

Assessment: two essays 40% and 60%.

The restriction of the concept of 'History' to humans can be interpreted as one of the causes of the current ecological crisis. Depicting human decisions, intentions and ingenuity as all-powerful, this anthropocentrism obliterates the dynamism and creativity of the nonhuman world, and thus their role in shaping not only Earth's life-supporting systems but also human social lives. As one of the most critical stages of the climate crisis, Brazil is a privileged case study in what has been called 'more-than-human history'. How did the world's largest tropical nation-state form? What were the geo-ecological and human processes that shaped Brazil's territory and so-called 'natural resources'? What is at stake in Amazonia now, and how did it come to this?

This module will introduce students to the environmental history of Brazil through a two-part exploration. The first is centred on pre-human landscapes, and the protagonists are rock layers, air pressure systems, water cycles, and nonhuman biological communities evolving over geologic timescales. Although the primary focus is on that piece of Earth's surface that eventually became Brazil, we will also pay attention to climatic linkages with other parts of the planet. In the second – and most extensive – part of the module, biogeography gives way to cultural and political geography, as people's environmental practices are seen through the lens of linguistic transactions, economic motivations, and power asymmetries. This story will span Paleoindian, native pre-colonial, Portuguese colonial, and Brazilian postcolonial settlement dynamics, from the late Pleistocene (15 Kya BP) to the present day. From Pero Vaz de Caminha's "discovery" letter to Bolsonaro's statements about Indigenous and Afro-Brazilian territories, we will use primary documents to explore the discursive articulation of colonial projects of ethnic and ecological refurbishment of non-European cultural landscapes.