reading material for one week of the class.

Paper proposal with a bibliography

Final paper.

**Paper Proposal and Bibliography due March 23, 2020**

A 2-page paper proposal of a topic of your choice chosen in consultation with the professor. The proposal should state what archival and primary material you plan to use in the paper. It should outline the current literature on the subject and offer possible theses or arguments that you will investigate.

**Final Paper due May 6, 2020**

**Grading:**

Class Participation: 10%

Presentation: 20%

Proposal and Bibliography: 20%

Final Paper: 50%

Students with limited experience in writing research papers or writing in academic English are strongly encouraged to seek support at the Columbia College Writing Center:


Students should adhere to standard guidelines regarding academic honesty, such as those described in the GSAS Statement on Academic Honesty, available at:

[https://gsas.columbia.edu/student-guide/research/academic-integrity-and-responsible-conduct-research](https://gsas.columbia.edu/student-guide/research/academic-integrity-and-responsible-conduct-research)

**Course Schedule**

(Subject to minor alterations)

January 27
Week 1: Introduction to the class

February 3

Week 2: Nature, snapshots


Further Reading:


February 10

Week 3: Infrastructure, interrogated

- Carse, Ashley. “Nature as Infrastructure: Making and Managing the Panama Canal Watershed.” Social Studies of Science, April 2, 2012,
February 17

Week 4: Where is the Global South?


Further Reading:


February 24

Week 5: Train and Terrain (The Construction of Colonial Publics)


Further Reading:


March 2

Week 6: The Tropics and Tropes


Further reading


March 9

Week 7: Postcolonial Developments


Further Reading:

March 16
Week 8: Spring Break

March 23
Paper proposal and bibliography due

Week 9: The Body and Self

March 30
Week 10: Expertise and Subjectivity

Further Reading:


April 6

Week 11: Flows and Inefficiencies


Further Reading


April 13

Week 12: Paper Discussions

Students will present their papers and the class will discuss the arguments and ideas that you have put forth.

April 20

Week 13: Paper Discussions
Students will present their papers and the class will discuss the arguments and ideas that you have put forth.

May 6
Final Paper Due