

The Cold War: An Environmental History

34. Minisymposium des Zentrums für Umweltgeschichte IFF - Lecture

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The Cold War (1945-91) is remembered as a global political struggle featuring the USA and the USSR, one that threatened to plunge the world into catastrophic war. But it was also an ecological process. The superpowers and their allies felt anxieties and entertained ambitions that drove them to try to harness nature to the fullest. While in the deeper past states often tried to do the same thing, after 1945 the capacity to control nature seemed almost unlimited, inspiring more grandiose agendas to bend nature to political purposes. This lecture focuses on the Green Revolution in agriculture, on transportation infrastructure, and on nuclear weapons programs, all seen as Cold War projects with widespread and enduring environmental consequences.

J. R. McNeill has taught at Georgetown University since 1985 as professor of history, as well as being holder of the Cinco Hermanos Chair in Environmental and International Affairs and University Professor. He is the Interim Director of Georgetown's Mortara Center for International Studies and currently serves as President of the American Society for Environmental History. His books include 'The Mountains of the Mediterranean World' (Cambridge 1992), 'Something New Under the Sun' (2000)(dt. Blue Planet, Campus, 2003), The Human Web (2003), and Mosquito Empires (Cambridge 2010).

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