

HIST 380.02: Disasters!

Eng 1 Room 119

MW 1:50-3:05pm

Fall 2012

Professor Hicks

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Office: Siegel 206

Office Hours: Wednesday 3:15-4:15pm (Please email me for an appointment.)

*“There's no disaster that can't become a blessing,*

*and no blessing that can't become a disaster.”*

*--Richard Bach*

**Course Description:**

Disasters have played a key role in constructing the modern world. This course introduces you to the history of key social, economic, and technological changes in industrializing nations by focusing on episodes and incidents that have created paradigm shifts—disjunctures between how things were done before them, and how things were done after. During the semester we will investigate the contexts of different historical disasters to analyze how disasters catalyze change.

We will be particularly concerned with ascertaining how disasters produce regulatory and legislative changes on a national and even global scale. We will discuss the technological and social changes effected by disasters in the realms of power production, environmental stewardship, manufacturing, transportation, infrastructure, public health, reproduction, food production, and more.

Since our understanding of what constitutes a disaster is constructed through public discourse and popular media, this class will employ a variety of media and learning approaches. In addition to discussion, lecture, and required readings, you will watch documentaries, research newspaper articles, and participate in constructing a public (online) resource interpreting particular disasters’ roles in history.

**Readings** must be completed for the day that they are listed. There may be unannounced reading

quizzes to ensure that everyone is keeping up. They may be written or oral. Readings will be on reserve on our Blackboard site if they are marked with an (R), or linked from the syllabus.

Your course grade will be broken down as follows:

Attendance and participation: 20%

Reading quizzes, class exercises, article searches: 20%

Blog comment assignments (in lieu of papers): 20%

Midterm Exam: 20%

Final Exam: 20%

**Resources** that you will be expected to use in this class include the databases linked from Galvin Library’s History Research Guide: <http://guides.library.iit.edu/content.php?pid=114040&sid=986140>. A key resource we will be using for class assignments is the Historical London Times Newspaper database. Familiarize yourself with it as soon as possible: <http://ezproxy.gl.iit.edu/login?url=http://find.galegroup.com/ttda/start.do?userGroupName=chic7029>

Contact John Dorr, the humanities librarian for further help with these resources. Google is not an academic resource, and I do not expect you to use it as a panacea for your class assignments or studies. Same goes for Wikipedia: I hope we can all agree that reading an online encyclopedia (of dubious credibility) is not adequate for college level humanities research.

You can get help with improving your writing at the **Humanities Department Writing Center** located in

Siegel 232-233. If English is not your first language, ask for James Dabbert or Gail Lehman: <http://www.iit.edu/csl/hum/resources/writing_center.shtml>

**Reasonable accommodations will be made for students with verified disabilities**. In order to access these resources or get special provisions in class you must register with Aggie Niemiec [aniemiec@iit.edu](mailto:aniemiec@iit.edu) in the Disability Service Office at the **beginning of the semester** and you must **speak with me at the beginning of the semester** as well so we can plan for the needed accommodations.

**Cheating, plagiarism, and academic dishonesty** are serious offenses and will not be tolerated. They will result in a failing grade as well as sanctions from the university. If you are in doubt about what constitutes plagiarism or academic dishonesty, re-read the code of student conduct and sections on academic dishonesty in the student handbook. If you are still confused, make an appointment to speak with me during my office hours **before** you pass in an assignment. Remember that it is never appropriate to use someone’s ideas or words without giving them credit, and that copying text from sources or peers--in addition to being plagiarism and cheating--short-circuits the learning process and is the exact opposite of what I want to see.

**Course Schedule:**

M Aug 20 Introduction

Useful Disasters, Useless Disasters: Or, What do Tulips and Mortgage-Backed Securities have in common?

Excerpts from *Leonardo to the Internet*

**Urban Disasters: Substandard Infrastructure**

W Aug 22 London Cholera, the Birth of Epidemiology, and the Rise of Sewer Engineering and Water Management

Excerpts from Johnson, *The Ghost Map* (40 pp.)

M Aug 27 London Cholera: Working With Historical Documents

Read second batch of excerpts from The Ghost Map (9 pp.)

In anticipation of today’s class, use what you learned last class to search the historical London *Times* database (available through the library) and bring in the 4 most important or interesting articles you find. Be sure you can explain the historical significance of the articles you chose to your classmates, with whom you will work in small groups to construct your own history of this public health disaster.

The London *Times* database is linked from the library’s history research guide (under the Articles & Databases tab): <http://guides.library.iit.edu/history>

W Aug 29 The Great Chicago Fire: Disasters as Simulacra (or “If a disaster happens and nobody pays attention, does it matter?”)

Pauly, “The Great Chicago Fire as a National Event”(15 pp.)

M Sept 3 LABOR DAY—NO CLASS

W Sept 5 Engineering Mistakes: The 1907 Quebec Bridge Collapse

Kranakis, “Organizational Culture and the Quebec Bridge Collapse” (32 pp.) (R)

**Public Health Disasters I: Disease**

M Sept 10 Striking Down Children: Polio, Paranoia, and Vaccination

Watch in class: *Paralyzing Fear: The Story of Polio in America*

Read and print out timeline from Smithsonian, annotate while watching film:  
<http://americanhistory.si.edu/polio/timeline/index.htm>

**FIRST BLOG COMMENT DUE by 10 am Sept. 11th (no credit given for comments submitted late)**

W Sept 12 Could It Happen Again? Vaccine Controversies, Resistors, and Herd Immunity

Selected NYT articles (R)

Today we’ll have a class debate that looks at a contemporary issue through the lens of the historical case study we watched in *Paralyzing Fear*

**Public Health Disasters II: Understanding Power and Weapon Production**

M Sept 17 Dangers of the Industrial West: London Fog

Article Exercise in Class

W Sept 19 The London Fog (continued)

Thorsheim, “Interpreting the London Fog Disaster of 1952” (14 pp.)

Stradling and Thorsheim “Smoke of Great Cities” (22 pp.)

M Sept 24 Windscale: Nuclear Lies

Watch Windscale documentary in class

Editorial, “Windscale Reactor Accident 50 Years On” (4 pp.)

For next time, you will find historical news articles on the Windscale disaster from 1950s-70s. In class next time you will compare them with what we know today, and look at the speed with which information was (and wasn’t) made available.

W Sept 26 Bring in articles you found in London *Times* on Windscale for class exercise described above.

**Too Much of a Good Thing**

M Oct 1 Environmental Fears

Excerpts from Carson, *Silent Spring*

# NYT article, 2007 “Justices Say E.P.A. Has Power to Act on Harmful Gases”: <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/03/washington/03scotus.html?pagewanted=all>

Read case facts of MA v. EPA: <http://www.oyez.org/cases/2000-2009/2006/2006_05_1120/>

and court opinion (6 pp.): <http://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/549/05-1120/>

W Oct 3 Urban Renewal

Watch *The Pruitt-Igoe Myth* documentary in class

Read Austen, “The Last Tower”: <http://harpers.org/archive/2012/05/0083897>

**SECOND BLOG COMMENT DUE by 10 am Oct. 4 (no credit given for comments submitted late)**

M Oct 8 FALL BREAK—NO CLASS

**W Oct 10 MIDTERM EXAM**

M Oct 15 Lessons of Pruitt-Igoe, Public Housing Today

Selected Articles on Public Housing (R)

**Consumer and Worker Protection**

W Oct 17 Consumers, Collectives, and Car Safety

Excerpts from Nader, *Unsafe at Any Speed* (R)

M Oct 22 Who Cleans Up the Mess?

Bhopal and Union Carbide

From the perspective of humanitarian group in the UK: <http://www.bhopal.org>

From Union Carbide’s perspective: <http://www.bhopal.com>

(Also read Union Carbide’s historical timeline: <http://www.unioncarbide.com/history>)

From the perspective of local government: <http://www.mp.gov.in/bgtrrdmp/default.htm>

W Oct 24 The Perils and Necessities of Real-Life Testing I: Nuclear Regulation

Watch in class Battle of Chernobyl documentary (1 hr 32 min): <http://topdocumentaryfilms.com/the-battle-of-chernobyl/>

Read selected articles on Chernobyl and its legacy (R)

**THIRD BLOG COMMENT DUE by 10 am Oct 25th (no credit given for comments submitted late)**

M Oct 29 The Perils and Necessities of Real-Life Testing II: Food and Drug Administration

*Wired* Article on IUDs: <http://www.wired.com/magazine/2011/07/ff_iud/>

**Devils in the Details: Disasters of Organization**

W Oct 31 Challenger Disaster

Feynman appendix: <http://science.ksc.nasa.gov/shuttle/missions/51-l/docs/rogers-commission/Appendix-F.txt>

NASA documents: <http://history.nasa.gov/rogersrep/v6exsumm.htm>

M Nov 5 Transnational Recycling, Waste, and Labor

Watch in class: *Shipbreakers* of Alang documentary

Read Articles from Baltimore Sun on Pulitzer website:

<http://www.pulitzer.org/works/1998-Investigative-Reporting>

W Nov 7 Transnational Recycling, Waste, and Labor (cont.)

Articles on Guangdong Recycling and Foxconn (R)

M Nov 12 Finance and Markets: Mortgage-Backed Securities and Complex Financial Tools

Before coming to class, listen to NPR podcast “The Giant Pool of Money” (1 hr): <http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/355/the-giant-pool-of-money>

Read Ullman, “Errant Code? It’s Not Just a Bug” (Knight Capital): <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/09/opinion/after-knight-capital-new-code-for-trades.html?_r=1&hp>

**FOURTH BLOG COMMENT DUE by 10 am Nov 13th (no credit given for comments submitted late)**

**Disasters-in-Progress(?)**

W Nov 14 Food Supply and Waste

Watch in Class: *DIVE!* Documentary

Selected articles on dumpster diving (R)

M Nov 19 Food Supply (cont.)

In-class debate on food supply logistics

Selected articles on GM crops (R)

W Nov 21 THANKSGIVING BREAK—NO CLASS

M Nov 26 Fukushima and Deepwater Horizon

Selected articles on Fukushima (R)

NOAA archive: <http://response.restoration.noaa.gov/deepwaterhorizon>

NOAA current efforts: <http://www.gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov/>

W Nov 28 Summation

**Final Exam Date TBA (Check University Final Exam Schedule for more details)**