

American Disasters

HIST 6003 • Spring 2021

PROFESSOR: Dr. Mary Draper
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OFFICE: O'Donohoe 233
OFFICE HOURS: MWF – 9am to 10am
MW – 1pm to 2pm

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

What are “disasters” and how do historians study them? How do disasters challenge our understanding of the relationship between the environmental, cultural, and social? Just how “natural” are natural disasters? This semester, we will grapple with these questions and more as we consider various events in American history that we might label as “disasters” from Columbus’s arrival in 1492 to Hurricane Katrina in 2005. As we study these moments, we will consider disasters as lived experiences, cultural constructions, and man-made events. We will analyze the preconditions of disasters, responses to them, memories of them, and preparations for them. By the end of the semester, we will have a better understanding of how various disasters have shaped and been shaped by social, cultural, and political contexts (including our own). Moreover, we will better understand how residents of North Texas have prepared for, responded to, created, and mitigated disasters.

OBJECTIVES:

By thoughtfully engaging with course materials and completing assignments, you will be able to:

- Contextualize the long history of American disasters, paying close attention to social, cultural, and political forces.
- Interpret a wide range of sources (both secondary and primary) that chronicle local and national disasters.
- Critique the methodologies of secondary sources and the perspectives of primary sources.
- Conduct archival research, synthesis research into accessible guides, and draft exhibit text.
- Write thoughtfully for diverse audiences, from fellow graduate students to museum visitors.

READINGS:

Over the course of the semester, you will read six books as well as dozens of chapters and articles (PDFs available on D2L). The books are as follows:

- Sam White, *A Cold Welcome: The Little Ice Age and Europe’s Encounter with North America* (Harvard, 2017)
- Elizabeth Fenn, *Pox Americana: The Great Smallpox Epidemic of 1775-1782* (Hill & Wang, 2001)
- Andrew Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison: An Environmental History, 1750-1920* (Cambridge, 2000) **Available [online](#) through Moffett**

- Donald Worster, *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s* (Oxford, 1979)
- ~~Peter J. Thuesen, *Tornado God: American Religion and Violent Weather* (Oxford, 2020)~~
- Andy Horowitz, *Katrina: A History, 1915-2015* (Harvard, 2020)

ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING:

Your grade for this course is based on the following percentages:

Class Participation and Readings:

Attendance and Participation:	10%
Discussion Leader:	5%
Weekly Responses:	15%

Local History Project:

Annotated Research Guide:	15%
Create Your Own Exhibit:	15%

Final Paper:

Topic Proposal (Final Paper):	5%
7-10 page Excerpt (Final Paper):	5%
Peer Review of Excerpt:	5%
Final Research Paper (15-20 pgs):	25%

GRADING SCALE: A = 100-90; B = 89-80; C = 79-70; D = 69-60, F = 59 and below

ASSIGNMENTS: Please note that all papers and assignments will due online to D2L, but you're welcome to turn in a hard copy if you prefer hand-written feedback.

Class Participation and Readings:

- **Attendance and Participation (10%):** All of our classes will be discussion-based. To succeed in this class, you need to prepare for and participate in class discussion. Come ready to talk about the readings, having thought about the posted questions and developed questions of your own. If you have perfect attendance but never speak, your discussion grade cannot be higher than a C. Likewise, if you do not attend class, your discussion grade will suffer. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of class. You will be given one unexcused absence. Your grade will drop one letter grade with subsequent absences.
- **Discussion Leader (5%):** One week, you will lead a portion of the in-class discussion. To do this, you will develop questions, identify passages for close reading, and/or locate primary sources for the seminar to analyze. You're welcome to meet with me brainstorm how to lead your discussion.

- **Weekly Responses (15%):** Each week, you will come to class with a response to the readings. These responses can take several forms:
 - You can write a 1-2 page (double-spaced) response to one of the discussion questions posted on D2L.
 - You can locate a primary source related to the readings/theme. Please e-mail me a copy of the source before class so that I can make copies and distribute. Come prepared to discuss the source and lead the class through an analysis of it.
 - You can write a 1-2 page (double-spaced) reflection on how the readings of the week change how you would teach an event/time period.
 - You can write a 1-2 page (double-spaced) reflection on how the readings of the week challenge your understanding of an event/theme/era.

You must vary what you do throughout the semester. You can have no more than three weeks when you identify/circulate a source. You do not need to submit a response on the week that you lead discussion.

Local History Project (due March 15):

- **Annotated Research Guide (15%):** This semester, we'll be completing a local history project. This assignment will be completed with one other member of the class. You will work together to create an annotated research guide that identifies primary and secondary sources related to a local disaster. At the end of the semester, your research guides will be donated to the Museum of North Texas History and the Wichita County Archives. See the instruction sheet on D2L for more information.
- **Create Your Own Exhibit (15%):** As you work on your Annotated Research Guide, you will come across an array of primary sources. Your task is to identify five to seven sources that tell the story of your event. You will then draft exhibit text for each source. See the instruction sheet on D2L for more information. (Note: This will be done individually.)

Final Paper (due April 28):

- **Topic Proposal and Annotated Bibliography (5%):** You will be writing a 15-20 page research paper on a disaster of your choice. For this assignment, please write a two- to three-page essay that outlines your research topic, identifies the question you want to answer, and explains why you want to answer it. Your proposal should also include an overview of the primary and secondary sources your plan to use. See the instruction sheet on D2L for more information. *This is due Feb. 15.*
- **7-10 page Excerpt of Final paper (5%):** You will circulate a 7-10 page excerpt of your final paper for peer review. This will allow you to receive feedback before completing your final draft. *This is due by noon on Friday, April 2.*
- **Peer Review of Excerpt (5%):** You will provide feedback on another class member's excerpt. See the instruction sheet on D2L for more information. *This due on April 5.*

- **Final Research Paper of 15-20 pages (15%):** You will produce a polished research paper based on primary source research that is situated within the relevant literature. If relevant, this paper can form the basis of one your master's thesis chapters.

ATTENDANCE AND CLASS MEETINGS IN THE AGE OF COVID: Unfortunately, we are living in uncertain times. As a result, I promise to be flexible and patient with you all in the coming semester. If you need an extension on an assignment, another accommodation, or anything else, please let me know. We'll work together to make a plan that fits your needs. Because this class is currently designated as Face to Face (F2F), it will meet in its regularly scheduled rooms but will utilize social distancing. I will also "livestream" via Zoom on D2L.

Lastly, **do not come to class if you are feeling under the weather or have been exposed to COVID.** No exceptions. Should you feel up to it, you can tune into the livestream. Most importantly, stay safe, stay healthy, and follow the MSU mask policies. The mask policy in my classroom and my office is the same as MSU's mask policies. This means you will wear your mask whenever you are attending class in-person or visiting my office hours.

ACCOMMODATIONS: Students should visit the [DSS webpage for current students](#). If you have never applied for accommodations before you may qualify for them under the vulnerable population designation. The application may be [downloaded](#) or [completed online](#). Once an accommodations letter is provided students will discuss their specific accommodation needs with their professor(s). If a student is unsure if a condition is covered by the ADA or Section 504, and they desire COVID-19 accommodations, they should complete the [Request for COVID Consultation Form](#).

ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT POLICY: *"As an MSU Student, I pledge not to lie, cheat, steal, or help anyone else do so."* Academic misconduct—cheating, collusion, plagiarism, etc.—will not be tolerated and will receive an F. For example, "cutting and pasting" from any internet source or poorly paraphrasing (i.e. changing a few words with the synonym function) without citing that source is plagiarism. It is unacceptable.

DROP DATE: Last Day to drop with a grade of "W" is April 23, 2020. It is the student's responsibility to visit with their academic advisor prior to withdrawing from a class.

COMPUTER REQUIREMENTS: This class uses D2L. You will find readings, submit papers, and livestream class through D2L. It is your responsibility to have (or have access to) a working computer in this class. Computers are available on campus in various areas of the buildings.

NOTICE: Changes in the course syllabus, procedure, assignments, and schedule may be made at the discretion of the instructor. Look on D2L for any relevant announcements.

E-mail me (mary.draper@msutexas.edu) or visit me during office hours if you have any questions.

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WEEK 1	
January 11	<p>Before class: <i>Finish Reading:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Kathryn Schulz, “The Really Big One,” <i>The New Yorker</i>, July 20, 2015. - Jonathan Bergman, “Disaster: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” <i>History Compass</i> 6:3 (2008): 934-946. - Theodore Steinberg, “What is a Natural Disaster?” <i>Literature and Medicine</i> Vol. 15, No. 1 (Spring 1996): 33-46. - Ted Steinberg, <i>Acts of God: The Unnatural History of Natural Disasters in America</i> (Oxford: 2000), xvii-xxv, <p>In-class:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review syllabus, assignments for semester - Meeting with Madeleine Calcote, Director of the Museum of North Texas History - Discussion of assigned readings (see above) - Sign-up for Discussion Leader <p>Assignments: <i>Reading:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Begin Sam White’s <i>A Cold Welcome</i>
WEEK 2	
January 18	<p>**No class on Monday, January 18**</p> <p>Assignments: <i>Reading:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Complete reading for January 25 meeting
WEEK 3	
<p><i>Climate History</i></p> <p>January 25</p>	<p>Before class: <i>Finish Reading:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sam White’s <i>A Cold Welcome</i> (see discussion questions on D2L) - Karen Ordahl Kupperman, “The Puzzle of the American Climate in the Early Colonial Period,” <i>The American Historical Review</i> 87:5 (Dec. 1982): 1261-1289. - Thomas Wickman, “‘Winters Embittered with Hardships’: Severe Cold, Wabanaki Power, and English Adjustments, 1690-1710,” <i>William and Mary Quarterly</i> 72:1 (Jan. 2015): 57-98. <p><i>Other:</i></p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Complete Response #1 - Brainstorm potential final paper topics & local history projects; Come to class with a list of at least 3 potential topics. <p>In class:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discussion of Sam White’s <i>A Cold Welcome</i>; Kupperman & Wickman articles - Assign local history projects (and partners) - Introduction to local archives and online databases for local history <p>Assignments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Begin Elizabeth Fenn’s <i>Pox Americana</i> - Begin working on local history project, identifying sources
<p>WEEK 4 <i>“Acts of God” in the Atlantic World</i></p> <p>February 1</p>	<p>Before class: <i>Finish Reading:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Encountering Hurricanes” and “A Conspiracy of Winds” in Matthew Mulcahy <i>Hurricanes and Society in the British Greater Caribbean</i> (JHU Press, 2006), 10-64. - Whitney Barlow Robles, "Atlantic Disaster: Boston Responds to the Cape Ann Earthquake of 1755," <i>New England Quarterly</i>, 90 (2017): 7-35. <p><i>Other:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Complete Response #2 - Begin brainstorming final research paper topics <p>In class:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discussion of Mulcahy chapters & Robles article - Final Research Paper Brainstorming Session <p>Assignments: <i>Reading:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continue Elizabeth Fenn’s <i>Pox Americana</i> - Continue working on local history project, identifying sources
<p>WEEK 5 <i>The Age of Revolutions</i></p> <p>February 8</p>	<p>Before class: <i>Finish Reading:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Elizabeth Fenn’s <i>Pox Americana</i> - Richard B. Sheridan, “The Crisis of Slave Subsistence in the British West Indies during and after the America Revolution,” <i>William and Mary Quarterly</i> 33:4 (Oct. 1976): 615-641. <p><i>Other:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Complete Response #3 - Identify one primary or secondary source relating to your local history project. Bring a copy (or picture) of that source to class. <p>In class:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discussion Elizabeth Fenn’s <i>Pox Americana</i>; Sheridan article - In-class activity with primary/secondary sources relating to local history project <p>Assignments: Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Begin Andrew Isenberg’s <i>The Destruction of the Bison</i> - Draft Topic Proposal
<p>WEEK 6 <i>The New United States</i> February 15</p>	<p>Before class: Finish Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Eve Kornfeld, "Crisis in the Capital: The Cultural Significance of Philadelphia's Great Yellow Fever Epidemic," <i>Pennsylvania History</i>, 51 (1984): 189-205. - Excerpts from Conevery Bolton Valencius, <i>The Lost History of the New Madrid Earthquakes</i> (UChicago, 2013). <p>Other:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Complete Response #4 - Submit Topic Proposal for Final Research Paper <p>In class:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discussion of Kornfeld article and Valencius chapters <p>Assignments: Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continue Andrew Isenberg’s <i>The Destruction of the Bison</i> - Draft essay for Annotated Research Guide
<p>WEEK 7 <i>The Tragedy of the Commons?</i> February 22</p>	<p>Before class: Finish Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Andrew Isenberg’s <i>The Destruction of the Bison</i> - W. Jeffrey Bolster, “Putting the Ocean in Atlantic History: Maritime Communities and Marine Ecology in Northwest Atlantic, 1500-1800,” <i>The American Historical Review</i> 113:1 (Feb. 2008), 19-47. <p>Other:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Complete Response #5 - Complete a draft of one of the essays for your Annotated Research Guide. Bring a hard-copy to class. <p>In class:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discussion of Isenberg’s <i>The Destruction of the Bison</i>; Bolster article. - Workshopping of Drafts - How to Write Exhibit Text <p>Assignments: Reading:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Begin Donald Worster's <i>Dust Bowl</i>
WEEK 8 <i>Progressive America</i> March 1	<p>Before class:</p> <p><i>Finish Reading:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Michael Willrich, "'The Least Vaccinated of Any Civilized Country': Personal Liberty and Public Health in the Progressive Era," <i>Journal of Policy History</i>, 20 (2008): 76-93. - Excerpts from Timothy Egan, <i>The Big Burn: Teddy Roosevelt and the Fire that Saved America</i> (Mariner, 2010). - Caroline Grego, "Black Autonomy, Red Cross Recovery, and White Backlash after the Great Sea Island Storm of 1893," <i>Journal of Southern History</i> 85:4 (Nov. 2019):803-840. <p><i>Other:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Complete Response #6 <p>In class:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discussion of Willrich, Egan, and Grego articles <p>Assignments:</p> <p><i>Reading:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continue Donald Worster's <i>Dust Bowl</i> - Draft exhibit text
WEEK 9 <i>Drought</i> March 8	<p>Before class:</p> <p><i>Finish Reading:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Donald Worster's <i>Dust Bowl</i> - William Cronon, "A Place for Stories: Nature, History and Narrative," <i>The Journal of American History</i>, Vol. 78, No. 4 (March 1992), pp. 1347-1376 - Excerpts of Marsha Weisiger, <i>Dreaming of Sheep in Navajo Country</i> (UWashington, 2011). <p><i>Other:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Complete Response #7 - Come to class with draft exhibit text for your Create Your Own Exhibit Project. <p>In class:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discussion of Donald Worster's <i>Dust Bowl</i>; Cronon article, Weisiger excerpt. - Watch "The Plow the Broke the Plains" (~25 minutes) - Workshopping of Exhibit Text. <p>Assignments:</p> <p><i>Reading:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Begin Andy Horowitz's <i>Katrina</i> - Prepare for in-class presentations on local history project

<p>WEEK 10 <i>Local History Presentations</i></p> <p>March 15</p>	<p>Before class: <i>Other:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Submit Annotated Research Guide - Submit Create Your Own Exhibit - Schedule a meeting with Dr. Draper re: final research paper (to take place sometime this week) <p>In class:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presentations of Local History Project <p>Assignments: <i>Reading:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continue Andy Horowitz's <i>Katrina</i>
<p>WEEK 11 <i>Race & Class</i></p> <p>March 22</p>	<p>Before class:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Finish Andy Horowitz's <i>Katrina</i> - Richard M. Mizelle, Jr., "Making Race Visible in the Disaster Archive," <i>The American Historian</i> (Feb. 2018): 8-12. <p><i>Other:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Complete Response #8 <p>In class:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discussion of Andy Horowitz's <i>Katrina</i> <p>Assignments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Work on research paper.
<p>WEEK 12 <i>No Class</i></p> <p>March 29</p>	<p>** No class on Monday, March 29**</p> <p>To do:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Finish the 7-10 page excerpt of your research paper, submit to Dr. Draper by noon on Friday, April 2 - Look for an email on Friday afternoon with peer review assignments - Complete Peer Review by class on Monday, April 5
<p>WEEK 13 <i>Peer Review</i></p> <p>April 5</p>	<p>Before class:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Complete Peer Review <p>In class:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Workshopping of research paper excerpt <p>Assignments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continue working on research paper.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prepare for in-class presentations. Presentations should be 10-15 minutes long.
WEEK 14 <i>Presentations</i> April 12	<p>Before class:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prepare for in-class presentations. Presentations should be 10-15 minutes long. <p>In class:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Final Research Paper Presentations <p>Assignments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continue working on research paper. - Prepare for in-class presentations. Presentations should be 10-15 minutes long.
WEEK 15 <i>Presentations</i> April 19	<p>Before class:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prepare for in-class presentations. Presentations should be 10-15 minutes long. <p>In class:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Final Research Paper Presentations <p>Assignments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Finish final draft of research paper. Submit to Dr. Draper by Wednesday, April 28
FINALS WEEK	<i>Final draft of paper due Wednesday April 28.</i>

*** Readings, assignments, and schedule subject to change ***