

Ian Hinds

Jen Martin

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### Perspectives of the Anthropocene

The Anthropocene is a culmination of geologic, environmental, cultural, and political transformations following expansions of economies and governments within the modern-present period. The heavily debated epoch has a series of different perspectives and ideologies attached to it, keeping it an unofficially recognized geologic period. In simple terms, the “anthropo-”, refers to human interaction or influence and “-cene” refers to a new transition in geologic time. In previous accounts, different “-cenes” have derived from a series of natural phenomena leading to significant changes in earth’s structure or climate. This Anthropocene takes a different turn, as it is depicted as the only epoch to occur because of human influence. There are several approaches to the topic, but Duncan Cook, a professor at Australian Catholic University, argues that the discussed epoch is “time-transgressive”<sup>(1)</sup>, meaning the facts and history used to understand the Anthropocene are continuously developing, causing expansions, retractions, and neutral changes to the defined human impacts on the earth. Without a solid start-time for the epoch, it seems to be more unknown than known, as human culture and influence changes much more rapidly than the natural phenomena that have been used to define other geologic stages. For this paper, the Anthropocene is defined as a geologic period dependent on human expansion.

1. Cook , Duncan. “How the Term 'Anthropocene' Jumped from Geoscience to Hashtags – before Most of Us Knew What It Meant.” The Conversation, April 28, 2021.

The present and popular arguments regarding the start of the Anthropocene begin as early as the Mayan era in South America to as modern as the Industrial Revolution, with no detailed end as it is still occurring. With every other epoch, a start and end frame has already occurred, making it simpler to define the exact time series. With the Anthropocene, it is difficult to clearly pinpoint the start, without seeing how it ends. By the described definition, human influence has existed for hundreds of thousands of years, with advanced civilizations coming to the surface about six to three thousand years ago, and an industrial revolution only occurring 200 years ago. These variations in human civilization have had drastically different environmental and geological effects. Professors Maslin and Lewis, from University College London declare the cause of a “human planet” being, “...capitalism, which itself grew out of European expansion in the 15th and 16th century and the era of colonization and subjugation of indigenous peoples all around the world.”<sup>(2)</sup> Although this perspective has great value and reason and fits the definition of the Anthropocene, it does not encompass the technologies behind agricultural domestication and engineering practiced by ancient human cultures. In the case of Spanish colonization and exploration, the indigenous communities used benefits of nature to survive, and engineered alternatives to improve their livelihoods. Once again, if the Anthropocene encompasses all human influence and expansion, it encompasses human existence at its core. Therefore, the Anthropocene begins, and will realistically end with human existence unless an unforeseen natural disaster or climate change wipes out major populations, forcing a dramatic change in geologic and human interactions.

2. Mark Maslin , and Simon Lewis . “Why the Anthropocene Began with European Colonization, Mass Slavery and the 'Great Dying' of the 16th Century.” The Conversation, March 5, 2021.

Determining the cause of the Anthropocene is relative to its start-time and is dependent on the existence of human influence on earth. Although human existence sets the time-series for the epoch, major growth in human presence will be used as reason for causing the progression of the Anthropocene. For human civilization and population to grow, agriculture practices guaranteed the advancement of ancient groups. Intensive Agriculture, being this driving for growth, included soil mixing, hydrology, and geography analysis, therefore creating the interaction between human expansion and geology. Several archaeologists compiled global data to better understand the development of agriculture extent on earth within the last ten-thousand years. This team stated, “nearly half (42%) of our regions had some form of agriculture by 6,000 years ago...by 3,000 years ago, most of the planet was already transformed by hunter-gatherers, farmers and pastoralists.”<sup>(3)</sup> To stay aligned, this advancement of agriculture practice furthered human existence on a global scale, progressing the Anthropocene and paving paths for future developments.

Major secondary developments to human expansion came from cultural changes and progressions. Maslin and Lewis pin the start of the Anthropocene on capitalism, but the economic ideology serves as more of a transition than beginning. Economies existed within human community, including agriculture, trade, coin, and slavery for generations before capitalism. However, capitalism has had the most dramatic changes on human culture, as short-term profits in mass sums are prioritized and ethical thinking is shaded by the pursuit of profit. Along with monetary gain, European expansion and colonialism drastically affected population values globally. Commonly known as the “Great Dying”<sup>(2)</sup>, the Columbus era wiped out 95% of

3. Ben Marwick , Erle C. Ellis , Lucas Stephens , and Nicole Boivin . “Surveying Archaeologists across the Globe Reveals Deeper and More Widespread Roots of the Human Age, the Anthropocene.” The Conversation, May 5, 2021.

Native-American populations, from disease, war, and simple domination. With such a drop in indigenous slave numbers, slavers then turned to Africa to fuel the rapid-growing capitalistic economy of the 1<sup>st</sup> world cultures. At this point, several advancements are made to human culture, rooted in monetary profit and political power. Populations are disregarded, slaved, and abused to continue expanding the human influence across North America and other regions. This second factor to human expansion raises the presence of the Anthropocene, and further progresses the eco-influence potential of advancing cultures.

The most powerful case study illustrating the Anthropocene is post World War II population growth. From roughly 2 billion people in 1930, to 7.9 billion today, the modern world has seen a 5.9 billion spike in less than a century. This “population bomb”<sup>(4)</sup> was a result of global reconstruction following WWII, where populations were executed in the millions and wars annihilated cities, governments, and ideologies. This reconstruction period further increased capitalistic economic rates, being fostered by the United States, the competition for GDP and global influence grew faster than the Columbus era’s influences. Investments in the oil, plastic, travel, and war industries harmed environments and ecosystems, but were not recognized as harmful until many decades later. The push for rapid growth in the post-war capitalistic economy may have turned humanely ethical but remains environmentally unethical to this day. The massive surge in population and energy use has depleted natural resources and has re-shaped the earth’s geologic and atmospheric composition.

4. McNeill, John Robert, and Peter Engelke. Essay. In *The Great Acceleration: an Environmental History of the Anthropocene since 1945*, 1–40. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016.

This “Great Acceleration” <sup>(4)</sup>, rooted in biology, structured by agriculture, and set ablaze by capitalism represents the greatest point so far in the Anthropocene, meaning the most impactful to the natural environment and the planet’s health. As tides begin to shift to sustainable practices and eco-capitalism, there is hope for a drop in human impact, but it will take much more to end the Anthropocene epoch.

The people most affected by the Anthropocene are indigenous groups, with no specific regional distinction. Predominately occurring during the Columbus colonization era, where indigenous populations in North America saw the most effective mass-extinction episode of the human species. Following their rapid disappearance from North America, capitalistic culture turned to the African Continent, where indigenous tribes lost millions to replace the slave population in the west. Slavery was not a capitalistic invention but acted as a tool to maximizing profits and productions to provide for the growing 1<sup>st</sup> world, regardless of the negative impacts wherever else. In a modern setting, native people are restricted to the lands they live on and are always at risk of losing their historic culture and livelihood as the world continues to grow around them, and without them. Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner accounts the effects of peace-time nuclear testing between the 1940s-60s in the Marshall Islands in her poem “Anointed”, where populations received radiation-based health issues, and physical island structures were changed due to the nuclear tests. Kathy writes, “Who gave them this power? Who anointed them with the power to burn?” <sup>(5)</sup>, to question how dominant countries, including the United States, can easily claim dominion and control over native groups that have no defense, let alone aggression.

5. Jetnil-Kijiner, Kathy. “Dome Poem Part III: ‘Anointed’ Final Poem .” Kijiner, February 13, 2019.

The big-picture of the Anthropocene is that it is rooted in human expansion, not reversible, but adaptable. Humans are adaptive by nature, and must conform to the changing environment to protect the species. During the Anthropocene, humans have dominated the earth, but the human species is young compared to the planet itself. The planet can survive without humans, but humans cannot survive without the planet. A simple, but realistic phrase depicts the importance of understanding the Anthropocene and how human expansion has formed a new age for earth, geologically, and atmospherically. Progressions to reduce harmful impacts include eco-corporations such as CREO<sup>(6)</sup>, ran by Regine Clement, and funded by family investment firms, push for eco-conscious decision making in corporate and political environments to protect the natural environment. Eco-Capitalism is described by her as, “aiming to accelerate capital into climate solutions”<sup>(6)</sup>. Additional progressions include the psychological approach, to assist a transitional mindset to re-approach capitalism, as described by Susanne Moser, in the “Adaptive Mind”<sup>(7)</sup>. Without global transitions to eco-friendly sustainable economies, negative climate and geologic effects will continue to challenge and potentially kill human populations. Human expansion is not the same as adaptation, and the Anthropocene does have a chance of ending if the planet is better prioritized over financial profit. If capital culture continues to grow and prosper however, the end of the Anthropocene may translate to the end of human influence, or existence.

6. Régine Clément, “Catalytic Capital,” *All We Can Save: Truth, Courage, and Solutions for the Climate Crisis*, ed. Ayana Elizabeth Johnson and Katharine Wilkinson (New York: One World, 2020), 171-75.
7. Susanne Moser, “The Adaptive Mind,” in *All We Can Save: Truth, Courage, and Solutions for the Climate Crisis*, ed. Ayana Elizabeth Johnson and Katharine Wilkinson (New York: One World, 2020), 270-78.

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