

Special Topics in American Studies: American Histories and Futures of Climate Change

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Description: Climate change touches all aspects of human life. It impacts small and large-scale scenarios, from the choices we make about transportation to the ebb and flow of global financial markets. As such, climate change is a global, large-scale phenomenon that manifests in local spaces and in everyday situations. This online course addresses the history American climates and American climate change in environmental literature, policy, and media.

Throughout our time together, we will learn to track the multi-scalar manifestations of "climate" and "climate change" historically and in today's crisis landscape. Students with backgrounds in the humanities are encouraged to sign up, but a background in the humanities is in no way required. Given the very human and global stakes of the course topic, students from diverse disciplinary backgrounds, including business, finance, psychology, and/or the quantitative sciences, are encouraged to sign up. We will work through four different units throughout the course. First, a brief history of environmentalism in America between 1890 and 1960; second, the history and aftermath of toxic dumping and industrial pollution from 1960 to 2010; third, experiments in real-time environmental scenario planning and information tracking from recent weather events; and, finally, future scenario-planning for our ever warming and watery earth.

Requirements: Instead of writing papers, students will be responsible for two "born-digital" projects that utilize historic and contemporary environmental datasets to illuminate something vital about the history of environmental concerns and climate change in America. Students will also be responsible for marking up weekly readings through Genius, as well as contributing a 250 word reflective statement on the weekly readings and theme. The born digital projects that students create might range from tracking and analyzing the manifestation of climate events through twitter or instagram, working with contemporary world climate data, or tracking and analyzing the rise of the language of climate change through Google Ngrams. Students might also think about creating an app, or designing the contours of their own digital projects.