

ANTH 1601: Reimagining Climate Change

Brown University, Fall 2020

Tuesday and Thursday, 1 PM – 2:30 PM, Zoom

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Course Description

The science is settled. Fossil fueled human societies have irrevocably altered the climate system, precipitating sea-level rise, catastrophic weather, drought, species extinction, grave political instability, and loss of life. We know what causes climate change and we (generally) know what to do about it—and yet, it seems, we only keep making it worse. Numerous theories abound as to why this is the case—the greed of fossil fuel corporations, a lack of political will, human indifference, human anxiety, neoliberal capitalism, moral degeneration. This course starts from the premise that none of these theories are wrong, per se, but neither are they exactly right. Instead, our climate stalemate suggests that the multiple ways in which we understand what climate change is and what to do about it are similarly constrained by one-dimensional analyses, limited theories of change, and panacea thinking.

As such, this course aims to (1) critically engage with the metanarratives and silver-bullet “solutions” that have dominated climate discourse; and (2) amplify other responses and analyses that address the intersecting exploitative, racist, patriarchal, and anthropocentric systems of domination at the core of our climate challenges. With these objectives in mind, this course will prepare students to reconceptualize the problem of climate change and reimagine responses to it. We will draw from a range of scholarship and activism related to the fields of anthropology, geography, Black diaspora/Africana studies, Indigenous studies, political ecology, science and technology studies, post-humanism, and the humanities.

This course is comprised of two parts with an interlude. Part one will introduce students to anthropological, historical, and geographical frameworks for conceptualizing, assessing, and dissecting the dominant understandings of and responses to climate change. We will look critically at climate timescales, climate science and climate modeling, disaster capitalism, “global” epistemologies, REDD+, carbon trading, and the Anthropocene concept. During our interlude, we will apply these frameworks to popular climate mitigation strategies, as students will utilize scholarship to engage with real world analyses as part of a “Metanarrative Meditation” assignment. Part two will offer new and alternative approaches to imagining and pursuing climate responses with a focus on perspectives that have been undermined by the systems of extraction and exploitation at the root of anthropogenic climate change.

Eligibility

This course is geared to advanced undergraduate and graduate students.

Required Texts

These books have been ordered through the Brown Bookstore. Please be in touch if you need access to electronic copies.

- Kathryn Yusoff. 2019. *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*.
- Mike Hulme. 2009. *Why we Disagree about Climate Change: Understanding Controversy, Inaction and Opportunity*.
- Robin Wall Kimmerer. 2015. *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*.
- Anna Tsing. 2015. *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*.
- Cara Daggett. 2019. *The Birth of Energy: Fossil Fuels, Thermodynamics, and the Politics of Work*.
- Vincanne Adams. 2013. *Markets of Sorrow, Labors of Faith: New Orleans in the Wake of Katrina*.

All other readings on the syllabus will be posted on Canvas. Please note that I expect you to have a copy of the day's readings with you when we convene on Zoom, and I expect you to do your best to refer to page numbers when you speak in class so that others can follow along. That said, I understand that it might be difficult referring to electronic texts and participating on Zoom simultaneously.

Course Requirements and Grading

Attendance and Participation (25%)

All members of this class are expected to contribute to robust group and class discussions. Please come to class prepared to critically engage with the assigned texts. Students should note that merely being present on Zoom does not constitute participation—students must verbally engage with the course themes, reading materials, and one another out loud in class discussions.

If I will be delivering mini-lectures on Tuesdays. If you miss class on a Tuesday, *you are strongly encouraged to watch the class recording prior to class on Thursday*.

Students will also be encouraged to contribute to a Jargon Discussion Board, where you can identify terms and ideas from the readings and from class that you find complicated or extremely complex. I will make an effort to demystify all jargon on the Discussion Board and encourage us, as a class, to better understand and/or problematize the core ideas of anything that strikes you as jargony.

Metanarrative Meditation (30%)

Students will compose a 3 - 9 page meditation that draws from the course's anthropological frameworks to critically explore the popular climate metanarratives that we will read and view during the course's interlude. For this assignment, you can either write a traditional short paper or engage with different and alternative forms of text-based media or form. Submissions will be graded according to two criteria:

- How does the submission engage with at least two *specific* ideas, theories, or analyses from the assigned readings in Part One of the course?
- How does the submission utilize these ideas, theories, or analyses to destabilize at least one of the climate metanarratives from the Interlude?

Your submission's length, number of citations, and format are not my primary concern. Instead, I'm seeking *in-depth* engagement with course materials. Don't simply cite the course's assigned readings; engage them critically and with specificity.

Weekly Questions, Ideas, and Intentions or Thesis Statements (10%)

To facilitate analysis and participation, students will formulate two questions, ideas, and/or 'intentions for class discussion' based on the reading each week. An 'intention for class discussion' is a *detailed* statement on what you hope to accomplish by critically exploring the assigned readings in class with your peers. Each student will post their two questions, ideas, and/or intentions on Canvas prior to Thursday classes and share them out loud within small groups. We will then structure class discussion around these questions, ideas, and intentions.

If you miss a Thursday class, you will be responsible for writing one to two sentence thesis statements summarizing the major points in the week's readings and submit it to Canvas within three weeks of your absence. This is not a general description of the article's topic, but a rephrasing of its thesis that shows that you understand it. Try to avoid generic statements like: "Johnson describes climate change adaptation projects in the Sahara." Instead focus on capturing the core ideas of a reading, for example: "Johnson compares different approaches to climate adaptation in the Sahara, arguing that 'mundane' projects to provision water on the community scale are more effective than large-scale resilience projects led by states." In lieu of class discussion, this exercise aims to help you synthesize complex ideas in your own words, and help you formulate your arguments when writing your meditations.

Final Paper/Project (35%)

Students will either:

- Write a 12 -15 page framework for the Brown Sustainability Plan grounded in the themes of the course and drawing from course readings and other pertinent scholarly and activist research;
- Write a 12 -15 page final research paper (20 - 25 pages for grad students) exploring any topic pertinent to climate change, chosen in consultation with the instructor;
- Write a 12 -15 page meditation on how the course's texts and discussions challenged or reconfigured your understandings of and responses to climate change—or how these texts

and discussions failed in this regard. Meditations should include some statement of intention on how you plan to reorient yourself or your work in light of this class; OR

- Undertake a group project (two or more students) in any media or format that draws from and *substantively* engages with the themes of the course. The group project could also be an collaboratively-designed version of the Brown Sustainability Plan discussed above

You are encouraged to begin conceptualizing and researching this assignment early in the semester, and to attend office hours to discuss your submission ideas. A preliminary detailed two-page double-spaced proposal will comprise 15% of your final paper grade and will be due the tenth week of class.

Other Course Policies

Late submissions: Please submit all work on time. Unexcused late papers will be marked down one grade step (e.g. B to B-) each day they are late, up to a maximum of two full grade levels (i.e. A to C).

Academic Dishonesty. Participation in this class assumes your familiarity and compliance with Brown's policies on plagiarism and appropriate classroom conduct. Both mid-term and final paper assignments will include specific instructions on whether, how, and when collaboration and consultation with others is permitted. Violations will be reported to the appropriate disciplinary body. If you have questions about citations, collaboration, or anything else, please don't hesitate to ask me or to make use of other Brown resources such as the Writing Center.

Schedule of Meetings, Topics, and Readings

Part One: Destabilizing Climate Metanarratives

9/10: Introductions – No reading

9/15: Rethinking Assumptions: Climate Solutionism, Capitalism, Colonialism, Part 1

Mike Hulme. 2009. *Why We Disagree About Climate Change: Understanding Controversy, Inaction and Opportunity*.

- Chapters 1, 4, and 7

Larry Lohmann. 2008. "Carbon Trading, Climate Justice and the Production of Ignorance: Ten examples" in *Development* 51(3)

9/17: Rethinking Assumptions: Climate Solutionism, Capitalism, Colonialism, Part 2

Anil Agarwal and Sunita Narain. 1991. *Global Warming in an Unequal World: A Case of Environmental Colonialism*.

Choose one of the following two texts:

- Ozzie Zehner. 2012. "Solar Cells and Other Fairy Tales," *Green Illusions: The Dirty Secrets of Clean Energy and the Future of Environmentalism*.
- Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition. 2009. *Toward a Just and Sustainable Solar Energy Industry*.

9/22: Historicizing Climate, Part 1

Mike Hulme. 2009. *Why We Disagree About Climate Change: Understanding Controversy, Inaction and Opportunity*.

- Chapter 2

Kuko Asaka. 2018. *Tropical Freedom: Climate, Settler Colonialism, and Black Exclusion in the Age of Emancipation*.

- Chapter 1: Black Freedom and Settler Colonial Order

Ben Orlove et al. 2016. "How Long-standing Debates Have Shaped Recent Climate Change Discourses" in *Climate Cultures: Anthropological Perspectives on Climate Change*

9/24: Historicizing Climate, Part 2

Michael R. Dove. 2016. "Historic Decentering of the Modern Discourse of Climate Change: The Long View from the Vedic Sages to Montesquieu" in *Climate Cultures: Anthropological Perspectives on Climate Change*

Deborah R. Coen. 2011. "Imperial Climatographies from Tyrol to Turkestan" *Osiris* (26)(1)

9/29: Performing Climate Science, Part 1

Mike Hulme. 2009. *Why We Disagree about Climate Change: Understanding Controversy, Inaction and Opportunity*.

- Chapter 3

Kath Weston. 2017. *Animate Planet: Making Visceral Sense of Living in a High-Tech Ecologically Damaged World*.

- Chapter 3

Joe Masco. 2010. Bad Weather: On Planetary Crisis in *Social Studies of Science* 40(1)

Anna Tsing. 2005. *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*.

- Chapter 3

10/1: Performing Climate Science, Part 2

David Demerit. 2001. “The Construction of Global Warming and the Politics of Science” in *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 91(2).

Mike Hulme. 2012. “On the ‘Two Degree’ Climate Policy Target” in *Climate Change, Justice and Sustainability: Linking Climate and Development Policy*.

10/6: Interrogating the “Global,” Part 1

Tim Ingold. 2000. “Globes and Spheres: The Topology of Environmentalism” in *The Perception of the Environment*.

Indigenous Environmental Network and Climate Justice Alliance. 2017. *Carbon Pricing: A Critical Perspective for Community Resistance*.

Pam McElwee. 2016. “From conservation and development to climate change: anthropological engagements with REDD+ in Vietnam” in *Climate Cultures: Anthropological Perspectives on Climate Change*.

10/8: Interrogating the “Global,” Part 2

Rodd Myers et al. 2018. Messiness of Forest Governance: How Technical Approaches Suppress Politics in REDD+ and Conservation Projects. *Global Environmental Change* 50: 314-324.

Thea Riofrancos. 2019. “What Green Costs.” *Logic* (9)

QUICKLY SKIM:

A. Kenis and M. Lievens. 2016. Greening the Economy or Economizing the Green Project? When Environmental Concerns Are Turned into a Means to Save the Market. *Review of Radical Political Economics*, 48(2), 217–234.

10/13: Unpacking the Anthropocene, Part 1

Dipesh Chakrabarty. 2009. “Anthropocene Time,” in *History and Theory* 57(1)

Kathryn Yusoff. 2019. *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*.

- Pages 1 – 64

10/15: Unpacking the Anthropocene, Part 2

Andreas Malm. 2015. "The Anthropocene Myth." *Jacobin*.

Katherine Binhammer. 2018. "The Anthropocene as Capitalocene: How Eighteenth-Century Novels Help Us Answer the Problem of Infinite Economic Growth."

10/20 and 10/22: Disaster Capitalism

Vincanne Adams. 2013. *Markets of Sorrow, Labors of Faith: New Orleans in the Wake of Katrina*.

*****Proposal for final paper/project due 10/21*****

Interlude: Metanarrative Meditations

Analyze at least one of the following "metanarrative" texts by drawing from course readings and discussions:

Bill McKibben, "Global Warming's Terrifying New Math" in *Rolling Stone*.

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), "Technical Summary" in *Global Warming of 1.5 degrees*.

Nicholas Stern, *Stern Review: Economics of Climate Change*, Pages 1 – 40

Van Jones, *The Green Collar Economy: How One Solution Can Fix Our Two Biggest Problems*,

- Chapter 4

Nathaniel Rich, "Losing Earth: The Decade We Almost Stopped Climate Change" in *The New York Times*.

*****Metanarrative Meditation due on Monday, November 2 at Noon*****

10/27: In-class lecture on climate "solutionism"

10/29 Exploring alternatives: In-class conversations with guest speakers:

- Leah Penniman, Co-Director and Farm Manager, Soul Fire Farm
- Ceci Piñeda, Executive Director, BK ROT
- Nikola Alexandre, Restoration Fellow, Conservation International

Part Two: Responding Otherwise

11/3: Election day, no class

11/5: Beyond Environmental Justice

Laura Pulido. 2017. Geographies of Race and Ethnicity II: Environmental Racism, Racial Capitalism and State-Sanctioned Violence, *Progress in Human Geography* 41(4)

David Pellow. 2016. Towards a Critical Environmental Justice Studies: Black Lives Matter as an Environmental Justice Challenge. *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* 13(2): 221-236.

Myles Lennon. 2020. Antiracist Praxis for Energy Transitions after COVID: A #BLM Rejoinder to “Planet of the Humans”

Robert Todd Perdue. 2018. Linking Environmental and Criminal Injustice: The Mining to Prison Pipeline in Central Appalachia, *Environmental Justice* 11(5): 177-182.

Yarimar Bonilla. 2020. "The coloniality of disaster: Race, empire, and the temporal logics of emergency in Puerto Rico, USA. *Political Geography*

Astra Taylor and Leah Hunt-Hendrix. 2019. "One for All." *The Nation*.

SKIM but read Page 59 closely:

Michael Méndez. 2020. "The (in)visible victims of disaster: Understanding the vulnerability of undocumented Latino/a and indigenous immigrants." *Geoforum* 116: 50-62.

11/10: Blackness, Part 1

Christina Sharpe. 2016. *In the Wake: On Being and Blackness*.

- Chapter 4

Kathryn Yusoff. 2019. *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*

- Pages 65 – 108

Leah Penniman. 2019. “Black Farmers Embrace Practices of Climate Resiliency.” *Yes! Magazine*.

Ruha Benjamin. 2018. "Black AfterLives Matter," *Making Kin Not Population*.

11/12: Blackness, Part 2

Myles Lennon. 2020. Postcarbon Amnesia: Toward a Recognition of Racial Grief in Renewable Energy Futures. *Science, Technology & Human Values*.

Deirdre Smith. 2014. "Why the Climate Movement Must Stand With Ferguson," 350.org.

Optional Reading: Ikuko Asaka. 2018. *Tropical Freedom: Climate, Settler Colonialism, and Black Exclusion in the Age of Emancipation*.

- Chapter 6: U.S. Emancipation and Tropical Black Freedom

11/17: Indigeneity, Part 1

Robin Wall Kimmerer. 2015. *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*.

- Pages 3 – 62 and Pages 303 – 379

Kim Tallbear. 2020. VIDEO: "A Sharpening of the Already Present: An Indigenous Materialist Reading of Settler Apocalypse 2020," Speaker Series, Department of Political Science, University of Alberta, October 2020.

Kyle Powys Whyte. 2017. "Indigenous Climate Change Studies: Indigenizing Futures, Decolonizing the Anthropocene," in *English Language Notes* 55(1-2)

Lauren Sommer. 2020. "To Manage Wildfire, California Looks To What Tribes Have Known All Along." NPR

11/19: Indigeneity, Part 2

Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang. 2012. Decolonization is Not a Metaphor. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society*.

SKIM:

Leah Temper and Sam Bliss. 2015. Decolonising and decarbonising: How the Unist'ot'en are arresting pipelines and asserting autonomy. *EJOLT Report 23: Refocusing Resistance for Climate Justice. COPing in, COPing Out and Beyond Paris*.

11/24: More-than Human Interventions

Anna Tsing. 2015. *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*

- Pages 1 -21, 137 – 276

Tim Choy. 2011. *Ecologies of Comparison: An Ethnography of Endangerment in Hong Kong*

- Pages 139 – 168

11/26: Thanksgiving break, no class

12/1 and 12/3: Beyond ‘The Energy Transition’

Cara Daggett. 2019. *The Birth of Energy: Fossil Fuels, Thermodynamics, and the Politics of Work*.

******Final paper/project due on December 11 at 9 PM******