



Candido Portinari, 'Entry into the Forest', Hispanic Reading Room, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

HIU12041 **Earthly pasts: an introduction to environmental histories**

Co-ordinator **Diogo De Carvalho Cabral**

Credits **5 ECTS**

Semester **Hilary Term**

Assessment A 1,000-1,500-word historiographical review essay (40%), and a 2,000-word end-of-term essay (60%).

Description This module will introduce students to the crux of environmental histories: the material world. In one way or another, environmental historians are always tracing what Ellen Stroud called the 'dirt', i.e. the material stuff of human life. Even when interested in ideas and ideologies – as is often the case – environmental historians situate power, cognition and culture within biophysical ecologies. From considering historical sources as bodies (or surviving material structures) to discussing the role of climate and spatial location as shapers and drivers of history, this module will present environmental history as a specific approach to the past, one that allows a different view of traditional topics such as economies and political systems. A core concern is to make students familiar and comfortable with the idea that the world's material features – soils, landforms, rivers, climates, flora, fauna and the very body of humans – are as much historical as any lofty philosophical or political principle, thus preparing them to engage with the wealth of environmental history modules offered later in the History course. Most importantly, it will equip students with key critical-thinking tools, enabling them to participate in contemporary societal discussions about climate change and the environmental crisis from a distinctively and much-needed historical perspective.