

Global Environmental Problems, Environmentalisms, and the Age of Climate Change

Professor Matthew Vitz

T/TH 11:00-12:20

Robinson Auditorium

Office Hours: Wednesdays 1-3 HSS 4063 (mvitz@ucsd.edu)

SECTION ID	TYPE	SECTION	DAY	TIME	BUILDING	LOCATION	INSTRUCTOR	ASSIGNED TO
988634	DI	A01	W	9:00a-9:50a	RBC	AUD	Vitz, Matthew	Abner S.
988635	DI	A02	W	10:00a-10:50a	RBC	GARDN	Vitz, Matthew	Abner S.
988636	DI	A03	W	11:00a-11:50a	RBC	GARDN	Vitz, Matthew	Amie C.
988637	DI	A04	W	12:00p-12:50p	RBC	GARDN	Vitz, Matthew	Amie C.
988638	DI	A05	W	1:00p-1:50p	RBC	GARDN	Vitz, Matthew	Nancy T.
988639	DI	A06	W	2:00p-2:50p	RBC	GARDN	Vitz, Matthew	Nancy T.
988640	DI	A07	F	9:00a-9:50a	RBC	3203	Vitz, Matthew	Sam G.
988641	DI	A08	F	10:00a-10:50a	RBC	3203	Vitz, Matthew	Sam G.

Global Warming (or in broader terms, climate change) will be the greatest single challenge facing our world in the 21st century. One, in fact, could argue that climate change already *is* the greatest challenge we all face, even though it remains on the margins of political discourse in most countries and especially in the U.S until this past year. Such statements are no longer hyperbole; fossil fuel use is high and

incredibly unsustainable, global temperatures are rising fast, and devastating social and environmental consequences loom. There are some signs that international cooperation to combat climate change is strengthening, but progress on this front is slow and has taken a hit with the current national political climate in the U.S. This grim reality, in great part, led an influential group of scientists in August 2016 to propose that the period of time starting in 1945 (some say the 1780s, the decade fossil-fuel based industrialization began in England) be denoted a new geological epoch: “The Anthropocene.” Humans, they (and others) argue, have left indelible imprints on the soil, ice, and geological record through the consumption of fossil fuels and other related activities such as nuclear warfare, the mass use of plastics, and chemical fertilizers springing from our modern urban and industrial society. Declaring a new geological epoch that places front and center the role of humans in molding global environments is probably good science, but it is also politically motivated to spur action. Yet debates over what types of solutions to pursue rage on, while some (mostly in the United States) continue to deny the need for any action.

This class seeks to interrogate the term “Anthropocene” by historicizing it and critically examining the economic models, social power relations, and inequalities that have given rise to and shaped this new era. Humans have been radically transforming and exploiting the world’s forests, oceans, soils, freshwaters, geological strata, and fauna on a massive scale since at least 1800, when commercial capitalism and industrial civilization took off. And, for about as long, environmentalists of various stripes, humanists, social scientists, and others have been debating the environmental degradation spawned by this urban industrial modernity.

The course is divided into three parts. The first part will serve as an introduction to global environmental degradation and its accompanying problems (many of which have led to our current climate crisis), how degradation evolved over time, and how it had different effects on people based on class, race, and gender. The second part of the course will delve into the rich and multifarious cultural and political traditions of environmental thinking across the globe to reflect on the limits and possibilities of environmental politics over time and space. You will learn about the utilitarian and conquest conceptions of nature that environmentalists have long sought to overturn, early preservation and conservation movements, the rise of modern environmentalism and ecological thinking, sustainable development paradigms, and environmental justice movements, among other ideas. The third part is dedicated to 1) a deeper understanding of our present environmental crisis as rooted in power relations, inequality, and the accumulation of earlier crises; and 2) pondering, based on the global environmental history we have learned, what the future might bring, with a special emphasis on pessimistic (even apocalyptic) visions and optimistic (even utopian) visions.

Required Books to purchase (available at bookstore):

Ramachandra Guha, *Environmentalism: A Global History* (Langham, 2000)

This book will also be available on reserve at Geisel.

All other readings will be uploaded to our Canvas site.

Major Course Assignments

Attendance: You are required to attend lecture. I will ask you a simple question about the lecture, readings, or some other class activity, and you will have 2-3 minutes to write a response. This will be my way of registering your attendance. This will happen randomly during about 8 of the lecture sessions, at the beginning, middle, or end. If you miss one of these, you will still receive an A. Two absences will be a B+, and 3 or more absences will result in more substantial deductions.

In-lecture Midterm Exam : A test of your understanding of key terms and concepts from lectures and discussions of readings. You will need to write a short paragraph identifying and explaining the key terms. You will select about 8 or 9 from 10 or 11.

Short Essay: A 3-4 page historical narrative and explanation of an environmental problem that has affected you and/or your hometown in some way. This could be any number of things, but think specifically about something that has happened, or is happening now, in or near where you live or grew up. You will then use the course material and one outside academic source to place the problem in its regional/national/global context; discuss who is affected most by the problem; and explain what kinds of efforts have been undertaken, if any, to address the problem.

Final Take-home essay: A 7-8 page essay. This is a two-part essay. In the first part, you will need to give a brief summary of the major environmental paradigms covered in the class and make an argument for the one(s) that you consider most convincing. Note: it might behoove you to consider more than one very convincing, but instead of defending them separately use your critical thinking skills to bring them together to form your own environmental ethics. Be sure that if you synthesize two or more paradigms that your new formulation does not have contradictions. (We will review more thoroughly what I mean by this at the end of the quarter). The second part is connected to the first. You will answer the following question: You have been hearing about dire warnings and often bleak, dystopian predictions regarding climate change (a future all the more possible in the Age of Trump and widespread climate change denial in the U.S.). Let's now turn the tables. Reflecting on lectures, readings, notes, and class discussions, etc., what would your ideal environmental future look like? How would we get there? What obstacles would need to be overcome? What kind of polity would it require? What kinds of social relations would we need to have? There will be more precise and thorough instructions for this two-part final essay during the second half of the term.

Reading Reflections: Reading comprehension is absolutely essential for your success in this class. Readings appear on the syllabus under the lectures, and you need to read them for that day. However, you will discuss the readings during your first section that follows the lecture. Sometimes, your TA will give you reading comprehension quizzes (see section syllabus for details). On 3 of the reading assignments, you will write a two-page “response paper” on the corresponding Triton-ed assignment. The response papers are due before the corresponding lecture, and you will not be able to upload them after class starts. See syllabus for due dates. You will not have a reading comprehension quiz for readings you must write a response paper.

Section Attendance and Participation: See section syllabus for details. Sections will be primarily devoted to reading discussion, lecture review (when necessary), assignment and essay preparation, as well as other activities that complement lectures. Again, readings are due prior to the corresponding lecture (as indicated on the syllabus), but discussions of these readings will take place on the first section after the lecture the readings are due.

Grading Rubric

Lecture Attendance 10%

3 Reading Reflection Papers 10%

Section Attendance and Participation 15%

Midterm 25%

Short Essay 10%

Final Paper: 30%

Course Objectives

--Gain a capacity to think critically about the past and our changing relationship with non-human nature

--Gain an understanding that all environmental problems are at once social problems tied to social structures of power and inequality

--Interpret and evaluate the different ways people have sought to deal with environmental problems past and present

--Learn about climate crisis, what is being done (and not being done) to address it, and what can be done about it now and in the future by interrogating and critiquing myriad proposals and environmental visions.

--Improve your writing and reading comprehension skills

A Brief Note on Note-Taking

Come to class and take good notes. Understand the key themes and argument of each lecture, the key people involved, and the key terms. I will provide a list of key terms at the beginning of each class. In your exams, you will need to use evidence in the forms of historical examples and cases from the lectures and readings. This is how I know you understand the material. Use the key terms as a guide for your note taking. If you are confused during lecture, raise your hand. Moreover, take good notes on the readings. Capture the main arguments and major claims with notes. Use zotero, word files, or show some love for the old school and have a notebook specifically for this class.

Office Hours and Availability

If you cannot see me during office hours, please send me an email to arrange an alternative time. I want you to do well in this class, so please stay in touch with me throughout the quarter. If you are confused about the material or if you're having trouble keeping up in class, do not hesitate to see me. I reply to emails regarding questions whose answers don't require one-on-one meetings. However, be sure to check the syllabus first before you ask your question. If you do not receive a response from me within 48 hours, it is likely because the answer is readily available on the syllabus or on an assignment handout. Otherwise, write me again; I receive up to 20 important emails each day, so it could be that yours slipped through the cracks.

Academic Integrity

Integrity of scholarship is essential for an academic community. The University expects that both faculty and students will honor this principle and in so doing protect the validity of University intellectual work. For students, this means that all academic work will be done by the individual to whom it is assigned, without unauthorized aid of any kind. You may work in groups or consult with other classmates for assignments, but all work in the end must be your own.

Plagiarism will not be tolerated. There are two kinds of plagiarism: copying the work of another person word for word (a sentence, part of a sentence or more) and the use of idea(s) that you do not attribute to its author with a citation). It is important to know how to paraphrase in your writing. This means you must put the ideas of others into your own words, your own formulation. It does not suffice to simply change one word here and there. And you must always cite ideas that are not yours unless it is common knowledge (at least 3 others have made the exact same point). If I catch an act of plagiarism, I will consult with university authorities (The Academic Integrity

Office). This could result in automatic failure of the class or the assignment, depending on the severity of the case, as well as additional administrative sanctions.

Accessibility

Students with disabilities enrolled in the course and who may need disability-related classroom accommodations are encouraged to make an appointment to see me before the end of the second week of the term. All discussions will remain confidential, unless university assistance is needed to implement a requested accommodation.

Writing Help

The UC San Diego *Teaching and Learning Commons Writing and Critical Expression Hub* offers tutoring on the writing process and writing skills. To sign-up for a one-on-one appointment go to <https://commons.ucsd.edu/students/writing/index.html>.

Course Schedule (subject to change)

Tuesday January 7: Course Introduction: Syllabus Review, Expectations, and Some Key Concepts

Part I: Global Environmental Change: 1600 to the Present

Thursday January 9: Environmental History as History of The Anthropocene: Global Environmental Problems Introduced

Tuesday, January 14: Colonialism, The Commodification of Nature, and the Making of the Modern World

Readings:

1. Ted Steinberg, "Down to Earth: Nature, Agency and Power in History" *American Historical Review* 107, 3 (June 2002): 798-820

Thursday, January 16: The Environmental History of Energy, Mining, and Industry

Readings: 1. Andreas Malm, "The origins of Fossil Capital: From Water to Steam in the British Cotton Industry" *Historical Materialism* (2013) (selections)
2. Myrna Santiago, "Class and Nature in the Oil Industry of Northern Veracruz, 1900-1938" in *A Land Between Waters: Environmental Histories of Modern Mexico* ed. Christopher R. Boyer (Univ of Arizona Press, 2012)

Response Paper due on these two readings

Tuesday, January 21: The Rise of Industrial Agriculture

Readings: 1. Angus Wight, *The Death of Ramon Gonzalez: The Modern Agricultural Dilemma* (University of Texas, 2005): Introduction and Aftwerword
2. Alicia Fentiman, "The Anthropology of Oil: The Impact of the Oil Industry on a Fishing Community in the Niger Delta." *World in Motion: The Globalization and the Environment Reader*. Gary M. Kroll and Richard H. Robbins, eds. (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2009): 32-44

Thursday, January 23: Warfare, Chemicals, and Environment

Readings: 1. Edmund Russell, "Speaking of Annihilation: Mobilizing for War Against Human and Insect Enemies, 1914-1945" *Journal of American History* (1996)

Response Paper due

Video in class on Agent Orange in Vietnam

Tuesday, January 28: Planetary Urbanization

Readings: "Phagocene: Consuming the Planet" in *Shock of the Anthropocene* (Verso, 2016)

Thursday, January 30: Midterm review

Part II. Politics and Culture: Conceptions and Ideology of Environment and Nature

Tuesday, February 4: Midterm exam in class

Thursday, February 6: Capitalism and Nature: Utilitarian and Conquest Mentalities

Readings: Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (Harper, 1980): Introduction, Chapter 1 "Nature as Female", and Chapter 7 "Dominion over Nature"

Tuesday, February 11: No class

Thursday, February 13: Conservation and Public Health: the Antecedents to Modern Environmentalism

Readings: 1. Ramachandra Guha, *Environmentalism: A Global History* (Longman, 2000): 1-62.

Tuesday, February 18: The Rise of Ecology and Modern Environmentalism

Readings: 1. Guha, *Environmentalism*: 63-97

PBS Special Documentary “Rachel Carson”

Thursday, February 20: Environmental Justice

Readings: 1. Guha, *Environmentalism*: 98-124
2. Joan Martínez Alier: “Environmental Justice and Economic Degrowth: An Alliance between Two Movements” *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism* 23, 1 (2012): 51-73

Response Paper Due

Tuesday, February 25: Sustainability Politics and Neoliberalism

Readings: 1. Andreas Malm, “The Anthropocene Myth: Blaming Humanity for Climate Change Lets Capitalism off the Hook” *The Jacobin* (2015)

Part III. The Future of the Anthropocene: Alternative Worlds Not Involving Severe Climate Emergency and Societal Collapse

Thursday, February 27: The Global Politics of Climate Change

Short Essay Due

Film: “Merchants of Doubt” (finish film out of class)

Tuesday, March 3: Climate Emergency and Alternative Worlds I: Free Market Environmentalism and Techno-Utopias

Readings: 1. “Bolivia’s Lithium Challenge” *North American Congress on Latin America* (NACLA), “Bolivia’s Dilemma: Development Confronts the Legacy of Extraction” *NACLA*; “Clean Energy Plays Dirty in Oaxaca” and “Not so Peacefully Green” in *NACLA*, and <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/09/23/jonathan-ledgard-believes-imagination-could-save-the-world>

Thursday, March 5: Alternative Worlds II: New International Orders under Capitalism and a Social-Democratic Vision

Readings: A couple short readings on alternative worlds (TBD)

Tuesday, March 10: Alternative Worlds III: Eco-socialism and Radical Anti-capitalist Critique

Readings: A few more short readings on alternative worlds (TBD)

Thursday, March 12: Class Reflections—What Would a Global Environmental Ethics Look Like?

Take-home final essay due Thursday, March 19 by 3pm.