

Spring 2021

Culture, Humankind, and the Environment

Anthropology 070:302
Environmental Studies 381:371:01
(prerequisites: none)

Class meets Mondays and Wednesdays 9:15-10:35am
Synchronously on Zoom

Instructed by:
Professor David M. Hughes
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office hours: TBA

Course summary

We are living a geological era characterized by the end of nature and human domination of the planet. Or, at least, some humans and some technologies have been converting the earth into a giant house, farm, and factory. The course will examine precedents and break-points in this long trajectory. The control of fire, agriculture, and European colonialism figure prominently in this history. So do less tangible forms of culture: the notion of wilderness, white supremacy, and the meaning of technology itself. We will also examine movements of reform and revolution seeking to combat pollution and related practices of exploitation. Climate change – where we end the course – is profoundly reconfiguring nature, politics, and the future of humanity.

Course objectives

The attentive, serious student will, by the end of the course, will gain an understanding of;

1. Human-environment interaction and co-production;
2. The Columbian Exchange;
3. Tenure and property;
4. Political ecology and environmental injustice.

Graded Work

Students are expected to do all the weekly reading by the class meeting. Students are also responsible for the material in films listed on the syllabus. These will be shown in class and will be available for reviewing at the Douglass Media Library (in the basement). At each class meeting, two students will present the reading, summarizing it, interrogating it, and offering questions for further discussion (see below). Finally, attending the class and contributing to discussions therein contribute to the final grade.

I will calculate final grades as follows:

- 25% for in-class participation
- 25% for reading reports or the presentation
- 25% for the midterm exam
- 25% for final exam or final paper

Students who wish to carry out a major research project, in lieu of the final exam, must discuss this option with the professor by the end of week 4.

Reading Reports

Students may opt to do six reading reports or one presentation. Students should have completed the week's reading by the Wednesday class meeting. Beginning with Week 2, students will submit "reading reports" regarding each week's reading. Students need not do a report every week, but they must complete a total of six reports: three before the midterm and three more between the midterm and the final exam. You must email the reading reports to dhughes@anthropology.rutgers.edu by 5pm on the Tuesday of the given week. Late reading reports will receive no credit. Please put your name (last name, first name) in the subject line of the message. Please include the reading report in the body of the message, rather than attaching it. An acceptable reading report adheres to the following format:

1. Begin by stating a question that an author addresses and answers. Put that author's name in the question. In a paragraph, answer that question in the way that the author does.
2. Begin by stating a question the author does *not* address or answer. If there two or more authors in the given week, use a different author from the one in #1. Put that author's name in the question. In a paragraph, answer that question using your own knowledge, opinion, or speculation.

Presentation

Students may opt to do six reading reports or one presentation. You must make this irrevocable choice at the first class meeting, on 24 January. Held on the second class meeting of the given week, a superior presentation will accomplish the following objectives:

1. summarize the important points of the reading assigned;
2. relate that reading to previous reading, lectures, and/or discussions in the course;
3. relate that reading to some aspect of our everyday lives and/or to current events;
4. discuss a gap, flaw, or limit to the argument of the author of the reading;
5. pose three questions to the class regarding the reading.

Reading

For greater ease of comprehension, please read each week's selections in the order they appear on the syllabus. Almost all the reading materials are available in electronic form on the Sakai site for the course (see below). Where I have assigned more than one third of a book, however, copyright laws prohibit loading it onto this system. Therefore, the books listed immediately below are only available on reserve as hard copies – rather than as electronic files – at the Douglass Library. If you wish, you may also purchase these books at the Barnes and Noble Store are, much more cheaply, in used form on <http://www.abebooks.com> .

Basso, Keith. 1996. *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language among the Western Apache*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.

Levinson, Marc. 2006. *The Box: how the Shipping Container Made the World Smaller and World Economy Bigger*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Patel, Raj and Jason Moore. 2017. *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things: a Guide to Capitalism, Nature, and the Future of the Planet*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Thorsheim, Peter. 2006. *Inventing Pollution: Coal, Smoke, and Culture in Britain since 1800*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press.

Canvas Site

??You will submit written work through the “Assignments” section of the Sakai course website. Sakai automatically compares all such texts with each other and with the entirety of the web.

Course policies

Absences: Students are expected to attend all classes. I will only excuse absences for medical, legal, or military causes and upon the student's presentation of relevant documents. If you must miss a class, try to borrow the notes of a fellow student. Also, please use the University absence reporting website (<https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/>) to indicate the date and reason for your absence. Using this procedure alone does not excuse the absence.

Classroom etiquette: Class begins punctually. Late arrival indicates disrespect to the instructor and to the other students. In order to minimize disruptions, late students should settle themselves as quietly as possible in the back of the classroom. Texting, emailing, and web surfing is similarly disrespectful and undermining. Those engaging in these activities will be asked to leave the lecture hall for the rest of the period. Regarding cell phone rings, they are to be avoided at all costs. I do not allow any form of electronic recording unless authorized by a letter of accommodation from the Office of Disability Services.

Academic integrity: Cheating lowers the value of a Rutgers degree and the learning experience for all students. No form of cheating will be tolerated. When take-home exams are submitted, the Sakai site automatically screens each for evidence of plagiarism. One commits plagiarism when one represents the text or ideas of others as one's own creation. Please visit the website of the Rutgers Office of Academic Integrity (<http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu>) for a fuller explanation of plagiarism and of the penalties for it. Convicted plagiarists will receive a disciplinary F in the course and possibly face expulsion from the University.

Syllabus

Week 1 (20 January): Introduction

Week 2 (25,27 January): Humanity out of the environment

Wrangham, Richard. 2009. *Catching Fire: How Cooking Made us Human*. New York: Basic Books. Introduction, Chapters 2 and 5 (about 50 pages).

Kolbert, Elizabeth. 2014. *The Sixth Extinction: an Unnatural History*. New York: Henry Holt and Company. Chapters 12 and 13 (37 pages)

Week 3 (1,3 February): The beginning and end of nature

Ghosh, Amitav. 2017. *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Part 1 (pp. 3-84).

Kopenawa, Davi and Bruce Albert. 2013. *The Falling Sky: Words of a Yanomami Shaman*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Forward and Chapters 16 and 24.

I. Animals, vegetables, and minerals

Week 4 (8,10 February): Taming organisms

Scott, James C. 2017. *Against the Grain: a Deep History of the Earliest States*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. Chapters 1 and 2 (56 pages).

Week 5 (15,17 February): The plantation

Patel, Raj and Jason Moore. 2017. *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things: a Guide to Capitalism, Nature, and the Future of the Planet*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Introduction and Chapter 3 (70 pages).

Week 6 (22,24 February): Taking the commodity seriously

Sheller, Mimi. 2014. *Aluminum Dreams: the Making of Light Modernity*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. Chapter 4 (pp. 85-114).

Watts, Michael. 2001. "Petro-violence: community, extraction, and the political ecology of a mythic commodity." In Nancy Lee Peluso and Michael Watts, eds. *Violent Environments*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Week 7 (1,3 March) Review and exam

There will be a review session on Monday 1 March. The exam is a take-home, open-book test. The test will be posted on Canvas on Tuesday 2 March at 12noon. I will advise students on complete draft essays during the class meeting on Wednesday 3 March. Only students who have completed draft essays should come to this meeting. Exams must be turned in to the Canvas site by 11:59pm on Thursday 4 March.

II. World-making

Week 8 (8,10 March): Place as identity

Basso, Keith. 1996. *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language among the Western Apache*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press. Pp. 3-70, 105-29, 151-52.

Spring break

Week 9 (22,24 March): Connection and death

Crosby, Alfred. 1986. *Ecological Imperialism: the Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. Chapters 4 and 7 (55 pages).

Week 10 (29,31 March): Race and space

Hughes, David McDermott. 2006. "Hydrology of hope: farm dams, conservation, and whiteness in Zimbabwe." *American Ethnologist* 33(2):269-87.

Bilby, Kenneth M. 2005. *True-Born Maroons*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida. Chapter 5 (53 pages).

Week 11 (5,7 April): Globalization

Levinson, Marc. 2006. *The Box: how the Shipping Container Made the World Smaller and World Economy Bigger*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Chapters 1,4,7,8,12, and 14 (about 100 pages).

III. Struggle

Week 12 (12,14 March) : Ecology becomes political

Thorsheim, Peter. 2006. *Inventing Pollution: Coal, Smoke, and Culture in Britain since 1800*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press. Chapters 1,3,5,9,10, and Conclusion (100 pp).

Class does not meet on Wednesday 21 November due to Thanksgiving.

Week 13 (19,21 April): Toxic Body

Auyero, Javier and Déborah Alejandra Swistun. 2009. *Flammable: Environmental Suffering in an Argentine Shantytown*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. Introduction, Chapters 1-2 (about 60 pages).

Antonetta, Susan. 2001. *Body Toxic: an Environmental Memoir*. Washington, DC: Counterpoint. Chapters 1,3, and 7 (about 80 pages).

Williams, Terry Tempest. 1991. *Refuge: an Unnatural History of Family and Place*. New York: Vintage. Epilogue (10 pages)

Week 14 (26,28 April): Humanity during Climate Change

Patel, Raj and Jason Moore. 2017. *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things: a Guide to Capitalism, Nature, and the Future of the Planet*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Chapters 6-7 and Conclusion (52 pages).

Hughes, David M. 2017. "A jobless utopia?" *Boston Review*. 19 May. <http://bostonreview.net/class-inequality/david-mcdermott-hughes-jobless-utopia>

Week 15 (3 May): Review and exam

We will hold a review session on Monday 3 May. The take-home midterm will be post on Canvas at 12noon on Tuesday 4 May. Exams must be turned in to Canvas by 11:59pm on Thursday 6 May.