

# History and Politics and Climate Change

Graduate Colloquium - Spring Semester, 2020, Department of History

**Instructor: Davide Orsini, History Department**

**Office: Allen Hall 238 – Hours: Mon & Wed 3:30-5 and by appointment**

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## Intro

What is climate change? When did scientists start talking about it? How did they define and study its causes and effects? To what extent does the international scientific community agree on methods and data interpretations? This course will provide students with analytical skills for understanding current scientific and policy debates on climate change, and their social, environmental, and economic implications. The course also provides conceptual tools for thinking about long-term historical processes and their connections with current events, as well as global phenomena and their localized impacts.

At the end of the course participants will be expected to have a critical understanding of: 1) What climate change is; 2) Why it matters (causes and effects); 3) Current debates on proposed solutions and their implications; 4) Science and Technology policies; 5) Energy futures, alternatives to fossil fuels, and their costs and benefits.

## Assignments

This is a graduate seminar. All participants are expected to engage actively with the assigned material and to be able to critically discuss evidence, concepts, and disciplinary implications in history and related fields. Each week participants are required to post a set of questions on Canvas to facilitate class discussion. Please post your questions/remarks by 5pm on Tuesday. Each participant will lead discussion at least twice over the course. In addition, by the end of the course each participant will write an 8,000 words article on a select theme from the course:

1. Deep time and historical thinking
2. Scale and the history of environmental change
3. Science and the politics of expertise
4. Energy and capitalism
5. History of the future
6. A theme of your choice to be discussed with the instructor

The final paper is due on Monday, April 27, by 5pm.

## Schedule

### **Week 1 – Introduction to the course – 1/8/20**

### **Week 2 – History and Global Warming - 1/15/20**

Readings:

- Jeremy Davies, *The Birth of the Anthropocene* (University of California Press, 2016).

### **Week 3 – History of Climate Science (Part 1): From the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century – 1/22/20**

Readings:

- James R. Fleming, *Historical Perspectives on Climate Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998)

### **Week 4 – History of Climate Science (Part 2): Understanding and Modeling Planet Earth - 1/29/20**

Readings:

- Paul Edwards, *A Vast Machine: Computer Models, Climate Data, and the Politics of Global Warming* (MIT Press, 2010).

### **Week 5 – Climate Change and History: Rethinking Time and Scale – 2/5/20**

Readings:

- Dipesh Chakrabarty, “The Climate of History: Four Theses,” *Critical Inquiry* 35 (Winter 2009): 197-222.
- Naomi Oreskes, “Scaling Up Our Vision,” *Isis* 105, 2014: 379-391.
- Steffen, Grivevald, Crutzen, and McNeill, “The Anthropocene: Conceptual and Historical Perspectives,” *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* 369, 2011: 842-867.
- Gabrielle Hecht, “Interscalar Vehicles for an African Anthropocene: On Waste, Temporality, and Violence,” *Cultural Anthropology* 33 (1), 2018: 109-141.
- Mark Carey, “Science, Models, and Historians: Toward a Critical Climate History,” *Environmental History* 19 (2), 2014: 354-364.

### **Week 6 – How Climate Scientists Work and Speak to Decision-Makers: The IPCC – 2/12/20**

Readings:

- Bert Bolin, *A History of the Science and Politics of Climate Change: The Role of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (Cambridge University Press, 2008).
- Read the synthesis of the last IPCC report

## **Week 7 – The Politics of Climate Change Denialism – 2/19/20**

### Readings:

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

## **Week 8 – Capitalism – 2/26/20 [Madeline]**

### Readings:

- Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil* (Verso, 2011).

## **Week 9 – Energy Transitions - 3/4/20 [Lidia]**

### Readings:

- Michaël Aklin and Johannes Urpelainen, *Renewables: The Politics of a Global Energy Transition* (The MIT Press, 2018)

## **3/11/20 NO CLASS Spring Break**

## **Week 10 – Writing the History of the Anthropocene (Part 1) - 3/18/20**

### Readings:

- John McNeill, *Something New Under the Sun: An Environmental History of the Twentieth-Century World* (Norton, 2001).

## **Week 11 – Writing the History of the Anthropocene (Part2) - 3/25/20**

### Readings:

- Irus Braverman, *Coral Whisperers: Scientists on the Brink* (University of California Press, 2018).

## **Week 12 – Writing the History of the Anthropocene (Part 3) - 4/1/20**

### Readings:

- Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, *The Shock of the Anthropocene: The Earth, History, and Us* (Verso, 2016).

## **Week 13 – Rethinking Nature - 4/8/20**

### Readings:

- Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Harvard University Pres, 2012).

**Week 14 – Global Warming, Human Imagination, and History - 4/15/20**

Readings:

- Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (University of Chicago Press, 2017).

**Week 15 – Activism, Green Capitalism, and the New Climate Regime - 4/22/20**

Readings:

- Marybeth Long Martello, “Arctic Indigenous Peoples as Representations and Representatives of Climate Change,” *Social Studies of Science* 38 (3), 2008: 351-376.
- Scott Prudham, “Pimping climate change: Richard Branson, global warming, and the performance of green capitalism,” *Environment and Planning A* 41, 2009: 1594-1613.
- Bruno Latour, *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climate Regime* (Polity, 2018).