

# HIST 007: THE LITTLE ICE AGE

## VOLCANOES AND CRISES IN THE PRE-MODERN WORLD



### **Essential Information:**

**Lectures:** Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:00-3:15.

**Professor:** Dr. Dagomar Degroot.

**Professor's email:** [dd865@georgetown.edu](mailto:dd865@georgetown.edu).

**Professor's Office Hours:** Wednesdays, 1:00-3:00 in ICC 627.

**Course Website:** [LIAModule.weebly.com](http://LIAModule.weebly.com)

## Course Description:

Human greenhouse gas emissions are today causing Earth’s average temperature to rise more quickly than it has in the 300,000-year history of our species. Yet even before widespread industrialization set in, Earth’s climate was never stable. Natural forces triggered preindustrial climate changes that may not have reached the scale of present-day warming, but still had profound consequences for societies the world over.

In this seven-week module in the Core Curriculum Pathway, we will explore one of the greatest of these climate changes: the global cooling that lingered from the thirteenth through the nineteenth centuries and is today called the “Little Ice Age.” We will discuss how volcanic eruptions and fluctuations in solar activity lowered Earth’s average temperature, and how scholars have reconstructed these changes through time. We will investigate the human consequences of the Little Ice Age, and find lessons for our warmer future. In the process, we will learn about the discipline of environmental history, which draws from both the sciences and the humanities to explore how humanity has altered, and been altered by, the nonhuman world.

## Course Goals:

Like other courses offered by the Department of History, this course will help you:

1. Gain a deeper 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 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 capacity 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. 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:

Participation:	30%
Ship Logbook Essay:	20%
“Tipping Points” Article:	20%
Final Test:	30%

## Evaluation:

### Participation:

You will earn half of your participation grades for attending class. Another half will reflect both the quantity and especially the quality of your comments. If we break into groups for debates and primary source exercises, I will evaluate your group participation. If you want top grades, I strongly encourage you to keep notes from your readings. You should aim for at around two pages of single-spaced notes per week.

### Ship Logbook Essay:

Write a five-page essay that uses peer-reviewed *secondary* sources – including those you’ll read in this course – to analyze several pages of a *primary* source. The source: **one** ship logbook written by English adventurer John Davis during a sixteenth-century expedition in search of a “Northwest Passage” through the Canadian Arctic to Asia. You can find the source on our class website.

Tell me:

1. What does that primary source tell us about weather?
2. Can we link that weather to climate change?
3. What does the source reveal about human responses to weather?
4. Ultimately, what does it suggest about relationships between climate change and human history?

Be sure to include a thesis. In other words, try to come up with an argument that can be debated, and explain how you will prove that argument. We will discuss all of this in class.

### “Tipping Points” Article:

Visit [ClimateTippingPoints.com](http://ClimateTippingPoints.com). Use the tools listed on the site to write a short (roughly 500-750 word) article that explains the consequences of *past* climate change (cooling or warming) in an American county. **Tell me which county you have in mind before writing your article!**

Your essay will tell your reader: 1) How climate change has affected a local environment; 2) How we know; and 3) How the local environmental consequences of climate change have influenced peoples’ lives.

You can bring in additional information from newspapers or scholarly articles. You should include maps or graphs that visualize the impact of climate change on a particular place, so long as you are able to explain how they were made. With your consent, I will edit the finest articles and publish them on our website. You may remain anonymous if you choose.

There are already many articles on the website that should give you an idea of what I’m looking forward. I encourage you to study a new location, one that isn’t yet on the website.

We will discuss how to write the article in class. You must email me a PDF **and** a Word or Open Office version of your article, as well as separate attachments for all the images you used. I do not need a physical copy.

### Final Test:

This 75-minute test consists of six short essay questions, of which you must answer three. I will give you many more details in class.

### **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?

#### Ideas:

How creative and nuanced are your arguments? Are you merely repeating the claims of other scholars, or are you evaluating them in the context of other arguments and concepts? To what extent can you develop fresh ideas?

### **Required Course Texts (both available as free e-books):**

Parker, Geoffrey. *Global Crisis: War, Climate Change and Catastrophe in the Seventeenth Century, Abridged Edition*. London: Yale University Press, 2017.

Wood, Gillen D'Arcy. *Tambora: The Eruption that Changed the World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014.

### **Important Notes:**

#### House Rules:

You may use your laptops or tablets to take notes or to look up information in class. However, you may **not** use your phones, and you may **not** record your professor's lectures. You may not access social media in class, which is distracting both for you and for your classmates.

Do not show up late to class. This detracts from your learning and disturbs your classmates. If you are repeatedly late, I may lower your participation grade without informing you.

#### Submitting Assignments:

Assignments are due **at the beginning of class**, including assignments you need to email to me. Any assignment submitted after the first 15 minutes of class is late. Late assignments will receive a 5%/day penalty. I will not grade assignments that are more than one week late, unless you have negotiated an extension with me (see below).

#### Extensions:

You may ask me for a **short** extension *before an assignment is due*. I am more likely to grant your request if you A) give me a convincing explanation for your tardiness; B) give me a roadmap that outlines how you will complete your assignment; and C) propose a new due date.

I will only grant requests for an extension on or after the assignment due date in truly exceptional circumstances (a death in the family, for example, or a very serious illness). In such cases, I may ask for written verification.

Be sure to contact your deans in case of absences, difficulties meeting due dates, and other problems.

#### Missing Assignments:

If you fail to hand in an assignment, you will receive a zero for that assignment. You will not fail the course, but your ability to pass the course will be in serious jeopardy. You will **not necessarily** receive a message from me that inquires about your missing assignment. I expect you to handle your obligations yourself.

#### Missing Class:

You have only **one** excused absence. 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 module**.

I will try to accommodate requests for a reasonable number of such absences. You must make sure that the details of the situation are clear to me early on, so that you may have a chance to enroll in a different class if I cannot accommodate your circumstances. Note that the short length of this module will make it hard for you to do well if you must miss more than one class.

You receive a grade for every class you attend. If you do not attend a class and you have already had your one excused absence, you will receive a grade of **zero** for the class you missed. This will significantly lower your overall grade.

### 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 the most serious intellectual offense you can commit in academia, so your professors take it very seriously.

It is **your** responsibility to familiarize yourself with the [Georgetown University Undergraduate Honor System](#). It is your professor's duty to refer academic misconduct - including plagiarism - to the Georgetown Honor Council. If the Council decides that you have plagiarized, you will fail this class and suffer additional penalties.

### Beyond the Course:

I am committed to supporting survivors of sexual misconduct, which includes relationship violence, sexual harassment and sexual assault. However, university policy requires faculty to report any disclosures about sexual misconduct to the Georgetown Title IX Coordinator, who directs the University's response to sexual misconduct.

Georgetown has a number of fully confidential professionals who provide support and assistance to survivors of sexual assault and other forms of sexual misconduct. They include:

Jen Schweer, MA, LPC, Associate Director of Health Education Services for Sexual Assault Response and Prevention. Contact: (202) 687-0323, [jls242@georgetown.edu](mailto:jls242@georgetown.edu).

Erica Shirley, Trauma Specialist, Counseling and Psychiatric Services (CAPS). Contact: (202) 687-6985, [els54@georgetown.edu](mailto:els54@georgetown.edu).

More information about campus resources and reporting sexual misconduct can be found at: <http://sexualassault.georgetown.edu>.

### **Schedule:**

- *Your professor may change this schedule, but you will have at least a week's notice.*
- *Complete all weekly readings by Tuesday.*

### **Week 1: Introducing Climate History and Historical Climatology**

January 10: Why climate changed, and how we know.

Readings:

1. White, Sam. "Climate Change in Global Environmental History." In *A Companion to Global Environmental History*, edited by John McNeill and Erin Maulden, 394-410. London: Blackwell, 2012.
2. Brönnimann, Stefan et al., "Archives of Nature and Archives of Societies." In *The Palgrave Handbook of Climate History*, edited by Sam White, Christian Pfister, and Franz Mauelshagen, 27-36. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018). I will provide a copy.
3. Pfister, Christian. "Evidence from the Archives of Societies: Documentary Evidence - Overview." In *The Palgrave Handbook of Climate History*, 37-47. I will provide a copy

## **Week 2: Medieval Warmth and Crisis**

January 15: The Medieval Climate Anomaly in Europe and the Arctic.

January 17: The Dantean Anomaly, the Wolf Minimum, and the Black Death.

### Readings:

1. Xoplaki, Elena, et al., "The Medieval Climate Anomaly and Byzantium: A review of the evidence on climatic fluctuations, economic performance and societal change." *Quaternary Science Reviews* 136 (2016): 229-252.
2. Slavin, Philip. "The 1310s Event." In *The Palgrave Handbook of Climate History*, 495-515. I will provide a copy.
3. Campbell, Bruce. "Panzootics, Pandemics, and Climate Anomalies in the Fourteenth Century." *Beiträge zum Göttinger Umwelthistorischen Kolloquium* 2011 (2010): 177-215. Available at: <https://univerlag.uni-goettingen.de/handle/3/isbn-978-3-86395-016-3> (click on "view document" and scroll to page 177).

## **Week 3: Onset of the Little Ice Age**

January 22: The Little Ice Age: causes, concepts, and controversy.

January 24: The disappearance of the Greenlandic Vikings.

### Readings:

1. Barlow, L. K. et al. "Interdisciplinary Investigations of the End of the Norse Western Settlement in Greenland," *The Holocene* 7 (1997): 489-99.
2. Dugmore, Andrew J. et al. "Cultural Adaptation, Compounding Vulnerabilities and Conjectures in Norse Greenland," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 109 (2012): 3658-63.
3. Parker, *Global Crisis*, xiii-48.
4. Degroot, Dagomar, "Did the Spanish Empire Change Earth's Climate?". Available at: <http://www.historicalclimatology.com/blog/-did-human-brutality-trigger-preindustrial-climate-change>.

## **Week 4: The General Crisis and the Coldest Century**

January 29: Climate change and crisis in the seventeenth century.

January 31: NO CLASS

Readings:

1. Parker, *Global Crisis*, 49-88.
2. Read ONE of the following:
  - a. Behringer, Wolfgang. "Climatic Change and Witch-Hunting: The Impact of the Little Ice Age on Mentalities." *Climatic Change* 43:1 (1999), 335-351.
  - b. Bell, Dean Phillip. "The Little Ice Age and the Jews: Environmental History and the Mercurial Nature of Jewish-Christian Relations in Early Modern Germany." *AJS Review* 32:1 (2008): 1-27.

**Week 5: Adaptation and Resilience in the Face of Climate Change**

February 5: Conflict and climate change.

February 7: Resilience, adaptation, and opportunism in the Little Ice Age.

SHIP LOGBOOK ESSAY DUE: FEBRUARY 5

Readings:

1. Parker, *Global Crisis*, 356-373.
2. Degroot, Dagomar. "Climate Change, Whaling, and Conflict in the Seventeenth-Century Arctic." *Past and Present*. I will provide a copy.
3. Desjardins, Sean. "Neo-Inuit strategies for ensuring food security during the Little Ice Age climate change episode, Foxe Basin, Arctic Canada." *Quaternary International* (2018).
4. Fenske, James and Namrata Kala, "Climate and the slave trade." *Journal of Development Economics* 112 (2015): 19-32.

**Week 6: The End of the Little Ice Age**

February 12: Tambora and the causes of volcanic cooling.

February 14: The final "year without a summer."

Readings:

1. D'Arcy Wood, *Tambora*. Read pages 1-44, one chapter of your choice, and the short epilogue.

**Week 7: Learning from the Little Ice Age**

February 21: Can we learn from past climate changes?

February 26: Test review and module evaluation.

Readings:



1. Parker, *Global Crisis*, 512-524
2. McNeill, J. R. "Can History Help Us with Global Warming?" In *Climatic Cataclysm: The Foreign Policy and National Security Implications of Climate Change*, edited by Kurt M. Campbell, 26-48. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2008. I will provide a copy.
3. Jackson, Rowan C., Andrew J. Dugmore, and Felix Riede, "Rediscovering lessons of adaptation from the past." *Global Environmental Change* 52 (2018): 58-65.

**Week 8: Final Test**

TIPPING POINTS ARTICLE DUE: FEBRUARY 28

February 28: IN CLASS TEST