

# **World Environmental History: How do we live in the Anthropocene?**

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History 225 / Environmental Studies 404  
Spring 2016  
T/R 9:30-10:45  
W Discussion Sections

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## **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

We have entered the Anthropocene—a “human age” in which people have fundamentally reshaped the planet in ways that put the future of life in jeopardy. Climate change, ocean acidification, and species extinctions on a scale not experienced since the demise of the dinosaurs are just three of the problems scientists identify as central to this new geological epoch. This class approaches this environmental crisis using the framework of global environmental history. This means that we will seek to understand the Anthropocene by investigating how people living in different societies in different times and places have shaped, and been shaped by, their natural environments over the course of world history. How and when did the Anthropocene begin? How do we live in the Anthropocene today?

The class is structured around a survey of different proposed start dates for the Anthropocene: are its roots ancient—beginning with the evolution of the human species or the development of agriculture? Is it a modern phenomenon that began with the advent of capitalism, the age of exploration, or the Industrial Revolution? Or did this new era begin more recently: during the “Great Acceleration” of urbanization and development during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, or with the creation of atomic bombs? How can we judge which of these proposed dates is best? Our goal is not to evaluate the science on which these different proposals are based, but to understand how and why relationships between people and their environments in each of these moments changed so significantly that they have left permanent marks on the planet. Each of these proposed timelines for dating the beginning of the Anthropocene holds a different explanation for what is causing the global environmental problems we now face, and thus also points to different solutions for

how to address the crisis. To create a more sustainable future, we need to understand how and why we got into this global environmental crisis.

Through this class, students will learn about the social, political, and economic processes through which different societies have shaped, and been shaped by, the natural world. Students will gain an understanding of what is at stake in different proposed dates for the beginning of this new geological epoch. They will learn why historical debates about periodization matter for how we understand and live in the world today. Practically, students will gain skills for historical analysis, public communication, and writing for the web.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this class students will be able to:

- Define “the Anthropocene” and evaluate different approaches for dating this new “human age”
- Describe how historical processes such as agriculture, exploration, capitalism, colonialism, modernization, and urbanization have shaped uneven relationships between people and their environments around the world
- Craft a professional, persuasive letter to explain the importance of historical analysis for understanding contemporary environmental problems
- Apply historical methods to analyze how a material object of their choice illustrates a particular interpretation of the Anthropocene
- Write effectively for public web audiences

## ASSIGNMENTS & GRADE STRUCTURE

Participation (lecture & discussion activities)	15%
Modern Fossil Geology Museum Visit & Siftr Photo Essay	10%
Who is the anthropos? Siftr Photos & Essay	15%
Anthropocene in an Object Essay	20%
Mid-Term (In-class short answer and essay)	20%
Final (In-class short answer and essay)	20%

### Participation

Participation grades will be based on attendance and active participation in class. **You will not be permitted to use your devices for purposes other than note-taking.** Doing so is grounds for being asked to leave class.

Active participation includes listening, speaking, sharing ideas with other students, and otherwise being engaged in what is going on in class. I encourage all students to come to both my office hours and Jeffrey’s and to chat with us after class – these are excellent ways to show us that you’re engaged and interested in the course.

## Attendance

We will take attendance in discussion section every week. **You may have one free unexcused absence.** More than one absence will result in a reduction of your participation grade.

## Modern Fossils: Geology Museum Visit & Siftr Photo Essay (10%)

In the second week of the semester, students will complete a mini-project engaging with the geology of the modern world. This project involves two components: a visit to the UW-Madison Geology Museum and the selection of “modern fossils”—some parts of our contemporary environment that, ten thousand years from now, may become part of the geological strata that will form the bedrock of a future Madison.

Prompts will be posted on Learn@UW. We will not have lecture on Tuesday, January 26 to offset your time spent visiting the Geology Museum (which you may do during class time or at another point in the week. Note that the museum is free and open Monday – Friday: 8:30am – 4:30pm; Saturday: 9 am – 1 pm). We will use Siftr ([www.siftr.org/modernfossils](http://www.siftr.org/modernfossils)), an interactive tool developed at UW-Madison to document your experiences. Students will post photos and captions responding to the prompts.

Assignment	Due Date	Submission Format
Geology Museum Visit (see prompt for scavenger questions)	[No lecture 1/26] 1/27	Dropbox (via Learn@UW)
Modern Fossil photos	1/27	Siftr

## Who is the anthropos of the Anthropocene? Siftr & Essay (15%)

The second course assignment is another Siftr photo essay to be accompanied by a 500-word polished essay answering the question, “Who is the anthropos of the Anthropocene?” For this assignment, you will need to take original photos around Madison to make an argument about who the people of the Anthropocene are and what kind of actors they are. Who is part of the Anthropocene and what do they do that makes them so? (These do not have to be photos of people alive today – Madison is full of resources for exploring the past, so be creative. But if you do photograph another living person, you need to ask their permission first.) Prompts will be posted on Learn@UW.

Assignment	Due Date	Submission Format
Anthropos photos & essay draft	2/24	Siftr & Dropbox
Final Essay	3/9	Dropbox

### **Anthropocene in 100 Objects Photo & Essay (20%)**

Students will curate a public “Anthropocene in 100 Objects” website (based on Neil MacGregor’s *A History of the World in 100 Objects*) to showcase the diversity of interpretations of the Anthropocene. For this project, students will each select a different object to represent the Anthropocene—such as James Watts’ steam engine or the atomic bomb—and write a 1,500 word historical essay explaining (a) how this object reflects human-environment relationships in a particular place and time and (b) why this object is illustrative of the Anthropocene. [While students will create content for the website, they will not be responsible for building the site.]

<b>Assignment</b>	<b>Due Date</b>	<b>Submission Format</b>
Library research visit	3/31	In person
Object image & abstract	4/6	Word doc & high-resolution jpeg to Dropbox; bring print out to discussion
Essay draft	4/20	Word doc – Dropbox; bring print out to discussion
Final essay & image	5/4	Word doc & high-resolution jpeg to Dropbox

### **Exams**

The mid-term and final will both be in-class blue book short-answer and essay exams. You must be present in class to take the exam. Make up exams will only be considered under extreme circumstances with proper documentation.

### **Grading Rubric**

A 93-100	B 83-87.5	C 70-77.5	F <59.5
AB 88-92.5	BC 78-82.5	D 60-69.5	

During the semester I will circulate rubrics outlining how I will grade each assignment. All assignments are due at the beginning of class in hard copy unless otherwise instructed. I will not accept emailed assignments. Late assignments will be marked down five percentage points (on a 100-point scale) per day late. (I.e., after class time on Tuesdays = 1 day late; anytime on Wednesdays = 2 days late, etc.)

Requests for grade changes must be first taken to your TA, and must be made in writing. We will consider any request, but if we agree to re-grade your assignment, the grade could move either up or down.

## **COURSE POLICIES**

### **Respect for Diversity**

I am committed to making the classroom an open and safe space for everyone involved. Doing so will require you to respect each other's differences. I will make every effort to accommodate any physical, learning or other disabilities. If you are a McBurney student, please come see me after class or during my office hours to discuss accommodations.

### **Technology**

You are all adults so I will treat you as such and expect you to be responsible for your own conduct in class. However, I do have some basic ground rules I expect you to follow: you may use your laptops to take notes, but you may not shop, watch videos, play games, use social media, or IM during class. Use of phones for any purpose is grounds for having the phone taken away for the remainder of the class period.

### **Academic Integrity & Plagiarism**

Plagiarism amounts to turning in work or participating in class activities based on work that is not your own. It is a serious offense and grounds for failing an assignment (or worse) in my classroom. You must give attribution in your written work both when you directly quote someone else's words and when you use their ideas. It is your responsibility to understand what plagiarism is and to avoid it. For more information, consult the UW-Madison Writing Center: <http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/QuotingSources.html>  
If you would like further guidance, just ask.

### **Sexual Assault Resources**

There is an epidemic of sexual assault on college campuses and the UW is, sadly, no exception. If you or someone you know is the victim of assault, the university provides a number of helpful resources, including medical and psychological care as well as the option of confidential reporting. More information is available here: <http://uhs.wisc.edu/assault/sa-resources.shtml>

### **Written Communication Skills/ How to Address the Professor & TA**

Part of the focus of this class is learning professional communication skills. Mostly we'll do this by working on polished writing, which includes email communication. Writing appropriate professional emails can be tricky, especially when you just need to send a quick note. When in doubt about how formal your tone should be, err on the side of more formality rather than less. You don't want to address your professors (or bosses in the working world) the way you would a friend. Please don't begin your emails to me "Hey" or "Yo" or by directly jumping in to your question. ("Hello" and "Hi" are great.) Also, it can be difficult to know what to call your professors. If in doubt, it's always OK to ask someone what she or he would like to be called. I prefer to be called Professor Hennessy.

## COURSE PLAN

Weeks	Topic	Time Period
1, 2	Introduction	
3	Evolution of Modern Humans	~50,000 BCE
4	Agricultural Revolution	~10,000 BCE
4	Ancient Worlds	~500 BCE – 500 CE
5	Origins of Capitalism	1400-1500
6, 7	The Encounter	1492 - 17 <sup>th</sup> century
8, 9, 11	Industrial Revolution	18 <sup>th</sup> -19 <sup>th</sup> centuries
12, 13, 14	Great Acceleration	20 <sup>th</sup> century
15, 16	Rethinking Environmentalism	21 <sup>st</sup> century

### Week 1: What is the Anthropocene?

January 19 - Introduction

Readings (do all readings before lecture):

- Paul Crutzen, "Geology of Mankind" *Nature*, Vol. 415, 3 January 2002, p. 23.
- James Syvitski, "Anthropocene: An Epoch of Our Making" *Global Change*, Issue 78, March 2012, pp.12-15.

January 20 - Discussion

January 21 – Geology of the Human Age

Readings:

- Elizabeth Kolbert, "The Lost World (part two)," *New Yorker*, 23 Dec. 2013 <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/12/23/the-lost-world-3>
- Simon Lewis and Mark Maslin, "Defining the Anthropocene," *Nature*, 12 March 2015, Vol. 519, pp. 171-180.

Assigned: Geology Museum Visit & Modern Fossils Siftr Essay

### Week 2: Thinking the Anthropocene

January 26 - Geology Museum Visit [no lecture]

January 27 - Discussion: Modern Fossil Discussion

Due: Modern Fossil Siftr Photo Essay

January 28 – Thinking the Anthropocene

Readings:

- Clive Hamilton, "This Goodly Frame," *Earthmasters. The Dawn of the Age of Climate Engineering*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013, pp. 184-208.
- Christophe Bonneuil, "The geological turn: narratives of the Anthropocene," *The Anthropocene and the Global Environmental Crisis*, New York: Routledge, 2015, pp. 17-31

- Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Anthropocene and the Convergence of Histories," *The Anthropocene and the Global Environmental Crisis*, New York: Routledge, 2015, pp. 44-56

### **Week 3: Evolution of the Anthropos**

February 2 - Who is the anthropos of the Anthropocene?

Readings:

- Malm and Hornborg, "Geology of Mankind? Critique of species thinking." *The Anthropocene Review*. 2014, Vol. 1(1), pp. 62-69.
- J.R. McNeill, "Global Environmental History: The First 150,000 Years," *A Companion to Global Environmental History*, J.R. McNeill and E.S. Mauldin, eds., Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012, pp. 3-17.
- Neil MacGregor, "Olduvai Stone Chopping Tool" and "Olduvai Handaxe," *History of the World in 100 Objects*, New York: Penguin, 2010, pp. 9-18.

February 3 - Discussion: Brainstorm questions for Ellis

Due: Before discussion, read Ellis' bio

(<http://thebreakthrough.org/people/profile/erle-ellis>)

Optional: watch his lecture on the Anthropocene:

<http://videocenter.mbl.edu/videos/video/1099/>

February 4: Interview with Geographer Erle Ellis

### **Week 4: Agricultural & Ancient Worlds**

February 9 - The Agricultural "Revolution"

Readings:

- William R Dickinson, "Changing Times: The Holocene Legacy," *Environmental History*, 5 (2000) 503-530.
- Neil MacGregor, "Clovis Spear Point," "Bird-shaped Pestle," "Egyptian Clay Model of Cattle," and "Jomon Pot" *History of the World in 100 Objects*, New York: Penguin, 2010, pp. 27-36, 43-48, 55-60.

February 10 - Discussion

February 11 - The Ancient World

Readings:

- J. Donald Hughes, "The Ancient World, c. 500 BCE to 500 CE" *A Companion to Global Environmental History*, J.R. McNeill and E.S. Mauldin, eds., Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012, pp. 18-38.
- MacGregor, "Standard of Ur" and "Indus Seal," *History of the World in 100 Objects*, New York: Penguin, 2010, pp. 69-83.

Assigned: Who is the anthropos of the Anthropocene?

## **Week 5: Origins of the Modern World**

February 16 – The World in 1400

Reading:

- Robert Marks, Introduction and Chapter 1, *The Origins of the Modern World*, Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015, pp. 1-40.
- MacGregor, “Hebrew Astrolabe,” *History of the World in 100 Objects*, New York: Penguin, 2010, pp. 398-403.

February 17 - Discussion

February 18 – The Rise of Market Economies

Reading:

- Karl Polanyi, Chapters 3-6, *The Great Transformation*, Boston: Beacon Press, 2001 [1944], pp. 35-80

## **Week 6: The Worlds Collide**

February 23 – The Encounter

Readings:

- Charles Mann, 1491 Précis. *The Atlantic*, March 2002.  
<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2002/03/1491/302445/>

February 24 – Discussion

Due: Who is the anthropos? Siftr Photos & Draft Essay

February 25 – Silver and the Origins of World Trade

Reading:

- Flynn and Giráldez, Born with a ‘Silver Spoon’ *Journal of World History*, 1995, pp. 201- 221

## **Week 7: Sea Worlds**

March 1 - A Fish Tale

Reading:

- Mark Kurlansky, *Cod* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 17-107. (This looks like a lot, but it’s very light reading.)

March 2 – Discussion

March 3 – The Great Hunt

Reading:

- Joe Roman, *Whale* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), 7-26, 45-98, 117-126. (Ditto the above note, this is a fun book with many images.)

## **Week 8: The Industrial Revolution**



### March 8 - Origins of the Industrial Revolution

#### Reading:

- Sven Beckert, Chapters 1 and 2, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History*, New York: Knopf, 2015, pp. 3-55.

### March 9 – Discussion

Due: Who is the anthropos? Final essay

### March 10 - Industrial Energy Transition

#### Reading:

- Andreas Malm, The Origins of Fossil Capitalism: From Water to Steam in the British Cotton Industry, *Historical Materialism*, 21.1, 2013, pp. 15-47, 58-61

## **Week 9: Industrializing Agriculture**

### March 15 - Food, Power, People

#### Readings:

- Gregory Cushman, Selections from “The Guano Age,” *Guano and the Opening of the Pacific World: A Global Ecological History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, pp. 23-34, 38-53, 69-74
- Robert Thomas Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, London: 1798. Read Chapters 1, 2, and 5, pp. 1-11, 23-31  
<http://www.esp.org/books/malthus/population/malthus.pdf>

### March 16 – Discussion – Review Session

### March 17 – **MIDTERM EXAM**

## **Week 10: SPRING BREAK**

March 19-27

## **Week 11: Climate of Inequality**

### March 29 – Colonial Famines

#### Reading:

- Mike Davis, “Preface,” and “Chapter One: Victoria’s Ghosts,” *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World*, New York: Verso, 2002. pp. 1-16, 25-59.

Assigned: Anthropocene Objects project

### March 29 – Discussion

### March 30 – Library Research Visits

## **Week 12: The Great Acceleration**

#### April 5 – The Modern World

##### Readings:

- Robert Marks, “The Great Departure” *The Origins of the Modern World*, 2015, pp. 161-198
- WW Rostow, “The Stages of Economic Growth” *The Economic History Review*, New Series, Vol. 12, No. 1, 1959, pp. 1-16

#### April 6 – Discussion

Due: Anthropocene Object selection: image and abstract. Submit to dropbox and bring print out to discussion

#### April 7 – Water and Power

##### Reading:

- J.R. McNeill, “Hydrosphere: Depletions, Dams, and Diversions”, *Something New Under the Sun: An Environmental History of the Twentieth-Century World*, 2001, pp.149-191

### **Week 13: Feeding the People**

#### April 12 – The World Hunger Problem

##### Reading:

- Nick Cullather, "Chapter 7: You Can't Eat Steel" and "Chapter 8: The Meaning of Famine," *The Hungry World*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2010

#### April 13 – Discussion

#### April 14 – Urbanization and Population

##### Reading:

- Mike Davis, “The Urban Climacteric” and “Slum Ecology,” *Planet of Slums* New York: Verso, 2006, pp. 1-19,121-150

### **Week 14: Powering Modern Societies**

#### April 19 – Nuclear Revolution

Guest Lecture: Jeffrey Guarneri

Reading: TK

#### April 20 – Discussion

Due: Draft Object Essay [Submit in Word to Dropbox and bring a print out to discussion]

#### April 21 – Oil Dependency

### **Week 15: Rethinking Environmentalism**

April 26 – Manifestos for the Future Earth

Readings:

- Naomi Klein, Introduction *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014, pp. 1-28
- The Ecomodernist Manifesto  
<http://www.ecomodernism.org/manifesto-english/>
- The Leap Manifesto, <https://leapmanifesto.org/en/the-leap-manifesto/>

April 27 – Discussion

April 28 – Living with Climate Change

Reading:

- François Gemenne, "The Anthropocene and its Victims," *The Anthropocene and the Global Environmental Crisis*, Clive Hamilton, Christophe Bonneuil, and François Gemenne, eds., New York: Routledge Earthscan, 2015, pp. 168-174

**Week 16: How do we live in the Anthropocene?**

May 3 – Stewardship of the Future Earth

Readings:

- Stewart Brand, "Scale, Scope, Stakes, Speed," *Whole Earth Discipline*, New York: Penguin, 2010, pp. 1-23.
- Clive Hamilton. "Ethical Anxieties" *Earthmasters. The Dawn of the Age of Climate Engineering*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013, pp. 158-183.

May 4 – Discussion

Due: Final Object Essay & Image [LearnUW]

May 5 – How do we live in the Anthropocene?

Readings:

- Michael Chabon, "The Future Will Have to Wait," *Details*, 2006.  
<http://longnow.org/essays/omega-glory/>

**FINAL EXAM:** MONDAY, MAY 9, 10:05 AM - 12:05 PM

No schedule changes permitted. Plan to attend in person.