



Image Credit: E. Kolbert "Enter the Anthropocene-Age of Man" March 2011

Welcome to the Anthropocene: Politics of Nature in the Age of Humans

Macalester College, Fall 2016

Tues/Thurs 1:20-2:50 OLRI Room 301

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Office hours by appointment

Course Description

Geologists are telling us that we have entered a new epoch called the Anthropocene, when humans have fundamentally reshaped the planet in ways that put the future of life at risk. Theorizing the Anthropocene has catalyzed major shifts in a variety of disciplines—including history, political science, engineering, biology, and the arts. In this discussion-based class, we will use an interdisciplinary framework to consider what this new epoch means to our political economy and society. A timely look at the concept of “The Anthropocene” provides us with special challenges and opportunities for self-reflection, debate and expression. Our fiction and non-fiction readings will help us answer if there could be such a thing as a “good” Anthropocene rather than simply an apocalyptic one. We will develop our writing and research skills working on collaborative projects with the Twin Cities as our backdrop. As a culminating assignment, we will stage our own anthropocene museum.

The main learning goals for this course are:

- **Gain interdisciplinary analytical tools for understanding the confluence of geological, ecological, cultural, social and political perspectives**
- **Gain skills in writing, expert reading, visual representation, oral presentation and team work**

Student Evaluation

We will do lots of different kinds of writing, reading and presenting in this course. Our texts include journal articles, news, and memoirs. We will learn to approach each of these differently, with attention to argument and evidence. The writing assignments that correspond with our texts include low stakes/informal pieces, at-home short reflective writing, reports and a formal paper at the end.

Students will be evaluated on the basis of 1) attendance and participation (20%); 2) submission of reading responses, homework assignments and EnviroThursday summaries (20%); 3) student pair/group projects (book report, North Star Project, Class debate) (30%); and 4) a final gallery project (30%).

See Moodle for more information on reading responses. The book presentation will be assigned in class and presentations will occur across the semester. At midterm, we will engage in a debate in class and students will be assigned roles to play. The final project will involve preparing a museum catalog entry for our class Anthropocene Museum. The final project grade breakdown is: Proposal (10%), Draft (30%), Presentation (30%), Final paper (30%).

Part of your class grade includes attending any two EnviroThursday seminars throughout the semester. These seminars meet from 12-1pm in Olin Rice 250. They are listed on the Environmental Studies website and will be routinely announced in class. You will need to compose a brief summary (~250 words) of the presentation and explain how the seminar relates to the course. This should be completed within a week after the seminar, and can be done on the course Moodle page. Deadline is December 1.

I expect all of the assignments to be turned in on time, unless you have talked with me in advance. Reading responses will NOT be accepted late. I do not allow students to submit papers at times other than those posted. This is because it is not fair to the students in the class who do the work/take the exam on time. Some reasons I WILL reschedule: 1) You will be out of town on a Macalester-related event (sports, music, etc.), 2) You are genuinely ill, 3) You must leave town for a family emergency. If you are dealing with a long-term crisis or illness (either you or a family member), I encourage you to come and talk to me so I can better support your work in class and accommodate you.

If you submit an assignment late, you WILL be graded down one full step for each day past the deadline. For example, an assignment handed in one day late will begin with a B+; two days late a C+. Late reading reflections will not be accepted because it sets us both back in the course.

Academic Integrity: It is assumed that all members of the class will act with academic integrity and will not engage in behavior such as plagiarism, academic dishonesty, misrepresentation, or cheating. Please

refer to the college's policy on academic honesty. A first offense will cause you to get a failing grade on the assignment, and a second offense means you fail the class. If in doubt about what constitutes cheating or plagiarism, or if stress is causing you to consider this route, please speak to me.

I will assign a **final** term grade by taking the following percentages into account:

90-100% = A; 80-89% = B; 70-79% = C; 60-69% = D

The top 2% of each category will typically receive a "+" (i.e., a score of 88-89% will receive a B+), and the lower 3% of each category will receive a "-" (92% is an A-).

There is no limit on the number of students who can get any grade. If 50% of the class achieves an overall score of 95%, then 50% of the class will get an A. I DO have high expectations of your work in this course. It is important to know up front that we think an A means OUTSTANDING in all ways – in terms of effort, discipline, comprehension, and skills.

Advising and Support

I am available to talk with you about the class material and assignment questions by appointment. You are welcome to stop by my office, but I can't guarantee an 'on the spot' meeting. Calling in and emailing questions works as well. I do not necessarily answer phone calls or emails outside of the typical work day (M-F 9-5 pm), so please do not expect an immediate reply if you email me at 10 pm! I will also use Moodle as a tool for answering questions and disseminating information – please check this regularly!

I am committed to providing assistance to help you be successful in this course. Reasonable accommodations are available for students with documented disabilities. Please meet with **Robin Hart Ruthenbeck**, Assistant Dean of Students. Robin coordinates disability services and determines accommodations. You can reach her at rhartrut@macalester.edu. Additional information regarding the accommodations process for students with disabilities can be found at:

<http://www.macalester.edu/studentaffairs/disabilityservices/>

Readings/Assignments: <http://moodle.macalester.edu> is where you will find readings, assignments, helpful weblinks and announcements. Check it frequently!

There is only one required book for this course – the one for the first meeting. All other readings are available through the Moodle page. I reserve the right to add/change the reading assignments during the course.

Summary of Topics and Readings

Syllabus is subject to modification. When changes are announced, I will mention in class and post on Moodle.

* Denotes when a reading response is due

+ Denotes when a homework assignment is due

Part I: What is the Anthropocene?

Thurs September 1: How do we imagine the Anthropocene?

- Jamieson & Nadzam, *Love in the Anthropocene*
- Trexler, "Introduction", *Anthropocene Fictions*, Pp 1-27.

Writing assignment: What story surprised you the most or least?

>> *In class* -- Intro to Fictions assignment

***Tues September 6: What defines an epoch?**

- Crutzen, "The Geology of Mankind" (1 pg)
- Kolbert, "The Anthropocene", *The Sixth Extinction*, Pp 92-110.

Reading response: What defines an epoch? What's the significance of Crutzen's piece?

>> *In class* -- Visit from **Sleep Project** (at end)

How do you learn? How do you want to learn? (do not include in reading response)

- Bain, "Roots of Success" + "What Makes an Expert?", *What the Best College Students Do*, 1-63.

+Thurs Sept 8: When did the Anthropocene begin?

Creating a Class Glossary and Timeline with guest Professor Kristi Curry Rogers (Biology/Geology)

- Lewis and Maslin, "Defining the Anthropocene"
- *Masters of the Anthropocene* podcast (35 mins long)

Homework: Identify concepts in the reading that were new or confusing. Bring this list and your initial explanations to class.

***Tues September 13: How do we distinguish between natural history and human history?**

- Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses", Pp. 197-222.

Reading response: How does the author distinguish between natural history and human history?

How does knowing and naming your bias help you learn? (do not include in reading response)

- Bain, "Managing Yourself?", *What the Best College Students Do*, Pp. 64-98.

+Thurs Sept 15: Is the Anthropocene geologically significant? With guest Professor Bradtmiller (ES)

- Ruddiman, "Chapter 17- From the Past into the Distant Future", *Plows, Plagues, and Petroleum*, Pp. 167-174.
- Edwards, "What Is the Anthropocene?" (online article)
- Finney and Edwards, "The "Anthropocene epoch", Pp 1-7.
- *Homework:* Submit questions for the guest speaker on Moodle



Image credit: Mary Mattingly's *Pull*

+ Tuesday September 20: How do research libraries work? Meet at the Library

- You will receive your homework by email for this library session. It will include reading the Burkhardt article in the *Growler* which is on Moodle under “Sept 20”.

Thurs Sept 22: Fieldtrip 12-4pm (plan accordingly)

Mississippi River - St. Anthony, Weisman Gallery

+ Paddleford Cruise with guest Professor Pat Nunnally, Univ of Minnesota

- Read about *Silver River* @ Weisman Art Museum
<http://www.weisman.umn.edu/event/silver-river>

Part II: The Earth We Have Wrought

***Tues September 27: What’s the scale of human impact?**

- McKibben, “A New World, *Eearth*, Pp 1-46.
 - Rosen, “What 40 years Have Wrought”
- >> *In class*: Introduction to the North Star assignment project
(<http://grist.org/article/were-telling-outer-space-all-about-our-biggest-earth-mistakes/>)

Thurs Sept 29: Attend events for International Roundtable

11:15-1pm Urban Vulnerabilities and Landscapes by Sarah Dooling

John B. Davis Lecture Hall, Ruth Stricker Dayton Campus Center

***Special event: Friday September 30 6-9pm Climate Art sampler in Art Commons (food served)

Tues October 4: In class work time on **North Star assignment**

Thurs October 6: **North Star** presentations in class

Tues Oct 11: Fieldtrip: Ordway and the Bees with Mac Alum Erin Rupp, Pollinate MN

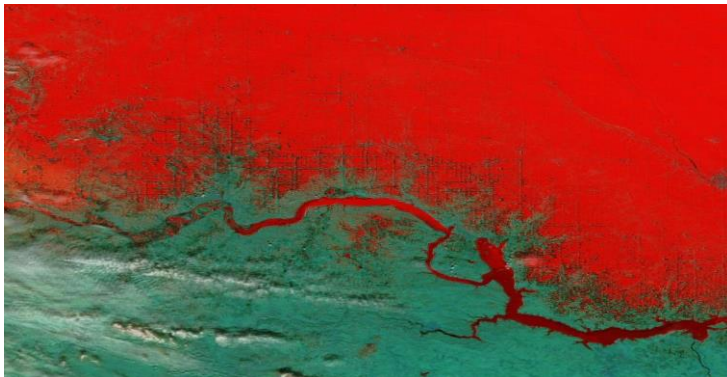


Image credit: NASA’s Terra satellite of the Bakken roads

***Thurs Oct 13: What needs to change?**

- Maniates, “Individualization: Plant a Tree, Buy a Bike, Save the World?”, Pp 31-50

- Nordhaus et al, “An Ecomodernist Manifesto”, Pp. 1-32.

Reading response: Contrast the solutions as expressed by the authors.

>> *In class*: Introduction to Debate assignment

Part III: The Good Anthropocene

+Tues October 18: What does wild mean in the Anthropocene? with Professor Mark Davis
(Biology)

- Marris, "Introduction" and "Chpt 5: Assisted Migration", Pp. 1-15; 73-95.
- Davis et al., "Don't judge species on their origins", Pp 153-154.
- Homework: Submit questions for guest speaker on Moodle

>>In class: Visit from *Sleep Project*



Image credit: Mock sign by Robyn Woolston

(NO CLASS Oct 20-- Fall Break)

Tues October 25: How will we get to the Good Anthropocene?

- Steffen, "The Anthropocene: From Global Change to Planetary Stewardship", Pp 739-757.
- Explore website "Seeds of Good Anthropocenes"
- Reading response: With insights from the reading, explore a project that you find particularly compelling on the "seeds" website. *Inspired by that example*, propose a "seed" in your own life that gives you hope for the Anthropocene.

>> *In class*: Introduce Debate assignment

Thurs October 27: In class screening of *The Anthropocene*

***Tues Nov 1: Is the Anthropocene Democratic?**

- Purdy, "Anthropocene Forever" and "The New Nature" (skip to the latter sections and read "Today's Neoliberal Anthropocene" on "Tomorrow's Democratic Anthropocene")
- *Reading response*: Do you agree with Purdy's concerns about the politics of the Anthropocene?

Thurs Nov 3: In class debate preparation + guest Jayne Neimi, Registrar (1:20-1:50)

Tues November 8: Debate in class

Thurs Nov 10: 12-1pm EnviroThursday with Sarah Christianson, followed by Library session 2

Part IV: Art and the Anthropocene

***Tues Nov 15:** What is special about Art in/and the Anthropocene?

- Davis and Turpin, Art in the Anthropocene: Introduction, Pp. 1-30
- >> In class: Introduce final gallery project



Image credit: Forest Redlin

#Thurs November 17: What does Anthropocene Art aim to accomplish?

- Heartney, “Art for the Anthropocene Era”
- *Homework:* Reflect of the new age of digital museums (or museology) by exploring:

- Museum of Postnatural History at

<http://www.postnatural.org/>

- AnthroSlam at

<http://nelson.wisc.edu/che/anthroslam/objects/index.php>

>>In class: Visit from the *Sleep Project* (end of class)

Tues November 22: Field trip to MIA – More details to be announced.

We will follow the catalog entries of different objects and pieces of art from recent exhibits

(NO CLASS Nov 24-- Thanksgiving Break)

***Tues November 29: Who’s Anthropocene?**

- Raworth, “Must the Anthropocene be a Manthropocene ?”
- Malm and Hornberg, “The geology of mankind? A critique of the Anthropocene narrative”

Reading response: What is lost and gained by adopting the Anthropocene’s grand species perspective on the human?

Thurs Dec 1: And all the other “scenes”...

Selections from:

- Clover and Spahr. [#Misanthropocene: Twenty-Four Theses.](#)
- Haraway, “[Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin](#)”
- *New York Times* “[Notes From the Plasticene Epoch](#)”
- Obscene --
http://www.earthisland.org/journal/index.php/eij/article/anthropocene_is_the_wrong_word/

Tues Dec 6: A Call to Action? Wrapping it Up

- Scranton, “Learning How to Die in the Anthropocene”
- Berbeco, “Teach Your Children: 10 Things the Next Generation will need to know to thrive in the Anthropocene”

Thurs Dec 8: Class presentations in Harmon Room with special guests from Northern Spark

Final Project Due Wed December 14 5pm on Moodle