

Hist 305: The Making of the Modern World



Essential Information:

Professor: Dr. Dagomar Degroot. Email: dd865@georgetown.edu. Website: DagomarDegroot.com.

Professor's Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays, 3:00-4:00 PM, ICC 617B.

Course Website: hist305.weebly.com

Course Description:

In the fifteenth century, a sizeable portion of humanity broke with the past and stitched together a new world. Societies across the globe encountered one another for the first time, developed novel intellectual and economic systems, and organized politically as they never had before. Their explorers, artists, scientists, merchants, and rulers set in motion a great expansion and intensification of humanity's presence on Earth, in ways we are still struggling to manage today.

This course will take you through these global developments. It will do so by introducing you to **environmental history**: the study of humanity's past interactions with the nonhuman world. You will discover how European imperialism involved more than just people, how climatic cooling triggered a seventeenth-century world crisis, and how globalization transformed humanity's footprint on planet Earth. In the process, you will learn how to read and learn across disciplines, in ways that will deepen your understanding of our present and future.

Course Goals:

Like other courses offered by the Department of History, this course will help you:

1. Gain a deeper 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 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 capacity 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. View the world from perspectives other than your own.

This course in particular will also help you:

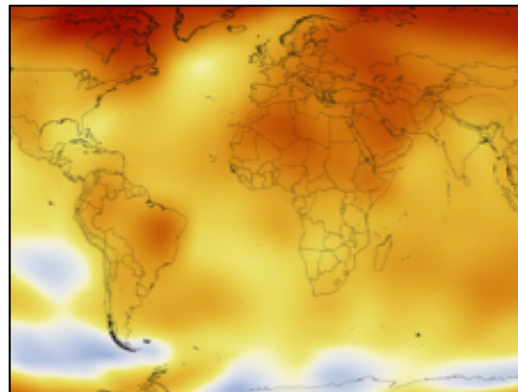
1. Appreciate the deep human and environmental contexts of the modern world.
2. Understand complex historical relationships between environmental changes and human activities.
3. Broaden your understanding of diverse scholarly disciplines, and their distinct ways of deciphering the past.

Breakdown:

Participation:	30%
Museum Exhibit Presentation:	10%
Primary Source Essay First Draft:	20%
Primary Source Essay Final Draft:	40%

Evaluation:

Participation:



Think of this class as a book club. Every week, we will all read around 200 pages of environmental history. Sometimes, you will read a whole book. More often, you will read part of a book, or a selection of articles. I recommend that you take notes, and pay heed to the weekly “big questions” in your syllabus. When we meet, we will discuss the big arguments in your readings, and evaluate how the authors support those arguments. Our conversations will often start with the questions provided in your syllabus. I will lead our class discussions, but I expect you to do most of the talking. You will earn participation grades for the quantity and especially the quality of your comments.

Occasionally, we will break into groups for counterfactual debates and primary source exercises. I will then evaluate how you contribute to your group, and grade you for the performance of your group in subsequent discussion.

Museum Exhibit Presentation:

FIRST PRESENTATION ON 19 SEPTEMBER

Starting in our fourth week, one student will give a 15-minute presentation on a museum exhibit in Washington, D.C. that has some relation to the topics in the week’s readings. To prepare for the presentation, you must venture beyond the classroom and find an exhibit in one of Washington’s many museums. Be as creative as you can! Now, prepare a PowerPoint presentation that explores how the topics in the exhibit reflect the environmental histories in our weekly readings. After your presentation, you will have roughly five minutes to respond to questions.

Your grade will reflect the suitability of the exhibit you selected, your creativity in selecting the exhibit, the quality of your presentation, and your ability to answer questions. Presentations will kick off the first seminar of every week (in other words, presentations are on Mondays).

Climate History Primary Source Essay:

SEND ME A PROPOSAL BY: 12 OCTOBER
 FIRST DRAFT DUE DATE: 7 NOVEMBER
 PRESENTATIONS BEGIN: 16 NOVEMBER
 FINAL DRAFT DUE DATE: 7 DECEMBER

Choose a topic relevant to the history of climate change. 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 primary sources online, for example at climatehistory.net/bibliography. However, you can also 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 12 October. If I do not receive an email, I will not grade your essay, and you will fail this course.

If I approve your topic and sources, write an original, 10-page environmental history of climate change. 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). Submit the first draft of your essay on 7 November.

In class, you will give a 5-minute presentation in which you will introduce your source, your argument, and how you went about proving your argument. You will have a minute or two to answer questions. We will begin these presentations on 16 November, and if necessary we will continue on 21 November. Your presentation grade will be part of your participation grade.

After you receive your graded rough papers, you must implement as many of my suggestions as you can. You will then submit a final draft on 7 December, along with a short (no longer than one page double-spaced) summary of your revisions. If you did not respond to one of my suggestions, you must explain why you did not.

When you submit your final draft, you should also include a roughly 200-word, single-spaced abstract of your essay. With your permission, I will post your abstracts on HistoricalClimatology.com, so people from around the world will learn about your ideas. To preserve your privacy, I will not use your names on the website.

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:

William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England*. New York: Hill & Wang Inc., 2003.

Crosby, Alfred W. *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900, 2nd Edition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Cushman, Gregory T. *Guano and the Opening of the Pacific World: A Global Ecological History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

McNeill, John R. *Mosquito Empires: Ecology and War in the Greater Caribbean, 1620-1914*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

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

Parker, Geoffrey. *Global Crisis: War, Climate Change and Catastrophe in the Seventeenth Century*. London: Yale University Press, 2013. 4 weeks

Richards, John F. *The World Hunt: An Environmental History of the Commodification of Animals*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2014.

SOME OF THESE TEXTS ARE AVAILABLE AS FREE EBOOKS THROUGH LAUINGER LIBRARY

Important Notes:House Rules:

You may use your laptops or tablets to take notes or to look up information in class, but you may not use your phones, and you may not access social media on your electronic devices. Do not show up late to seminar. This detracts from your learning and disturbs your classmates. If you are repeatedly late, your professor may lower your participation grade without informing you.

Submitting Assignments:

Assignments are due *at the beginning of class*. Any assignment submitted after the first 15 minutes of class is late. Give me a paper copy, *and* send an electronic copy (in PDF format) to Dagomar.Degroot@georgetown.edu. Late assignments will receive a 5% per day penalty. I will not grade assignments that are more than one week late, unless you have negotiated an extension with me (see below).

Extensions:

You may ask me for an extension *before the assignment due date*. I am more likely to grant your request if you A) give me a convincing explanation for your tardiness; B) give me a roadmap that outlines how you will complete your assignment; and C) propose a new due date. I am much more likely to grant requests for short extensions (for example, a day or two) than long extensions (for example, a week).

I will only grant requests for an extension on or after the assignment due date in exceptional circumstances (compassionate grounds, serious illness, etc.). In such cases, I may ask you for written verification. If I give you an extension, I will decide its length on a case-by-case basis. Contact your deans in case of absences, difficulties meeting due dates, and other problems.

Missing Classes:

You have one excused absence per term. 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 be able 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 enroll in a different class if I cannot accommodate your circumstances.

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.

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 requires me to report any disclosures about sexual misconduct to our Title IX Coordinator, who coordinates 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.

Erica Shirley, Trauma Specialist, Counseling and Psychiatric Services (CAPS). Contact: (202) 687-6985, 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.*
- *Complete these readings in the order in which they are listed.*
- *Complete all readings by the first class of the week.*

Part I: Introducing Environmental History

Week 1, 31 August. Orientating Ourselves.

Big Questions: what do I expect from you, what will we be doing, and what was the worldwide “early modern” period?

Readings:

- No readings for your first week.

Week 2, 7 September. Introducing Environmental History.

Big Questions: what is environmental history? What is climate history?

NO CLASS ON 5 SEPTEMBER

Readings:

- J. R. McNeill, “Observations on the Nature and Culture of Environmental History,” *History and Theory*, 42 (2003), 5-43.

- White, Sam. "Climate Change in Global Environmental History." In *A Companion to Global Environmental History*, edited by John McNeill and Erin Maulden, 394-410. London: Blackwell, 2012.
- Cronon, William. "The uses of environmental history." *Environmental history Review* 17:3 (1993): 1-22.

Part II: Environments and Empires

Week 3, 12 and 14 September. Guns, Germs, and Steel.

Big Questions: how have inescapable environmental conditions shaped human history? What is environmental determinism?

Reading:

- Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism*, i-170.

Week 4, 19 and 21 September. The Columbian Exchange.

Big Question: how did European empire builders transform the ecology of the entire world?

MUSEUM PRESENTATIONS BEGIN

Reading:

- Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism*, 171-308.

Week 5, 26 and 28 September. Zooming In and Out on the Columbian Exchange.

Big Question: does the idea of the Columbian Exchange hold up when we place it under the microscope?

Reading:

- McNeill, J. R. "Europe's place in the global history of biological exchange." *Landscape Research* 28:1 (2003): 33-39.
- Gade, Daniel W. "Particularizing the Columbian exchange: Old World biota to Peru." *Journal of Historical Geography* 48 (2015): 26-35.
- Emily Lena Jones, "The 'Columbian Exchange' and landscapes of the Middle Rio Grande Valley, AD 1300–1900." *The Holocene* (2015): 0959683615588375.
- McCook, Stuart. "The Neo-Columbian Exchange: The Second Conquest of the Greater Caribbean, 1720-1930." *Latin American Research Review* 46: 4 (2011): 11-31.

LIBRARY WORKSHOP ON 26 SEPTEMBER

Week 6, 3 and 5 October. Commodifying and Fencing Nature.

Big Question: how did First Nations communities and European colonists think differently about nature, and to what effect?

Reading:

- Cronon, *Changes in the Land*.

Week 7, 12 October. Humans Hunting Animals on a New Scale.

Big Questions: what was different about early modern hunting, especially at sea? What were its consequences?

NO CLASS ON 10 OCTOBER

PAPER PROSPECTUS DUE ON 12 OCTOBER

Reading:

- Richards, *The World Hunt*.

Week 8, 17 and 19 October. Animals Hunting Humans on a New Scale.

Big Questions: how did the lowly mosquito shape the history of the Caribbean? What does this tell us about historical relationships between empire building and nature?

Reading:

- McNeill, *Mosquito Empires*, 1-194.

Part III: Preindustrial Climate Change

Week 9, 24 and 26 October. Climate Changes Before Global Warming.

Big Questions: what was the “Little Ice Age”? How do we know whether it existed?

SHIP LOGBOOK WORKSHOP ON 24 OCTOBER

Reading:

- Kelly, Morgan, and Cormac Ó. Gráda. “The waning of the little ice age: climate change in early modern Europe.” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 44:3 (2014): 301-325.
- White, Sam. “The real little ice age.” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 44:3 (2014): 327-352.
- Degroot, Dagomar. “Testing the Limits of Climate History: The Quest for a Northeast Passage during the Little Ice Age, 1594–1597.” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 45:4 (2015): 459-484.

Week 10, 2 November. Crisis in a Changing Climate.

Big Questions: how did climate change destabilize early modern societies? Did these societies contribute to climate change?

Reading:

- Parker, *Global Crisis*, xv-113.
- Behringer, Wolfgang. “Climatic Change and Witch-Hunting: The Impact of the Little Ice Age on Mentalities.” *Climatic Change* 43:1 (1999), 335-351.
- Dagomar Degroot, “Did the Spanish Empire Change Earth’s Climate?” Historical Climatology.com. Available at: historicalclimatology.com/blog/-did-human-brutality-trigger-preindustrial-climate-change

Week 11, 7 November. Beyond the Climate Change Disaster Narrative.

Big Questions: how did societies adapt to climatic cooling? Did their cultures register climate (change)?

PRIMARY SOURCE ESSAY FIRST DRAFT DUE ON 7 NOVEMBER
NO CLASS ON 9 NOVEMBER

Reading:

- Parker, *Global Crisis*, 485-506; 587-667.
- Degroot, Dagomar. “‘Never such weather known in these seas’: Climatic Fluctuations and the Anglo-Dutch Wars of the Seventeenth Century, 1652-1674.” *Environment and History* 20:2 (2014): 239-273.
- White, Sam. “Unpuzzling American Climate: New World Experience and the Foundations of a New Science.” *Isis* 106:3 (2015): 544-566.

Part IV: The Modern Anthropocene

Week 12, 14 and 16 November. Revolutions.

Big Question: how did the commercial, industrious, scientific, and industrial revolutions transform humanity’s place on Earth?

Reading:

- Carolyn Merchant, “The scientific revolution and the death of nature.” *Isis* 97, no. 3 (2006): 513-533.
- Cushman, *Guano and the Opening of the Pacific World*, 1-204.

Week 13, 21 November. Introduction to the Anthropocene.

Big Question: what is the meaning of the term “Anthropocene?” When did this Anthropocene start?

Reading:

- Cushman, *Guano and the Opening of the Pacific World*, 205-328.
- Richard Monastersky, “Anthropocene: The human age.” *Nature* 519 (2015): 144–147.

NO CLASS ON 23 NOVEMBER

Week 14, 28 and 30 November. Present-Day Environmental Transformations.

Big Question: how are modern societies transforming Earth’s environment?

Reading:

- McNeill, *Something New Under the Sun*, xxi-266.

Week 15, 5 and 7 December. New Frontiers.

Big Question: what is global warming? Should environmental history be limited to Earth? What can it tell us about the future?

PRIMARY SOURCE ESSAY FINAL DRAFT DUE ON 7 DECEMBER

Reading:

- “Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Summary for Policymakers.” IPCC. Available at: https://ipcc-wg2.gov/AR5/images/uploads/WG2AR5_SPM_FINAL.pdf
- McNeill, J. R. “Can History Help Us With Global Warming?” Available at: <http://niche-canada.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/McNeill-Can-History-Help-Us-with-Global-Warming-2008.pdf>
- Degroot, Dagomar. “‘A catastrophe happening in front of our very eyes:’ The Environmental History of a Comet Crash on Jupiter.” *Environmental History*.