

Vanished

Histories of Extinction from the Mammoth to Extinction Rebellion

Level 3 Option (HIST32341)

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We're so familiar with extinction that it is hard to imagine a world where extinction is not considered as a natural process. Yet, extinction is a modern scientific idea. Originally, well-known losses, such as the dodo, were attributed to human actions. In the later eighteenth century, research on fossils established a new consensus that extinction was ubiquitous in life's history, and in the rise and fall of peoples, races, and empires. Ideas of animal extinction were quickly applied to humans with claims that colonised peoples were dying out in the face of settler colonialism, but these claims often tried to naturalise genocide and profound colonial violence. Twentieth-century ecology and conservation movements created a new awareness of anthropogenically-induced species loss. In the present day, scientists are racing to achieve de-extinction of lost species including the dodo, passenger pigeon, mammoth, and thylacine. Meanwhile, we are witnessing a new era of activism to challenge a crisis that many people are calling the Sixth Mass Extinction. This interdisciplinary module will be a broad introduction to the history of ideas about extinction, and their relevance to histories of histories of race, empire, settler colonialism, genocide, animal studies, environment and the Anthropocene. In doing so, we will also explore how histories of extinction are relevant to many fights for justice in the past and the present day.

Indicative Seminar Topics

Each seminar will examine a theme or case study relating to extinction, and the broader themes of the course. Topics are subject to change, but an indicative list of topics follows:

- What is endangerment or extinction?
- Colonial genocides and 'doomed races'
- Prehistoric human extinctions
- Indigenous dispossession and conservation
- Mass extinction in the cold war
- Defining and tracking endangerment
- De-extinction and the ethics of being
- Displaying and decolonising extinction
- Extinction activism
- Historians in and of the Anthropocene

Further Details

Possible Dissertation Topics

This is a new course, so there are no previous examples of dissertations, however there are many possible dissertation themes. The most obvious would be to explore specific case studies focused on particular endangered/extinct kinds. However, it would also be possible to explore how humans make meaning from extinction through display, protest, collecting, and decolonising theories of extinction. The most important consideration will be the nature of your primary sources.

Assessment

1500 word Primary Source Analysis (35%) and 3000 word essay (65%)

Recommended Reading

If you're interested in exploring some indicative texts, the following will help. It would probably be best to start with Sepkoski or Kolbert, which are both accessible introductions.

- David Sepkoski, *Catastrophic Thinking: Extinction and the Value of Diversity from Darwin to the Anthropocene* (2020)
- Elizabeth Kolbert, *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* (2014)
- Ursula Heise, *Imagining Extinction: The Cultural Meanings of Endangered Species* (2016)
- Mark Barrow, *Nature's Ghosts: Confronting Extinction from the Age of Jefferson to the Age of Ecology* (2009)
- Kyle Whyte, 'Settler Colonialism, Ecology, and Environmental Justice, *Environment and Society* 9 (2018): 125-144
- Juno Salazar Parreñas, *Decolonizing Extinction: The Work of Care in Orangutan Rehabilitation* (2018)
- Pratik Chakrabarti, *Inscriptions of Nature: Geology and the Naturalization of Antiquity* (2020)
- Dolly Jørgensen, *Recovering Lost Species in the Modern Age: Histories of Longing and Belonging* (2019)
- Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses," *Critical Inquiry* 35, (2009): 197–222

Tutor and Consultation Hour

Professor Qureshi specialises in histories of race, science, and empire with a very broad range of expertise in modern British history including histories of collecting and display, anthropology, museums, Black and South Asian British history, with a particular interest in intersectional feminist, decolonial, and anti-racist perspectives.

Professor Qureshi will be joining the University of Manchester in September so has limited availability before then. However, she will be available via zoom for one hour of consulting as follows (click for the link): [Monday 12 June, 10-11, Meeting ID: 351 123 1618, Passcode: 702035](#)