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STS.036 Technology and Nature in American History
Spring 2008

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Week 2: Colonial American Land Use
12 Feb 2008

A Brief History of Ecological Change in North America to the Eighteenth Century

1. Deep history of ecological change in North America
 - a. Geological transformations
 - i. Continental drift
 - ii. Rocky Mountain formation
 - iii. Glaciation
 - b. Debates over Paleoindian presence
 - i. Date of arrival
 - ii. Megafaunal extinction
 1. Overkill
 2. Climate change
 - iii. Native American population at contact
 - c. The “ecological Indian”
2. Native American relationships to non-human nature
 - a. Practices
 - i. Geographical and seasonal variation
 1. New England
 2. The South
 3. Great Plains
 - ii. Use of fire
 - b. Principles
 - i. Preserving species population and diversity
 - ii. Subsistence (not market) agriculture
 - iii. Symbolic value ascribed to the land
 1. Rituals, story-telling, place-naming
 2. Relation with and conception of animals
3. Exchange
 - a. Alfred Crosby’s “Columbian Exchange”
 - i. Epidemics
 - ii. A “biological revolution”
 - b. Knowledge systems and practices
 - i. The “Rice Coast”
 - c. Technologies and skills
 - i. Firearms and the “skulking way of war”
 - ii. The American axe
 - d. Cultural beliefs and practices
 - i. Property rights
 - ii. Relationship between human and non-human nature
 - e. Commodity exchange
 - i. Fur
 - ii. Forests

For further reading

Alfred Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing Co., 1972).

Shepard Krech, *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999).

Theodore Steinberg, *Down to Earth: Nature's Role in American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).