

History/Env Studies 465
Global Environmental History
Spring 2025 (4 credits)

Lectures: Tuesday and Thursday, 11:00-12:15 - in person in 1111 Mosse Humanities Building
Sections: Wednesdays, in-person, as indicated in enrollment

Teaching Staff:

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The American Anthropocene and Global Environmental History: The concept of “the Anthropocene”—the possibility that human-induced changes to global earth systems have propelled the planet into a new geological epoch—has become a central avenue of inquiry in fields across the natural sciences, the social sciences, and the humanities. In all of these fields, scholars seek to understand the ways and reasons that human activities have shaped the planet. For environmental historians, the concept of the Anthropocene has a particular and additional meaning. Environmental history is the study of the interactions between human societies and the natural world over time; the Anthropocene brings the recognition that the very conditions under which history unfolds might be changing.

The United States has played an especially powerful role in shaping the environmental changes of the Anthropocene. As historian Josh Howe explains, “It is difficult to overstate the role of the United States in shaping the Anthropocene in the postwar period.... American foreign policy decisions, American economic expansion, and American patterns of consumption have been inscribed upon landscapes and in bodies throughout the twenty-first century world.” In this course, we will explore the concept of the Anthropocene, with particular attention to the role of the United States as a driver of global environmental change in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. That is, we will explore global implications of the American Anthropocene.

An additional goal of this class is to further your liberal arts education. What does this mean? The liberal arts education focuses on general learning, intellectual ability, and critical thinking rather than technical or professional skills. The goal of this class, then, is not just to convey specific information about environmental history (although you will learn much about this) but to teach you how to interpret this information critically, how to understand environmental change in its social, historical, and political context, and how to draw lessons from this history. A liberal arts education provides the tools we need to be active citizens of our communities. As we will learn this semester, active citizenship plays a key role in resolving the complex environmental dilemmas that have faced our society for centuries.

Learning Outcomes: Upon completing this course, students will be able to:

- 1.) Have a basic understanding of key questions in modern global environmental history.
- 2.) Define “the Anthropocene” as a concept and evaluate its usefulness for understanding environmental history.
- 3.) Recognize and understand how factors such as class, race, region, and gender have shaped the way that people have understood and interacted with the world around them, particularly in the context of ongoing historical processes such as colonialism, imperialism, consumerism, and resource extraction.
- 4.) Critically analyze the intersections among environmental change, economic activity, and social structures over time.
- 5.) Effectively communicate complicated ideas about environmental history in written format.

Bulletin Course Description: Explores the history of human relationships with the environment on a global scale through analysis of long-term changes, from early civilizations, to the beginnings of global trade, the Industrial Revolution, urbanization, and 20th century technological developments.

Requisites: Sophomore standing or 3 credits in HISTORY, GEOG or ENVIR ST

Course Attributes & Information: Breadth - Either Humanities or Social Science; Level – Intermediate; L&S Credit - Counts as Liberal Arts and Science credit in L&S; Grad 50% - Counts toward 50% graduate coursework requirement; cross-listed as ENVIR ST 465, HISTORY 465

Instructional Modality, Workload & Credit Hours: In-person. This 4-credit class meets each week for a total of 4 class period hours over the fall semester: two 75-minute lectures plus one 50-minute discussion section, which together count as four contact hours according to UW-Madison’s credit hour policy. The course expects that students will work on course learning activities (reading, writing, studying, discussing, etc.) for about 2 hours out of classroom for every class period, for an average of at least 8 hours of work outside of class per week. This syllabus includes detailed information about meeting times and expectations for student work. This course offers substantive interaction which engages student learning and assessment through direct instruction, written feedback on student work, and facilitating discussion of course content. The instruction is outlined by the course schedule.

Attendance, discussion, and participation: Your engaged participation in discussions and other class activities—in both lecture and discussion section—is the essential key to the success of this course. “Lectures” will be interactive and will demand your active participation. Come to class each day prepared to discuss reading assignments as indicated in the syllabus and in the weekly Canvas modules.

Make arrangements early in the semester to share lecture notes with a classmate; that way, if you do have to miss a lecture, you will know where to turn. Do not ask the professor or teaching assistant to give you a recap of what you missed.

We understand that life happens and circumstances might force you miss occasional classes. Please communicate in writing with the teaching team, preferably 48 hours in advance, to see what accommodations can be made. Exceptions are made for absences documented by a health care professional, athletics, or the Dean of Students, and for religious observance.

Discussion sections are where you’ll dig deeper into the readings and workshop your writing assignments. **Attendance in section is required**, and more than one unexcused absence will affect your section grade. You must come to section well prepared, having digested the assigned readings. Note that some weeks, there is dedicated reading assigned to section. You must have that week’s reading assignment with you in a form you can access without a live internet connection (i.e., either printed or downloaded to a laptop or tablet).

Attendance Self-Grading: Keep track of your attendance, contributions to class discussions, and your engagement with the course. Set a goal for yourself of contributing at least once per class section. At the end of the semester, you will be asked to give yourself a self-assessment and grade for your attendance and participation (15% of your total grade); a rubric will be provided. As long as this grade tracks with the teaching team’s general assessment of your participation, this will be your grade for this component of the course. We know that different people participate and engage in different ways, and this system is one way of accounting for that.

Reading responses, in-class writing assignments, and quizzes: Twenty percent of your grade in this class will be earned by completing short reading responses, in-class writing assignments, and other short assignments. These will be graded on a pass/fail basis (full credit, half credit, or no credit). There will be 15-20 of these assignments over the course of the semester. These assignments are intended to **maximize your engagement in the course** and will dramatically increase your grade if you complete them all. You may skip two of these short assignments with no penalty (or simply drop your lowest two grades). In-class writing

assignments will occur regularly but will be unannounced. There will be no opportunity to make up these short assignments. You might want to have a laptop to complete in-class writing assignments. If you don't want to bring a laptop, make sure that you have looseleaf paper or index cards that you can use to turn in these assignments.

Canvas & Communication: The course Canvas page is the best way to find readings, discussion questions, assignments, and to keep up with any changes to the course calendar. Email is the best way to get in touch with the teaching team. Sometimes, we will send Canvas/email announcements regarding the coming week's class. Please check Canvas sometime on Monday afternoon for updates and last-minute information about the upcoming class meetings.

Devices/Technology in Class: We all use devices. But critical and analytical thinking take a hit once screens are out. You are welcome to use a laptop or tablet in this class as long as it contributes to your learning. In fact, it will be helpful to have a laptop or similar device to complete in-class writing assignments, and we realize that many students read their assignments on a laptop or tablet. Please put away earbuds/earphones during class.

However, even when devices like laptops are used for typed notetaking, studies show they invite rote transcribing versus mental processing or thinking (Mueller and Oppenheimer, 2014). This leads to poorer academic performance. Other research demonstrates that when students engage in off-task behavior on their devices, it hurts the learning of the peers sitting near them. In one study, students who were not using a device in a class lecture but were seated within view of a peer with a device, performed 17 percent worse on an exam based on that lecture material than students who were not within view of someone else's device (Lang, 2020).

We encourage you to turn off your internet connection—and absolutely turn off your ringers and notifications—during class. The TA will sit toward the back of the lecture hall and monitor electronics use. If you begin using your laptop for non-class purposes, the TA will take note, ask you to shut it down, and inform me. Persistent violation of this policy will have consequences for your course participation grade.

So: Consider hand-writing your notes on readings and in class for potentially more efficient, deeper, real-time learning. At the very least, recognize that devices will detract from your own ability to participate in this discussion-driven class, and also might distract your peers.

Course Policies and Conduct: All of us must do our best to be intellectually honest and tolerant of personal differences. Environmental topics are often controversial, and we all have our own beliefs. I hope that everyone will feel safe to express an idea, even if that idea is not a popular one. Diversity drives innovation, creativity, and progress. At UW Madison, the culture, identities, life experiences, unique abilities, and talents of every individual contribute to the foundation of our success. Creating and maintaining an inclusive and equitable environment is of paramount importance to us. This pursuit prepares all of us to be global citizens who will contribute to the betterment of the world. We are committed to a university culture that provides everyone with the opportunity to thrive. Knowing and applying the names and pronouns that students wish to use is a crucial part of developing a productive learning environment that fosters inclusion and personal dignity. Please let us know your preferred name and pronoun any time before or throughout the semester.

Academic Misconduct: There are some university guidelines for behavior that I expect all of us to follow. One of these has to do with plagiarism, or taking credit for the work of others. This is a serious offense and will be treated according to university guidelines; failure of the course is a potential outcome of academic dishonesty. This doesn't mean you shouldn't talk with other students about what you are thinking or writing; but when you write something on a paper or exam, it must be in your own words, not copied from someone else. If you repeat someone else's words, you must use quotation marks and must cite the relevant author, work, and page numbers. If you closely paraphrase other writers or rely on their ideas, you must similarly acknowledge your debt with an appropriate citation. Appropriation of another author's work without citation—whether or not you use direct quotations—always constitutes plagiarism. Some clear guidelines are available at http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/QPA_plagiarism.html. You are responsible for knowing what constitutes

plagiarism; claiming ignorance will not help you after the fact. If you have any questions about academic honesty, and what might or might not be considered plagiarism, please ask, rather than taking a risk with grave consequences.

A Note about AI/Copilot/ChatGPT: Generative AI technologies are becoming widespread and have the potential to enhance learning experiences and promote critical thinking in this course. However, it is important to note that the use of AI should be supplementary and should not replace the development of essential cognitive skills. Generative AI is like Wikipedia – maybe a place to start, but you, as the author, are responsible for ensuring that the information and outputs are appropriate and original. Often, ChatGPT and similar sites are wrong in their interpretations of a text. Know that work created by AI tools may not be considered original work and instead is considered automated plagiarism. Remember that most of the writing assignments in this course are based on YOUR OWN reflections and interpretations of readings, so there is no right answer. Do not rely on generative AI to do the thinking for you. We want to know what YOU think, not read a word salad created by ChatGPT. If you use an AI tool at any point in the development and/or creation of your work for this course – including discussion board posts, exams, and reading responses, or to improve grammar/syntax – you must provide a citation that lists the tool you used, the query/prompt that you used, and the date. If you submit written work that comes from generative AI without this citation, we will regard it as academic misconduct—because it is work produced by someone other than you. Please ask us if you have any questions about this.

Although it is not prohibited, **we urge you not to use Generative AI on the writing responses.** These responses are pass/fail and generously graded. Their purpose is to help you process the material and to be ready to engage with the material in class. The only person who loses out when you use generative AI for these assignments is you.

Accommodations: The University of Wisconsin–Madison supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Wisconsin State Statute (36.12) and UW–Madison policy (UW-855) require the university to provide reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities to access and participate in its academic programs and educational services. Faculty and students share responsibility in the accommodation process. Students are expected to inform faculty of their need for instructional accommodations during the beginning of the semester, or as soon as possible after being approved for accommodations. Faculty will work either directly with the student or in coordination with the McBurney Disability Resource Center to provide reasonable instructional and course-related accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student’s educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA.

Course Readings: The amount of reading fluctuates from week to week. Sometimes you are asked to read over 100 pages of a single secondary source; other times you are asked to give a close reading to only 30 pages of primary sources. Try to keep your eye on the syllabus so that you can tell when the heavier reading loads are coming, and plan ahead.

The following items are available at the University Book Store:

- John Soluri, *Banana Cultures: Agriculture, Consumption, and Environmental Change in Honduras and the United States*, 2nd ed., (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2021)

The rest of the course readings are available electronically through Canvas. These are REQUIRED readings; you are strongly urged bring them with you to both lecture & section (in print or on a laptop, iPad, or e-reader) so that you make use them to aid in class discussion. If you have any other option, please do not use your phones to access readings in class.

Exams: There will be two in-class exams and a final; further details on these exams will be announced later in the semester.

Grading Breakdown and Course Requirements (submitted via Canvas Dropbox unless otherwise noted)

Reading responses, in-class assignments, & quizzes	20%
Section/lecture attendance & participation (self-assessment)	15%
Technofossil photo essay/presentation	5%
Commodity report/presentation	5%
Midterm 1	15%
Midterm 2	15%
Final	25%

We will follow the standard university grading scale:

A = 92.5+; AB = 87.5-92.4; B = 82.5-87.4; BC = 77.5-82.4; C = 70-77.4; D = 60-69.4

Course Calendar (Subject to change; check the weekly Canvas modules for the most accurate calendar)

Date	Subject	Reading/Assignment
Unit 1: Building the American Anthropocene		
Week 1: 1/21/25	Introduction & Course Themes	No Reading
1/22/25	Section	Section meets; No Reading
1/23/25	Welcome to the Anthropocene	Howe, "America and the World in the Anthropocene," Canvas Nixon, "The Promises and Perils of an Epochal Idea," https://edgeeffects.net/anthropocene-promise-and-pitfalls/ Roberts, "Technofossils," Canvas
Week 2: 1/28/25	Questioning the Anthropocene	Pulido, "Racism and the Anthropocene," Canvas Moore et al., <i>Plantation Legacies</i> , https://edgeeffects.net/plantation-legacies-plantationocene/ Reading Response due: see Canvas for assignment prompt
1/29/25	Section: Thesis statements & analytical writing	No additional reading; come to section prepared to discuss your reading responses
1/30/25	Globalization 1.0—The Columbian Exchange	Crosby, "Ecological Imperialism," Canvas McNeil, "Yellow Jack and Geopolitics," Canvas
Week 3: 2/4/25	European Precedents: Colonialism	Ross, <i>Ecology and Power in the Age of Empire</i> , Canvas
2/5/25	Technofossil workshop	Come to section having completed part one of the technofossil presentation and be prepared to workshop your photo essay; see https://emergencemagazine.org/gallery/the-anthropocene-project/ for inspiration
2/6/25	The U.S. as an Imperial Power	Tucker, <i>Insatiable Appetites</i> , Canvas Reading response due
Week 4: 2/11/25	Industrialization	Santiago, <i>Ecology of Oil</i> , Canvas Santiago, "Class and Nature in the Oil Industry of Northern Veracruz," Canvas
2/12/25	Section: Reading Primary Sources	Imperialism Documents, Canvas

2/13/25	Modern Fossil Class Presentations	Modern Fossil Photo Essay due No reading; ½ class presents their photo essay, as assigned
Week 5: 2/18/25	Militarism: World Wars & Resources	Evenden, “Aluminum, Commodity Chains, and the Environmental History of the Second World War,” Canvas
2/19/25	Section: midterm review	No reading; midterm review
2/20/25	Midterm	In-class Midterm
Unit 2: The American Anthropocene		
Week 6: 2/25/25	Globalization 2.0: Building the Postwar Order & the Great Acceleration	Goedde, “US Mass Culture and Consumption in a Global Context,” Canvas McNeill & Engelke, <i>The Great Acceleration</i> , Canvas
2/26/25	Section: Tracing Globalization	No additional reading
2/27/25	Capitalism, Communism, and High Modernism	Scott, <i>Seeing Like a State</i> , Canvas Brown, “Gridded Lives: Why Kazakhstan and Montana are Nearly the Same Place,” Canvas
Week 7: 3/4/25	Urbanization	McNeill & Engelke, <i>The Great Acceleration</i> , Canvas
3/5/25	Section: Documenting Urban Growth	Urbanization Documents
3/6/25	Commodity Flows 1	Soluri, <i>Banana Cultures</i> , pp. ix-xvi, 1-74 Reading Response Due
Week 8: 3/11/25	Commodity Flows 2	Soluri, <i>Banana Cultures</i> , pp. 75-128 (skim 128-60) Elmore, <i>Citizen Coke</i> , Canvas
3/12/25	Section: Workshop Commodity Reports	No additional reading; come to class prepared to workshop your commodity reports and presentations
3/13/25	Commodity Presentations	Commodity Reports due; No reading; ½ class presents their commodity reports, as assigned
Week 9: 3/18/25	Industrial Ag & the Green Revolution	Soluri, <i>Banana Cultures</i> , 161-264 Borlaugh, “Challenges Remain,” Canvas
3/19/25	Section	Food & Agriculture Documents
3/20/25	Cheap Food	Patel & Moore, <i>A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things</i> , “Cheap Food,” Canvas
SPRING BREAK		
Week 10: 4/1/25	Energy in the Anthropocene	Patel & Moore, <i>A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things</i> , “Cheap Energy,” Canvas Mitchell, “Carbon Democracy,” Canvas Reading Response Due
4/2/25	Section	No additional reading; be prepared to discuss your reading responses
4/3/25	Nuclear Colonialism & the Cold War	Hamblin, <i>Arming Mother Nature</i> , Canvas Hecht, “Nuclearity,” Canvas

Week 11: 4/8/25	Globalization 3.0: Plastic Apocalypse	Bonneuil, "The Phagocene," Canvas Additional reading TBA
4/9/25	Section: midterm review	No reading; midterm review
4/10/25	Midterm	In-class Midterm
Unit 3: Reactions and Paths Forward		
Week 12: 4/15/25	The Emergence of Environmentalism	Robertson, "This is the American Earth," ER
4/16/25	Section	Environmentalism Documents
4/17/25	Biodiversity Crisis & Response	Lewis, <i>Inventing Global Ecology</i> , Canvas
Week 13: 4/22/25	Fortress Conservation	Conte, "Creating Wild Places from Domesticated Landscapes," Canvas Reading Response Due
4/23/25	Section: National Park Rapid Review	No additional reading
4/24/25	Environmentalism of the Poor	Nixon, <i>Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor</i> , Canvas
Week 14: 4/29/25	Manifestos	Asafu-Adjaye, <i>et al</i> , "An Ecomodernist Manifesto," Canvas Gibson, Rose & Fincher, <i>Manifesto for Living in the Anthropocene</i> , Canvas
4/30/25	Section	No additional reading; workshopping final exam
5/1/25	Environmental Pasts & Futures	Sabin, "The Ultimate Environmental Dilemma," Canvas
Final: 5/7/25	Final Exam	Final Exam due in the Canvas Dropbox by 11:59 pm on May 7