

## **HIST 200. Anthropocene: The History of Earth Under Human Dominion**

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Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday, 4:00-5:00 PM, 617B ICC

**Course Website:** [Hist200.weebly.com](http://Hist200.weebly.com)



Scholars in many disciplines have reached a startling conclusion: Earth has entered a new geological epoch in which its environment is shaped by the actions of one species: us. When did this “anthropocene” start? How has it transformed our species, and the natural world we inhabit? Where is it all headed? In this course, we will explore these questions through the lens of environmental history.

We will examine how Earth’s environment comes to change in ways that (usually) sustain life, and then investigate what it means to pursue interdisciplinary environmental history. We will measure anthropological, archaeological, and scientific evidence for ancient connections between human activities and environmental change on a global scale. We will explore how modern humanity has transformed environments all around the world and even in space, and we will figure out how scholars can track these changes.

### **Course Goals:**

Like other courses offered by Georgetown University’s Department of History, this course will help you:

1. Gain a better appreciation of the nature and practice of history as a discipline, and as the study, based on evidence, of human experiences, interactions, and relationships as they change over time.
2. Learn to appreciate that history does not consist of a simple succession of self-evident facts, and that evidence-based interpretation and analysis are central to all historical work.
3. Hone reading, writing, and oral communication skills.
4. Develop your ability to think historically: to situate events and developments in their historical context for the purpose of critical analysis.
5. Expand your ability to engage with complex causal analysis, and to articulate arguments that integrate supporting evidence and analytical commentary.
6. Learn to view the world from perspectives other than your own.

This course in particular will also help you:

1. Appreciate the significance and deep context of modern environmental crises.
2. Understand complex relationships between environmental changes and humanity.
3. Broaden your appreciation for diverse scholarly disciplines, and their distinct ways of deciphering the past.

### **Breakdown:**

Participation:	20%
Snapshot Assignment:	15%
Primary Source Essay:	35%
Exam:	30%



### **Evaluation:**

#### Participation:

Our second class of every week will usually take the form of a discussion seminar. You will earn participation marks for the quantity and especially the quality of your comments. We will also break into groups for debates and primary source exercises. I will evaluate your group participation. I strongly encourage you to keep notes from your readings. You should aim for at least two pages of single-spaced notes per week.

#### Snapshot Assignment:

DUE DATE: 3 MARCH 2016

Choose one picture from the [“Snapshots”](#) section of our course website. Alternatively, you may take a photograph of something in or around Washington, D. C.

Now, in a four-page essay, explain how the picture illustrates – or does not illustrate – humanity’s increasing footprint on planet Earth. Consider the following questions: what relationships between humanity and more or less natural environments are reflected in your picture? Are these relationships sustainable? How can environmental history contribute to our understanding of these relationships? How do you think they will play out in the future?

Support your paper with at least four books or articles. A scholar who is not a historian (for example, a scientist, an anthropologist, etc.) must have written at least one of your articles or books. Include a title page that features the picture you selected.

#### Primary Source Essay:

SEND ME A PROPOSAL BY: 17 MARCH 2016

DUE DATE: 19 APRIL 2016

Choose a topic relevant to the history of the anthropocene. Be as creative as possible! Next, hunt for primary and secondary sources that will let you write an essay about your topic. You can find many primary sources online, but may also wish to search through Georgetown's libraries, the National Archives, the Library of Congress, and other resources in the city. Your secondary sources should include at least six books, where one book is equivalent to two articles. A scholar who is not a historian must have written at least two of your books (or four of your articles).

Now, write me an email that briefly describes: 1) your thesis, and 2) your primary sources, and how they will support your thesis. I must receive this email by 17 March 2016.

If I approve your topic and sources, write an original, 12-page environmental history of the anthropocene. Primary sources should be central to your thesis, but your interpretation of these sources, and your investigation of their context, should be supported by secondary sources. Be sure to contextualize your thesis in light of the arguments raised in your secondary sources (we will discuss how to do this in class).

After you submit your essay, you will need to give a brief presentation that introduces: 1) your primary source, 2) your argument, 3) how other scholars have approached your source and/or topic, and 4) how you went about proving your argument. Your presentation should be eight minutes long. You will then have two minutes to answer questions from your peers. You are encouraged but not required to use PowerPoint.

Exam:

DATE: 12 MAY, 4:00-6:00 PM

You will receive an exam outline and study guide in your final class.

## **Grading Criteria:**

*Each of these criteria will be worth approximately a third of your grade:*

Clarity:

Are you using words that appropriately and formally express your meaning? Are your points sourced correctly? Do your sentences precisely express your meaning, and are they grammatically correct? Is there a clear thesis that presents an argument and outlines how that argument will be defended? Is there a coherent organization that culminates in a conclusion that references the thesis?

Research:

Are your secondary sources serious works of scholarship, and are they relevant to your argument? Do your primary sources illuminate the issue you are investigating, and to

what extent? Are those primary sources relevant to your argument, and do you present them in the context of your secondary sources? Is your interpretation of your primary sources creative but nuanced?

#### Ideas:

How creative and nuanced are your arguments? Are you merely repeating the claims of other scholars, or are you evaluating them against their colleagues, and against primary sources (where you are asked to use them)? To what extent can you build new knowledge rather than re-interpret old ideas?

#### **Required Course Texts:**

McNeill, J. R. *Something New Under the Sun: An Environmental History of the Twentieth-Century World*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000.

Oreskes, Naomi and Erik M. Conway, *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming*. New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2010.

Ruddiman, William. *Plows, Plagues, and Petroleum: How Humans Took Control of Climate*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.

#### **Notes:**

##### Academic Honesty:

Plagiarism is not just about copying someone else's writing. Any time you present ideas without correctly citing them, you are committing plagiarism. This is academia's most serious intellectual offense, and it is taken very seriously by Georgetown University.

It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with the [Georgetown University Undergraduate Honor System](#). It is my duty to refer academic misconduct - including plagiarism - to the Honor Council. If the Council decides that you have plagiarized, you will fail this class and suffer additional penalties.

##### Submitting Assignments:

Assignments are due *at the beginning of class*. Any assignment submitted after lecture begins is late. Give me a paper copy, and then send an electronic copy (in PDF format) to [Dagomar.Degroot@georgetown.edu](mailto:Dagomar.Degroot@georgetown.edu). If you do not receive a confirmation email in return, approach me in class to verify that I have received your assignment. Late assignments will receive a 5%/day penalty.

##### Extensions:

If you cannot make a deadline, you may ask me for an extension *before the deadline*. I will not grant extension requests after a deadline has passed. I will usually only grant your request in exceptional circumstances (including compassionate grounds, illness, etc.). The length of the extension granted will be judged on a case-by-case basis, and you may be asked for written verification. Contact your deans in case of absences, problems with due dates, and other problems.

Note that I am happy to coach you through an assignment if you tell me early on that you are having difficulties. Let me help you!

#### Missing Classes:

If you think that you will need to miss several classes for significant and predictable reasons (such as religious observances or University-sponsored athletic events), you must inform me of the specific circumstances and dates *at the start of the term*. I will try to accommodate requests for a reasonable number of such absences, but I cannot guarantee that you will in any case be able successfully to complete all required class work. You must therefore make sure that the details of the situation are clear to both you and me early on, so that you may have a chance to enrol in a different class if accommodation should prove impossible. If you consistently miss class, I will contact your dean.

#### The Writing Center:

Since writing is a valued part of this class, I encourage you to visit the Writing Center (at 217a Lauinger) and work with one of the Center's trained tutors. Just as I share my own writing with people I trust before making it public, you can share your writing with student peers at the Writing Center before submitting drafts for this class.

While you will always be solely responsible for the writing you submit, and the Center's tutors won't do your work for you, Writing Center tutors can talk you through any stage of your writing process, from brainstorming a thesis and organizing your thoughts to revising, editing and proofreading. It's a terrific, free service. To set up an appointment, visit <http://writingcenter.georgetown.edu>.

#### Beyond the Course:

Please know that, as a faculty member, I am committed to supporting survivors of sexual misconduct, which includes relationship violence, sexual harassment, and sexual assault. However, university policy also requires me to report any disclosures about sexual misconduct to the Title IX Coordinator, whose role is to coordinate the university's response to sexual misconduct.

Georgetown has a number of fully confidential professionals who can provide support and assistance to survivors of sexual assault and other forms of sexual misconduct. They include:

Jen Schweer, MA, LPC, Associate Director of Health Education Services for Sexual Assault Response and Prevention. Contact: (202) 687-0323, [jls242@georgetown.edu](mailto:jls242@georgetown.edu).

Erica Shirley, Trauma Specialist, Counseling and Psychiatric Services (CAPS). Contact: (202) 687-6985, [els54@georgetown.edu](mailto:els54@georgetown.edu).

More information about campus resources and reporting sexual misconduct can be found at: <http://sexualassault.georgetown.edu>.

## **Schedule:**

- *This schedule is approximate and may be changed by your professor.*
- *If possible, complete these readings in the order in which they are listed.*
- *Complete all readings by the first Tuesday of every week.*
- *We will not meet on 11 February, 25 February, and 31 March. On those days, I will ask you to listen to a podcast or watch a YouTube video that I recorded.*

## **Part I: Introductions, Definitions, and Concepts**

*Note: you have nothing to read for 14 January.*

14 January: Lecture. Introducing the course and the field. Guide to finding readings. Guide to reading readings.

19 January: Lecture. A brief history of Earth's environment.

21 January: Discussion.

### Reading:

1. Richard Monastersky, "Anthropocene: The human age." *Nature* 519 (2015): 144–147.
2. Simon L. Lewis and Mark A. Maslin, "Defining the Anthropocene." *Nature* 519 (2015): 171-180.
3. Colin N. Waters et al., "The Anthropocene is functionally and stratigraphically distinct from the Holocene." *Science* 351:6269 (2016). DOI: 10.1126/science.aad2622
4. Karl Butzer, "Anthropocene as an Evolving Paradigm." *The Holocene* 25:10 (2015): 1539–41.
5. Andreas Malm and Alf Hornborg. "The Geology of Mankind? A Critique of the Anthropocene Narrative." *The Anthropocene Review* 1:1 (2014): 62-69.

## **Part II: Premodern Anthropocenes**

26 January: Lecture. A prehistoric Anthropocene?

28 January: Discussion.

Reading:

1. William Ruddiman, *Plows, Plagues, and Petroleum*, 1-114.

2 February: Lecture. Does anthropogenic climate change have an ancient history?

4 February: Discussion.

Reading:

1. William Ruddiman, *Plows, Plagues, and Petroleum*, 115-146.
2. A. C. Roosevelt, "The Amazon and the Anthropocene: 13,000 years of human influence in a tropical rainforest." *Anthropocene* 4 (2013): 69-87.

9 February: Lecture. Premodern environmental degradation and conservation.

11 February: No class. Listen to podcast or watch YouTube video (announced in class).

Reading:

1. William Ruddiman, *Plows, Plagues, and Petroleum*, 147-214.
2. William Ruddiman, "The Early Anthropogenic Hypothesis: Challenges and Responses." *Reviews of Geophysics* 45:4 (2007). DOI:10.1029/2006RG000207.

### **Part III: Science, Industry, and Environments in a New Era**

16 February: Lecture. Industriousness, Industrialization, and the rise of science.

18 February: Discussion.

Reading:

1. J. R. McNeill, *Something New Under the Sun*, xxi-117.
2. Fredrik Albritton Jonsson, "The Industrial Revolution in the Anthropocene." *The Journal of Modern History* 84:3 (2012): 679-96.

23 February: Lecture. Environments under siege: the last decade.

25 February: No class. Listen to podcast or watch YouTube video (announced in class).

Reading:

1. J. R. McNeill, *Something New Under the Sun*, 118-266.

1 March: Lecture. Waging war in the Anthropocene.

3 March: Discussion.

Reading:

1. McNeill, J. R. *Something New Under the Sun*, 267-362.

#### **Part IV: Atoms, Evolution, and the Final Frontier**

15 March: Guest lecture (TBA).

17 March: Discussion.

##### Reading:

1. Edmund Russell, "Evolutionary History: Prospectus for a New Field." *Environmental History* 8:2 (2003): 204-228.
2. Kate Brown, "Securing the nuclear nation." *Nationalities Papers* 43:1 (2015): 8-26.
3. Andrew Kirk, "Rereading the Nature of Atomic Doom Towns." *Environmental History* 17 (2012): 635-647.
4. Vitaly I. Khalturin et al., "A Review of Nuclear Testing by the Soviet Union at Novaya Zemlya, 1955-1990." *Science & Global Security: The Technical Basis for Arms Control, Disarmament, and Nonproliferation Initiatives* 13:1-2 (2005): 1-42.

22 March: Lecture. An environmental history of the space age.

29 March: Lecture. Littering – and cleaning – Earth's orbital backyard.

31 March: No class. Listen to podcast or watch YouTube video (announced in class).

##### Reading:

1. Peder Anker, "The Ecological Colonization of Space." *Environmental History* 10:2 (2005): 239-268.
2. Crowther, Richard. "Space Junk -- Protecting Space for Future Generations." *Science* 296:5571 (2002): 1241-1242.
3. Dagomar Degroot, "Towards a Climate History of the Solar System." Available at: <http://www.historicalclimatology.com/blog/towards-a-climate-history-of-the-solar-system>.
4. Jordan Bimm, "Rethinking the Overview Effect." *Quest* 21:1 (2014): 39-45.

#### **Part V: Scepticism, Doubt, and Controversy**

5 April: Lecture. Global warming: detection, controversy, and consequences.

7 April: Discussion.

##### Reading:

1. Oreskes, Naomi and Erik M. Conway. *Merchants of Doubt*, 1-66.



2. "Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Summary for Policymakers." IPCC. Available at: [https://ipcc-wg2.gov/AR5/images/uploads/WG2AR5\\_SPM\\_FINAL.pdf](https://ipcc-wg2.gov/AR5/images/uploads/WG2AR5_SPM_FINAL.pdf)

12 April: Lecture. The rise, failure, and possible success of the environmental movement.

14 April: Discussion.

Reading:

1. Oreskes, Naomi and Erik M. Conway. *Merchants of Doubt*, 67-168

19 April: Essay Presentations.

21 April: Essay Presentations (if necessary). Otherwise: Discussion.

Reading:

1. Oreskes, Naomi and Erik M. Conway. *Merchants of Doubt*, 169-276.

**Part VI: History for the Future**

26 April: Essay Presentations (if necessary). Otherwise: Discussion.

28 April: Exam Review and Discussion.

Reading:

1. Todd J. Braje, "Looking forward, looking back: Humans, anthropogenic change, and the Anthropocene." *Anthropocene* 4 (2013): 116-121.
2. J. A. Dearing et al., "Human-environment interactions: learning from the past." *Regional Environmental Change* 1-2 (2006): 1-16.
3. Nathan E. Hultman, Jonathan G. Koomey, and Daniel M. Kammen, "What History Can Teach Us about the Future Costs of U.S. Nuclear Power." *Environmental Science and Technology* (2007): 2088-2093.
4. J. R. McNeill, "Can History Help Us with Global Warming?" In *Climatic Cataclysm: The Foreign Policy and National Security Implications of Climate Change*, edited by Kurt M. Campbell, 26-48. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2008.