Hist 204: A Global History of Climate Change
Fall 2015, Professor Dagomar Degroot
Office Hour: Tuesday, 2:30 PM, 600 ICC
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Course Description:

Global warming caused by human activity is transforming our world today. However, climate change is not a new phenomenon. In this course, we will explore how natural and anthropogenic climate change has shaped human history, from the emergence of our species to the rise of ISIS. We will contemplate how climatic variability comes to influence human beings, reconstruct past climatic trends using interdisciplinary sources, and discover why climate changes. We will use case studies to investigate why some societies are vulnerable and others more resilient to climatic shifts. We will trace how climate change influenced organized violence, social upheaval, technological progress, and artistic responses. Finally, we will learn how scientists first detected global warming, examine what their models tell us about its future, and consider how it is already affecting our lives today.

Course Goals:

Like other courses offered by Georgetown University’s Department of History, this course will help you:

1. Gain a better appreciation of the nature and practice of history as a discipline, and as the study, based on evidence, of human experiences, interactions, and relationships as they change over time.
2. Learn to appreciate that history does not consist of a simple succession of self-evident facts, and that evidence-based interpretation and analysis are central to all historical work.
3. Hone reading, writing, and oral communication skills.
4. Develop your ability to think historically: to situate events and developments in their historical context for the purpose of critical analysis.
5. Expand your ability to engage with complex causal analysis, and to articulate arguments that integrate supporting evidence and analytical commentary.
6. Learn to view the world from perspectives other than your own.

This course in particular will also help you:
1. Appreciate the significance and deep context of modern climate change.
2. Understand complex relationships between climate change and humanity.
3. Broaden your appreciation for diverse scholarly disciplines, and their distinct ways of deciphering the past.

**Breakdown:**

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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Museum Assignment</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Essay Prospectus</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Primary Source Essay</td>
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<td>Exam</td>
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**Evaluation:**

**Participation:**

We will conclude most classes with a discussion of our readings. These conversations will link the readings to key ideas communicated in lecture. I expect you to complete your readings by the first class listed under each week in your schedule. Special “workshop” classes will allow you to decipher primary or interdisciplinary sources in groups. Informal, in-class group assignments will involve discussion and debate.

In all classroom conversations, you will earn participation marks for the quantity and especially the quality of your comments.

**Museum Assignment:**

DUE DATE: 1 OCTOBER 2015

Write a five-page essay that links one museum exhibit to the history of climate change. Support your paper with at least four books or articles. A scholar who is not a historian (for example, a scientist, an anthropologist, etc.) must have written at least one of your articles or books. When searching for secondary sources on climate history, use this site as your starting point: [http://climatehistorynetwork.com/bibliography](http://climatehistorynetwork.com/bibliography).

**Essay Prospectus:**

DUE DATE: 20 OCTOBER 2015

Choose a topic relevant to the history of climate change. Be as creative as possible! Next, hunt for primary and secondary sources that will let you write an essay about your topic. You can find primary sources online, for example at: [http://www.historicalclimatology.com/databases.html](http://www.historicalclimatology.com/databases.html). However, you can also search through Lauinger Library, the National Archives, the Library of Congress, and other resources in the city. Your secondary sources should include at least six books, where one
book is equivalent to two articles. A scholar who is not a historian must have written at least two of your books (or four of your articles).

Now, write a two-page outline of your intended essay that briefly describes: 1) your thesis; 2) your primary sources, and how they will support your thesis; and 3) your secondary sources, and how they will contextualize your thesis.

**Primary Source Essay:**

**DUE DATE: 1 DECEMBER 2015**

If I approve your topic and sources, write an original, 15-page environmental history of climate change. Primary sources should be central to your thesis, but your interpretation of these sources, and your investigation of their context, should be supported by secondary sources. Be sure to contextualize your thesis in light of the arguments raised in your secondary sources (we will discuss how to do this in class).

Write a one-paragraph, single-spaced abstract of your essay. I will post all abstracts on HistoricalClimatology.com. You will be able to browse one another’s work, and people from around the world will learn about climate history through your research.

**Exam:**

**DATE: TBA**

The exam will be divided into two parts:

1. Multiple choice and short answer.

2. Essay answer. You will be required to write an essay about a primary source given in your exam booklet.

**Grading Criteria:**

*Each of these criteria will be worth approximately a third of your grade:*

**Clarity:**

Are you using words that appropriately and formally express your meaning? Are your points sourced correctly? Do your sentences precisely express your meaning, and are they grammatically correct? Is there a clear thesis that presents an argument and outlines how that argument will be defended? Is there a coherent organization that culminates in a conclusion that references the thesis?

**Research:**
Are your secondary sources serious works of scholarship, and are they relevant to your argument? Do your primary sources illuminate the issue you are investigating, and to what extent? Are those primary sources relevant to your argument, and do you present them in the context of your secondary sources? Is your interpretation of your primary sources creative but nuanced?

Ideas:

How creative and nuanced are your arguments? Are you merely repeating the claims of other scholars, or are you evaluating them against their colleagues, and against primary sources (where you are asked to use them)? To what extent can you build new knowledge rather than re-interpret old ideas?

Required Course Texts:


Notes:

Academic Honesty:

Plagiarism is not just about copying someone else’s writing. Any time you present ideas without correctly citing them, you are committing plagiarism. This is academia’s most serious intellectual offense, and it is taken very seriously by Georgetown University.

It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with the [Georgetown University Undergraduate Honor System](https://honors.georgetown.edu). It is my duty to refer academic misconduct – including plagiarism – to the Honor Council. If the Council decides that you have plagiarized, you will fail this class and suffer additional penalties.

Submitting Assignments:

Assignments are due at the beginning of class. Any assignment submitted after the first 15 minutes of class is late. Give me a paper copy, and then submit an electronic copy (in PDF format) on Blackboard. Late assignments will receive a 5%/day penalty.
Extensions:

You may ask me for an extension, but your request will only be granted in exceptional circumstances (compassionate grounds, illness, etc.). The length of the extension granted will be judged on a case-by-case basis, and you may be asked for written verification. Contact your deans in case of absences, problems with due dates, and other problems.

Missing Classes:

If you think that you will need to miss several classes for significant and predictable reasons (such as religious observances or University-sponsored athletic events), you must inform me of the specific circumstances and dates at the start of the term. I will try to accommodate requests for a reasonable number of such absences, but I cannot guarantee that you will in any case be able successfully to complete all required class work. You must therefore make sure that the details of the situation are clear to both you and me early on, so that you may have a chance to enroll in a different class if accommodation should prove impossible.

Schedule:

- This schedule is approximate and may be changed by your professor.
- If possible, complete these readings in the order in which they are listed.
- Complete your readings by the first class listed under each week.

Section 1: Introducing the Environmental History of Climate Change

Week 1: Introduction


Reading:


Week 2: Definitions and Concepts, Methods and Meanings
8 September: What is climate change? Why does climate change? How can we trace its changes?
10 September: Interdisciplinarity in climate history. Conceptualizing how climate change influences humanity.

Reading:


Section 2: A Million Years of Climate History

Week 3: Climate Prehistory

15 September: Human evolution in a changing climate.
17 September: Megafaunal extinctions, land bridges, and agricultural revolutions.

Reading:

1. Brooke, John L. Climate Change and the Course of Global History, xix-164.

Week 4: Ancient Civilizations

22 September: Bronze Age crisis: was climate change to blame?
24 September: The rise and decline of classical civilizations.

Reading:

1. Brooke, John L. Climate Change and the Course of Global History, 165-349.
**Week 5: Medieval Anomalies**

*MUSEUM ASSIGNMENT DUE*

29 September: Mayan collapse and the rise of the Inca.
1 October: The Medieval Climatic Anomaly: causes, consequences, and changing paradigms.

**Reading:**


**Week 6: Transition and Decline**

6 October: Climate change and Vikings in the far north. Guide to library resources.
8 October: Climate reconstruction workshop.

**Reading:**


Section 3: Disaster and Opportunity in the Little Ice Age

Week 7: Controversial Cooling

PAPER PROSPECTUS DUE

13 October: The case for a Little Ice Age.
15 October: Farming, hunting, and fishing in a cooler Climate.

Reading:

1. Brooke, John L. Climate Change and the Course of Global History, 413-466.

Week 8: Global Crisis?

20 October: Disease and climate change.
22 October: Cooling and social unrest.

Reading:

1. Parker, Geoffrey. Global Crisis: War, Climate Change and Catastrophe in the Seventeenth Century, 26-113. Choose any two chapters from chapters 5-12.

Week 9: Adaptation and Resilience

27 October: The Dutch exception.
29 October: Waging war in the Little Ice Age.

Reading:

Week 10: The Cultural Reception of Climate Change

3 November: Perceiving a Little Ice Age.
5 November: Cultural and technological responses.

Reading:


Week 11: Empire and the End of the Little Ice Age

10 November: Climate (change) and European imperialism.
12 November: Climate change, race, gender, and class.

Reading:


Section 4: The Warming Anthropocene

Week 12: Discovering and Dealing with Warming

17 November: The science of global warming.
19 November: Climate change and human history in the past century.
Reading:


**Week 13: A Changing World**

*PRIMARY SOURCE ESSAY DUE*

24 November: IPCC workshop.
26 November: Thanksgiving!

Reading:


**Week 14: Marketing Doubt; Predicting the Future.**

3 December: Merchants of Doubt?
8 December: Beyond Earth, and beyond the present. Exam review.

Reading: