

ACCIDENTS & DISASTERS IN THE US & THE WORLD

Online (mixed asynchronous/synchronous) | alternate Thurs 12:10-1:30 pm ET

Instructor

Professor Jamie Pietruska
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 Online office hours (via Zoom):
 M 11:00am-1:00pm ET,
 Th 1:45-2:45pm ET, or by appt

Teaching assistants

–McKenzi Christensen
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 –Ethan Dunn
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 (TA office hours listed on Canvas homepage)

Course info

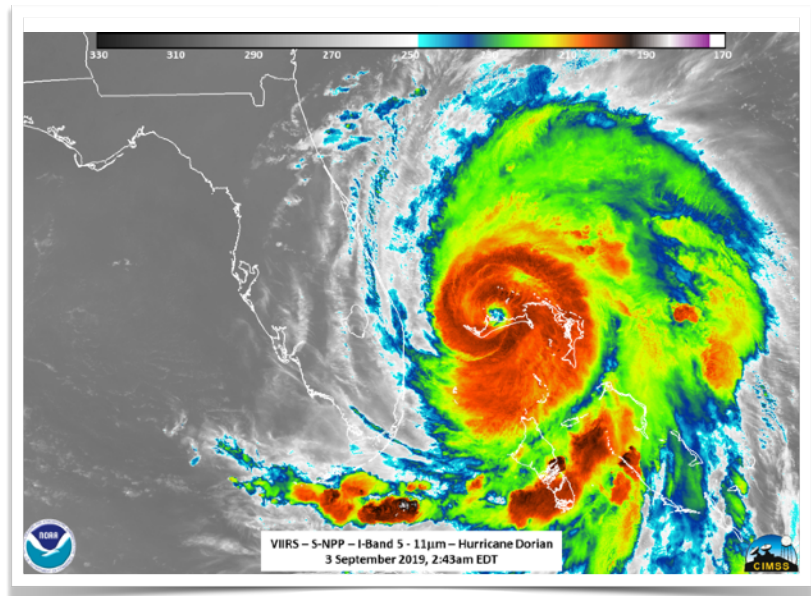
This course meets [SAS Core](#) goal [HST](#) and counts toward the [STEM in Society minor/certificate](#). No prerequisites. No prior experience in History necessary.

Course tools

Book: Arwen P. Mohun, [Risk: Negotiating Safety in American Society](#) (Johns Hopkins UP, 2013). ISBN: 9781421407906. Available through the [Rutgers University Barnes & Noble Bookstore](#) and from online retailers. **Freely accessible as an ebook** via Canvas Reading List.

LMS: [Canvas](#)

Technology: computer or tablet with Internet connection needed



Course description

This course examines the histories of accidents and disasters in the United States and the world from the 17th to the 21st centuries, with particular emphasis on the 19th and 20th centuries. Although accidents and disasters are often understood as isolated, rare events, they have been continuously important to the history of the United States and the world for the past four centuries. Through efforts to anticipate hazards, develop new tools for risk management, build infrastructures for relief, expand government capacity for disaster response, and remember human lives lost, accidents and disasters have become increasingly central to everyday life in the United States. To study accidents and disasters, we will draw on topics and methods from environmental history, the history of science and technology, and the history of capitalism, as well as political, social, and cultural history. We will explore the material and environmental dimensions of disaster alongside shifting cultural meanings of catastrophe.



Course format

–Mixed remote (primarily asynchronous, with synchronous Zoom meetings every other Thursday)

–Emphasis on multimedia sources (including video lectures, documents, maps, visual art, film, television clips, and podcasts)

–The success of our course will depend on your active and thoughtful engagement with the course material and each other, so please complete all the reading and activities for each module and share your ideas, comments, and questions with your classmates, the professor, and your TAs.



Big questions

1.) To what extent are “natural” disasters, like hurricanes and floods, in fact *unnatural*—shaped by human decisions about markets and economic growth, science and technology, and governance? Conversely, to what extent are accidents in human-built technological systems like nuclear reactors and electrical grids beyond human control?

2.) How can we understand discrete catastrophic events—like the Great Chicago Fire (1871) and the San Francisco Earthquake (1906), and high-profile accidents like Chernobyl (1986) and the Space Shuttle *Challenger* explosion (1986)—in the broader historical contexts of political economy, state-building, capitalism, technoscience, society and culture, and media? How do disasters unfold in different timeframes, whether sudden and singular events like the Galveston Hurricane (1900) or long-term, infrastructural, “slow” disasters, like climate change and pandemics? How do particular narratives of accidents and disasters become useful for policymakers, business interests, environmentalists, and other social groups?

3.) How has the social experience of disaster been historically differentiated according to race, class, gender, and region? How have disasters been imagined as spectacle in media and popular culture, and how has the lived experience of disaster preparedness become routinized in everyday life?

4.) Accidents and disasters obviously bring death and destruction, but how have they also led to moments of creation and production, including new forms of governance, new opportunities for profit-making, artistic and cultural responses, and community-building? What is the historical relationship between disaster response and state-building within the United States and around the world? How have accidents and disasters produced new forms of knowledge and expertise in prediction, risk management, emergency preparedness, and public policy?



SAS Core learning goals for Historical Analysis [HST]

Explain the development of some aspect of a society and culture over time

Employ historical reasoning to study human endeavors, using appropriate assumptions, methods, evidence, and arguments

Course learning goals

Analyze the relationship between what have traditionally been considered "natural disasters" and human-induced accidents and disasters

Analyze changing ideas and scientific knowledge about accidents and disasters from colonial America to the twenty-first century

Analyze how experiences of accidents and disasters have historically been shaped by race, class, and gender

Analyze the expanding role of the state and experts in disaster management from the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries

Analyze (and differentiate between) primary and secondary sources

Write analytically about multiple primary sources

How to succeed in this course

I. Stay engaged

Our ongoing, collective conversation about the course material and reading is the single most important part of this course, and it depends on your engagement! Students in this course come from across the disciplines, and everyone brings a valuable perspective to the topics we will study. My hope is that we can take advantage of our online format to engage with the material and with each other in different ways than we would in a classroom setting.

This is a **mixed asynchronous/synchronous remote** course. We will meet together for **online discussion** via Zoom **every other Thursday from 12:10-1:30pm ET: 9/5, 9/19, 10/3, 10/17, 10/31, 11/14, 12/5**. Attendance at these online discussions is required except in case of illness, religious observance, participation in university-sponsored events or activities, or other university-approved absences as explained in the [SAS attendance policy](#). Otherwise, you can log on to our Canvas site each week to do your coursework at whatever days and times are best for you. The course is organized into **14 weeks of online modules**, with typically 2 modules for each week. The new modules will be posted at the same time each week, and you will have **10 days to complete each module's assignments** on Canvas. Modules will be left open for **an additional 5-day grace period to accommodate late submissions (without grade penalty) but will close permanently at the end of the 5-day grace period (unless the [Dean of Students](#) requests a further extension for you)**. Modules will include short video lectures, a variety of multimedia sources, and opportunities for students to interact with each other, the professor, and the TAs through Canvas discussion forums and the social annotation platform [Hypothesis](#).

Another way to stay engaged in the course is to communicate by email with the professor and TAs and visit online office hours to clarify and deepen your understanding of the course material.

I understand that you may need to miss class occasionally due to the reasons outlined in the [SAS attendance policy](#). All absences should be entered into the [Rutgers University Self-Reporting Absence website](#). I will receive an automatic email from this system, so there is no need to send me a separate email regarding your attendance.



Your online engagement will be the basis of your citizenship/class participation grade, and it is highly unlikely that you will be able to succeed on paper assignments and exams without regular engagement with the weekly modules and regular attendance at our synchronous Zoom discussions.

I understand that you may occasionally have to miss an assignment due to illness or other extenuating circumstances. In the event that you do fall behind, please contact me by email as soon as possible so that I can help you catch up. **I understand that everyone is doing their best as we continue to navigate the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, and I will do everything I can to make this course as flexible as possible for anyone who needs accommodations.**

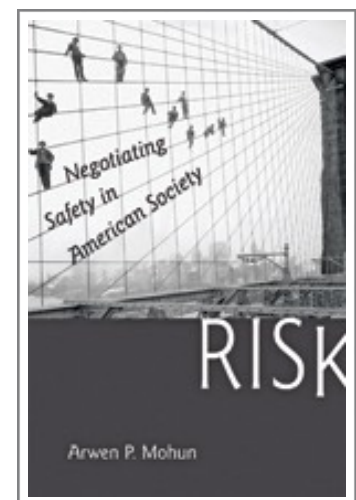
2. Do the reading

Reading assignments should be completed for each module as we will use the readings as the basis for online Canvas discussion and other interactive activities.

It is important to take notes in some way as you read (e.g., underlining, highlighting, annotating, writing notes on a text's main arguments and themes, writing down questions, noting any confusing or seemingly contradictory aspects of the reading, etc.)

Required book: Arwen P. Mohun, [Risk: Negotiating Safety in American Society](#) (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), hardcover. ISBN: 9781421407906. Available for purchase through the [Rutgers University Barnes & Noble Bookstore](#) and from various online retailers. **Digital copy is freely accessible** via the Reading List tab on Canvas.

Additional short readings will be posted on Canvas.



Assessment

15% Paper #1

3-page analysis of primary sources on late 19th-century accident insurance

15% Midterm "unessay" (Week 7 module)

15% Paper #2

Love Canal annotation project

15% Final exam (Week 14 modules)

40% Online participation
(submission of weekly module assignments)

Both papers and both exams must be completed to pass the course.



3. Complete assignments on time

You will receive detailed instructions for each paper and exam well in advance of the due date. Read the instructions carefully and plan ahead. Come to online office hours to discuss your ideas with the professor or your TA. (Don't wait until the night before the paper is due to start the assignment!)

Writing Tutors

Visit the [History Writing Tutor](#) to get expert help with any stage of your writing process. Check out the [History Writing Tutors webpage](#) for step-by-step writing guides covering everything from brainstorming to comma use. The Rutgers Learning Centers also offer appointments with their [Writing Tutors](#).

Submissions/Late work policy

There is a **rolling submission period of one week for both paper assignments** so that you can balance your workload for this course with your other courses and commitments.

Paper #1 is due the week of Sept 30. You may submit it on Canvas anytime between Sept 30 and Oct 7.

Paper #2 is due the week of Nov 18. You may submit it on Canvas anytime between Nov 18 and Nov 25.

Late work will not be accepted beyond the 1-week rolling submission period for major assignments or beyond the 5-day grace period for module assignments without a letter from the [Dean of Students](#) requesting an extension.



Grading

Final course grades will be calculated according to the following scale, conforming to University policy that uses "+" but not "-" grades:

- A 90% & above
- B+ 85-89%
- B 80-84%
- C+ 75-79%
- C 70-74%
- D 60-69%
- F 59% & below

Our Canvas grade book will be updated weekly throughout the semester; make sure to check your grades regularly so that you know where you stand.

If you would like to discuss your grades at any point, please come to office hours or make an appointment to speak with the professor or your TA. **Please note that we do not discuss grades over email.**

There are no extra credit assignments in this course.

If you face serious extenuating circumstances that prevent you from completing a major assignment within the 7-day rolling submission period or from completing a module assignment within the 10-day submission period plus 5-day grace period, please contact the [Office of the Dean of Students](#) so that they can provide the necessary support to ensure that you do not fall further behind in all your courses. **There are no late penalties in this course**, meaning that no points will be deducted from any assignment for lateness, whether it is submitted during the rolling submission period/grace period or submitted during an extension requested by the Dean of Students.

Online discussion activities

Our weekly modules will offer you regular opportunities to engage with the material and each other online. Your participation will be assessed based on the quality of your contributions to your Canvas discussion group and the Hypothesis social annotation platform.

Rubric for weekly module submissions

- A** Canvas discussion post or Hypothesis annotation convincingly demonstrates substantive and nuanced engagement with the entirety of the assigned source(s), including multiple concrete details and short quotations, as well as the main theme(s) of the module
- B** Canvas discussion post or Hypothesis annotation demonstrates some or partial engagement with the assigned source(s), including minimal details and/or quotations
- C** Canvas discussion post or Hypothesis annotation demonstrates cursory engagement with the general themes of the assigned source(s) but lacks specificity (e.g., concrete details and short quotations)
- D** Canvas discussion post or Hypothesis annotation demonstrates virtually no engagement with the assigned source(s)
- F** Canvas discussion post or Hypothesis annotation demonstrates no substantive engagement with the assigned source(s) or the module topic

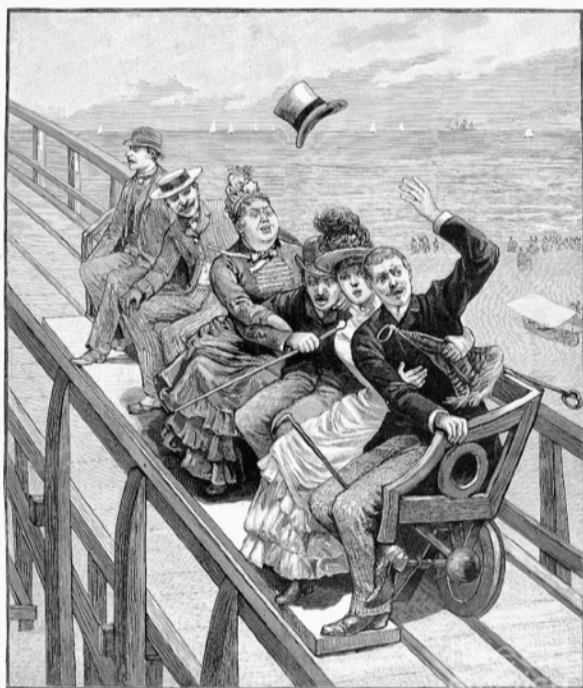
4. Contribute to our intellectual community

Citizenship

The [Department of History's "Policy on Mutual Responsibilities and Classroom Etiquette"](#) states, "Our commitments to a strong learning community are expressed in many ways.

Respectful professors convey their commitment to the discipline of history and their desire to share its delights and challenges. They are well prepared for class, provide students with clear goals and expectations, listen carefully to student questions and comments, and conscientiously evaluate their students' work. Respectful students bring a strong work ethic to the history courses that they select. They expect to attend the scheduled classes, to be on time, to be prepared for class, and to be attentive during class. A shared respect for the discipline of history and for one another as teachers and students of history is essential to the academic integrity of our program. We must all do our part to maintain an environment of openness and civility that encourages and honors the intellectual achievement represented by the discipline of history."

Each of you is a valuable member of our intellectual community this semester, and I trust that you will conduct yourselves accordingly. My goal is that our online class will be a space for thoughtful, sustained, and respectful engagement with the course material and with each other.



SUMMER EXCURSIONS AT THE BEASIDE.—A COASTING PARTY AT CONY ISLAND.—"MORE SCARED THAN HERE."
From a cartoon by a Boston artist.—The Boston Herald.

I trust that you will make your best effort to help us achieve this goal by doing the following:

- Keeping up with the weekly modules to the best of your ability
- Participating thoughtfully in online discussions and other class activities
- Working collaboratively and productively in your Canvas discussion group

**40 percent of your course grade will be based
on your online participation
(through weekly module assignments)**

5. Ask for help when you need it

Your TAs and I would like everyone to succeed in this course and are always happy to help however we can. Please don't hesitate to contact us with any questions or concerns as soon as they arise.

Contacting the professor & teaching assistants

We are available during online office hours each week or by appointment. We check email regularly during business hours, Monday through Friday, and will reply as soon as we can. **In compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), please use your Rutgers ScarletMail account (not a personal email account) to communicate with your professors and teaching assistants.** As the [Rutgers University Ethics and Compliance webpage](#) states, "All Rutgers University students, staff, and instructors are assigned a university managed email account to be utilized for purposes of official correspondence."

Student wellness & technology resources

Rutgers Resources for Student Success

The faculty and staff at Rutgers are committed to your success. Students who are successful tend to seek out resources that enable them to excel academically, maintain their health and wellness, prepare for future careers, navigate college life and finances, and connect with the RU community. Resources that can help you succeed and connect with the Rutgers community can be found at success.rutgers.edu, and nearly all services and resources that are typically provided in-person are also available remotely.

Rutgers Universitywide COVID-19 Information

<https://coronavirus.rutgers.edu/>

Rutgers Student Health

<http://health.rutgers.edu/>

UWill Student Mental Health & Wellness

<http://health.rutgers.edu/uwill/#1692387067708-ccd12908-188a>

Rutgers University is pleased to announce a partnership with Uwill, the leading mental health and wellness solution for colleges and students. Uwill offers students free immediate access to teletherapy through its easy-to-use online platform. To schedule teletherapy, you can choose a therapist based on your own individual needs and preferences. Uwill is a secure and convenient path to clinical services beyond CAPS's office hours, including evenings and weekends. Access is quick and easy. Create a profile using your Rutgers email and book your first session in just minutes by clicking [here](#).

If you are experiencing a mental health crisis, help is available 24/7/365 | [\(833\) 646-1526](tel:8336461526)

Just In Case Web App

<http://codu.co/cee05e>

Access helpful mental health information and resources for yourself or a friend in a mental health crisis on your smartphone or tablet and easily contact CAPS or RUPD.

Do Something to Help — Share a Concern

<http://health.rutgers.edu/do-something-to-help/>

Counseling, ADAP & Psychiatric Services (CAPS)

(848) 932-7884 | 17 Senior Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901 | <http://health.rutgers.edu/medical-counseling-services/counseling/>

CAPS is a University mental health support service that includes counseling, alcohol and other drug assistance, and psychiatric services staffed by a team of professionals within Rutgers Health Services to support students' efforts to succeed at Rutgers University. CAPS offers a variety of services that include: individual therapy, group therapy and workshops, crisis intervention, referral to specialists in the community and consultation and collaboration with campus partners.

Office for Violence Prevention & Victim Assistance

(848) 932-1181 | 3 Bartlett Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901 | <https://vpva.rutgers.edu>

The Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance provides confidential crisis intervention, counseling and advocacy for victims of sexual and relationship violence and stalking to students, staff and faculty. To reach staff during office hours when the university is open or to reach an advocate after hours, call (848) 932-1181.

Office of Disability Services

(848) 445-6800 | Lucy Stone Hall, Suite A145, Livingston Campus, 54 Joyce Kilmer Avenue, Piscataway, NJ 08854 | <https://ods.rutgers.edu/>

Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines>. If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus's disability services office will provide you with a Letter of Accommodations. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. To begin this process, please complete the Registration form on the ODS web site at: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/getting-registered>.

Scarlet Listeners

(732) 247-5555

Free and confidential peer counseling and referral hotline, providing a comforting and supportive safe space.

Rutgers Student Basic Needs Center/Food Pantry

(848) 932-5500 | 126 College Ave., Room 115, New Brunswick, NJ 08901

<https://ruoffcampus.rutgers.edu/basic-needs>
basicneeds@rutgers.edu

Any student who faces challenges in accessing food, housing, clothing, childcare, mental health resources, financial resources, and/or transportation is urged to contact the [Rutgers Basic Needs Center](#). Also, if you are comfortable doing so, please notify the professor so that she can help however she can and connect you with campus resources.

Off-Campus Living & Community Initiatives

(848) 932-5500 | 39 Union St., New Brunswick, NJ 08901 | RUoffcampus@echo.rutgers.edu

Commuter Resources

<https://ruoffcampus.rutgers.edu/listing-rates/commuter-resources>

Offices of the Dean of Students—Advocacy, Outreach, and Support

(848) 932-2300 | 88 College Ave., New Brunswick, NJ 08901 | <https://studentsupport.rutgers.edu/>
Deanofstudents@echo.rutgers.edu

Rutgers Learning Centers Online Resources

<https://learningcenters.rutgers.edu/resources>

The Rutgers Learning Centers have put together a set of tools, tips, and strategies from Learning Centers professional staff and peer leaders. Their online learning resources on topics such as time management, study strategies, student wellness, and more are always available to help you succeed in your academic and professional lives.

Rutgers Student Technology Resources

Please visit the [Rutgers Student Tech Guide page](#) for resources available to all students. If you do not have the appropriate technology for financial reasons, please [contact the Office of the Dean of Students](#) for assistance. If you are facing other financial hardships, please visit the Office of Financial Aid at <https://scarlethub.rutgers.edu/financial-services/office-of-financial-aid/>.

Academic Integrity Policy

The foundation of this course and any scholarly endeavor is academic integrity. Without academic integrity, the University cannot function. **All undergraduates, graduate workers, and instructors are expected to fully adhere to all principles of academic integrity at all times, without exception.** We are all responsible for understanding the [Rutgers University policy regarding academic integrity](#). Ignorance of these policies or the consequences for violations is not an acceptable excuse.

In my experience at Rutgers, the vast majority of my students (I would say 99%) have followed all principles of academic integrity. But each semester, I invariably have a few students who do not, which is why the syllabus addresses academic integrity in detail. The Academic Integrity Policy at Rutgers is multifaceted; what follows are some of the most important principles as they apply to this course.

Originality: *All* written work—formal essays and exams, as well as informal assignments like Hypothesis annotations and Canvas discussion posts—must be a student’s own original work. Collaboration on major writing assignments (i.e., essays and take-home exams) is not permitted unless otherwise specified. Using outside sources for an assignment when instructed not to is also a violation of the Academic Integrity Policy. Use of automated text generators like ChatGPT or corrupt file generators is not permitted in this course and falls under the category of “Fabrication,” which is a Level 2 violation in the Office of Student Conduct.

“Artificial intelligence” (AI): This past year has witnessed a great deal of hype and critique surrounding ChatGPT and other large language models (LLMs) that use statistical modeling to predict language in response to a prompt. It is important to note that these kinds of tools do not actually *understand* human language; rather, they are able to generate statistically likely sequences of words and sentences in grammatically and syntactically sophisticated ways. (For a smart and clear explanation of what generative AI can and cannot do, I highly recommend this short article: Ted Chiang, [“ChatGPT is a Blurry JPEG of the Web,”](#) *The New Yorker*, February 9, 2023.)

Simply put, writing *is* thinking. I am interested in how you are thinking about the course material, not in how ChatGPT predicts probable, generic, and sometimes incorrect statements about accidents and disasters. **You all have much smarter and more interesting things to say than ChatGPT does!** For that reason alone (and indeed there are many others), no one may use any forms of generative AI in this course.

In concert with Rutgers’ Academic Integrity Policy, which mandates [“that all work submitted in a course, academic research, or other activity is the student’s own and created without the aid of impermissible technologies, materials, or collaborations,”](#) I have designed this course to promote your learning, critical thinking, skills, and intellectual development without reliance on unauthorized technology including chatbots and other forms of “artificial intelligence” (AI). Although you may use spell-check and simple grammar-check when proofreading your work, you will be asked to submit written work that adheres to the following statement: *“I certify that this assignment represents my own work. I have not used any unauthorized or unacknowledged assistance or sources in completing it including free or commercial systems or services offered on the internet or text generating systems embedded into software.”* Please consult with me or your TA if you have any questions about the permissible use of technology in this class.

Citation practices: Citation practices are the very foundation of scholarly work, not a minor editing issue. Citations matter so much because they make clear our intellectual debts to other scholars and make our research and analysis transparent so that interested readers can follow our own path through the sources if they so choose. All writers must always give credit to other sources where credit is due; it is intellectually dishonest and completely unacceptable to omit or falsify citations. Any and all references to other sources within your own essays must be properly cited according to the bibliographic conventions of the [Chicago Manual of Style](#), which is available online through the [Alexander Library](#) and also through the [Purdue Online Writing Lab](#). If you have any questions about quoting, paraphrasing, or referring to the work of others, please ask! It is better to be safe than sorry—better to have too many citations than too few and thus run the risk of unintentional plagiarism.

Some concrete examples: All of the following are violations of the University academic integrity policy and are not permitted in this course:

- copying language (even 1 sentence) from any source without quotation marks or attribution
- collaborating with a classmate on an assignment when instructed not to
- copying ideas or language from another person's work (Hypothesis annotation, Canvas discussion post, or essay)
- using outside sources in any capacity (including paraphrasing) when instructed not to
- having another person or entity produce an essay or other assignment for you
- falsifying any aspect of a citation (including page numbers)
- using an AI text generator like ChatGPT when instructed not to
- submitting a document created by a corrupt file generator in order to get more time to complete an assignment

****Any and all violations of academic integrity—including plagiarism, fabrication, the use of outside sources when prohibited, and unauthorized collaboration—will result in the formal consequences and disciplinary action that are outlined in the [Rutgers policy on academic integrity](#).** I have a zero-tolerance policy for academic dishonesty and refer all violations directly to the [Office of Student Conduct](#).**

****Rest assured that making an honest mistake in your citation practices when using an assigned source is NOT a violation of academic integrity in this course. No one will ever be penalized for an unintentional mistake.** Ask your TA or professor if you are unsure about how to handle sources and/or cite sources—we are always happy to help.**

Students with Disabilities

Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey abides by the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments (ADAA) of 2008, and Sections 504 and 508, which mandate reasonable accommodations be provided for qualified students with disabilities and accessibility of online information. If you have a disability and may require some type of instructional and/or examination accommodation, please contact the professor during the first week of the semester to arrange accommodations. If you have not already done so, you will need to register with the [Office of Disability Services](#), Lucy Stone Hall, Livingston Campus, 54 Joyce Kilmer Ave., Suite A145.

Phone: (848) 445.6800 Online: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/>

Schedule

The professor reserves the right to modify the schedule (e.g., shortening or eliminating assignments) as warranted by the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic or other unforeseen events. Weekly Canvas modules will be based on some (not all) of the following readings (some required and some recommended). Use the Canvas modules to access and complete all readings and coursework.

Week 1: Conceptualizing Accidents & Disasters

Week of Sept 3

Module 1.1 Introductions and Course Overview: How to Think Historically about Disasters in the Context of Climate Crisis and COVID-19

James Fallows, [“The 3 Weeks That Changed Everything.”](#) *The Atlantic*, June 29, 2020

Ed Yong, [“The Pandemic’s Legacy is Already Clear.”](#) *The Atlantic*, September 30, 2022

Module 1.2 Theorizing Normal Accidents and Unnatural Disasters

Greg Bankoff, “No Such Thing as Natural Disasters,” *Harvard International Review*, August 23, 2010 [Canvas]

Mohun, *Risk*, introduction (pp. 1-8)

Recommended: Charles Perrow, *Normal Accidents: Living with High-Risk Technologies* (Princeton University Press, 1999 [1984]), pp. 3-12 [Canvas]

Recommended: Naomi Klein, “Disaster Capitalism: The New Economy of Catastrophe,” *Harper’s Magazine*, October 2007, pp. 47-58 [Canvas]

Week 2: Encountering Disaster in the New World

Week of Sept 9

Module 2.1 Narrating Epidemics

Miguel León-Portilla, [Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico](#) (Beacon Press, 2006), excerpts on plague (pp. 91-93)

Mohun, *Risk*, chap. 2 (“The Uncertainties of Disease”) (pp. 33-51)

Module 2.2 The Ways of Providence and the “Blessings of Disaster”

Increase Mather, *Remarkable Providences: Illustrative of the Earlier Days of American Colonization* (London: John Russell Smith, 1856 [1684]), [chap. 10](#) (“Of Remarkable Tempests, etc., in New-England”)

Mohun, *Risk*, chap. 1 (“Fire Is Everybody’s Problem”) (pp. 11-32)

Week 3: Knowing Natural Hazards in Colonial & Early America

Week of Sept 16**Module 3.1 Hurricanes and Empire in the Atlantic World**

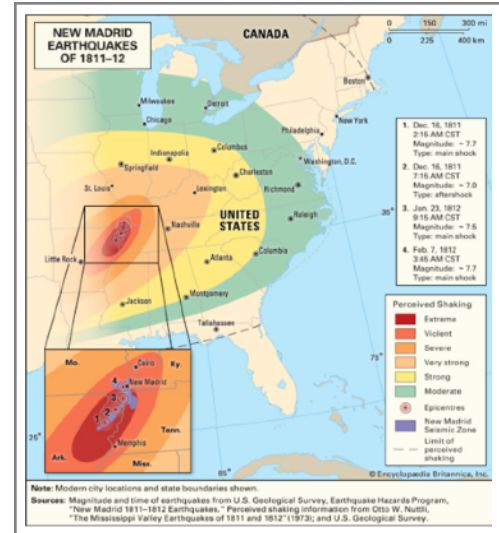
[“Captain Langford’s Observations of his own Experience upon Hurricanes, and their Prognosticks,”](#)

Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society 20 (1698): 407-416

Recommended: R. Bohun, *A Discourse Concerning the Origine and Properties of Wind, with an Historiell Accounts of Hurricanes, and Other Tempestuous Winds* (Oxford: W. Hall, 1671), [pp. 255-292](#)

Module 3.2 The New Madrid Earthquakes (1811-1812) and Disaster Science

University of Memphis Center for Earthquake Research and Information, [4 eyewitness accounts of New Madrid Earthquakes](#); [Eliza Bryan’s letter to Lorenzo Dow](#) (1816); [Dillard’s Account in Foster](#) (1869); [Anonymous—from the Lexington Reporter](#) (1812); [Louis Bringier—Notes on the Geology and Minerology...](#) (1821)

**Week 4: The New Industrial-Accident Society****Week of Sept 23****Module 4.1 Industrial Accidents and the Pricing of Injury**

Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi* (Harper & Brothers, 1901 [1874]), [chap. 20](#) (“A Catastrophe”), [Recommended: [chap. 37](#) (“The End of the ‘Gold Dust’”)]

Mohun, *Risk*, chap. 5 (“Railroads, or Why Risk in a System is Different”) (pp. 91-115)

Module 4.2 Constructing Narratives of the Great Chicago Fire (1871)

[“Account by an Eye-Witness,”](#) *Harper’s Weekly*, October 28, 1871

Elias Colbert and Everett Chamberlin, *Chicago and the Great Conflagration* (Cincinnati and New York: C. F. Vent, 1872), pp. [201-235](#), [374-387](#), [445-453](#)

Week 5: Predicting Extreme Weather**Week of Sept 30**

Paper #1 due this week (between Sept 30 and Oct 7)

Module 5.1 Weather Prophets and the Blizzard of 1888

[“In a Blizzard’s Grasp,”](#) *New York Times*, March 13, 1888

[“A Visit to the Prophet Who Predicted the 1888 Blizzard,”](#) *New York Times*, July 16, 1916

Recommended: A. W. Greely, “The Great Storm of March 11-14, 1888,” *National Geographic Magazine* 1, no. 1 (1888): 37-39 [Canvas]

“No such thing as ‘natural disasters’”

Module 5.2 American and Cuban Meteorological Infrastructures and the Galveston Hurricane (1900)

Isaac Monroe Cline, *Storms, Floods, and Sunshine* (1945), [chap. XVI](#) (“Cyclone of September 5-10, 1900—The Galveston Hurricane”)

Week 6: The Profits of Disaster

Week of Oct 7

Module 6.1 Creative Destruction and the San Francisco Earthquake and Fire (1906)

Kevin Rozario, “What Comes Down Must Go Up: Why Disasters Have Been Good for American Capitalism,” in *American Disasters*, ed. Steven Biel (NYU Press, 2001), pp. 72-102 [Canvas]

Ted Steinberg, “Smoke and Mirrors: The San Francisco Earthquake and Seismic Denial,” in *American Disasters*, ed. Steven Biel (NYU Press, 2001), pp. 103-126 [Canvas]

Module 6.2 Intimacies of Disaster

Selections from Malcolm E. Barker, ed. *Three Fearful Days: San Francisco Memoirs of the 1906 Earthquake and Fire* (San Francisco: Londonborn Publications, 1998): James Hopper, “A Strange Elation” (pp. 109-111), Hugh Kwong Liang’s story” (pp. 119-123), Mary Edith Griswold, “Three days adrift” (pp. 125-131), Louise Herrick Wall, “The dignity of ruins” (pp. 201-204), Charles B. Sedgwick, “Sublime spectacle” (pp. 207-209), “As told by the children” (pp. 277-278), William James, “A ‘subjective’ view” (pp. 293-297) [Canvas]

Rebecca Solnit, *A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities that Arise in Disaster* (Penguin, 2009), pp. 13-33 [Canvas]

Week 7: The Allure of Accident

Week of Oct 14

Module 7.1 Commercializing Risk from Coney Island to Action Park

The Module 7.1 assignment on Canvas will count as the midterm exam

Frederic Thompson, “Amusing the Million,” *Everybody’s Magazine* 19 (September 1908): 378-87 [Canvas]

Edward F. Tilyou, “Human Nature with the Brakes Off,” *American Magazine* 94 (July 1922): 18-21 [Canvas]

Mohun, *Risk*, chap. 10 (“Risk as Entertainment: Amusement Parks”) (pp. 214-235)

James Barron, [“People Were Bleeding All Over’: America’s Most Dangerous Amusement Park,”](#) *New York Times*, October 19, 2019

Week 8: Disaster Expertise in the Progressive Era

“No such thing as ‘natural disasters’”



Week of Oct 21**Module 8.1 Investigating and Reforming the Factory**

[Report to the Legislature of the State of New York by the New York State Factory Investigating Commission \(1912\)](#)

[Recommendations of the Commission](#)

Mohun, *Risk*, chap. 6 (“The Professionalization of Safety”) (pp. 116-140)

Clips from PBS *American Experience* film [Triangle Fire](#)

Module 8.2 The Influenza Pandemic of 1918

PBS *American Experience* film [Influenza 1918](#)

Selected primary sources [Canvas]

**Week 9: Inequities of Disaster Relief****Week of Oct 28****Module 9.1 Engineering and Flood Control in the Boston Molasses Disaster (1919) and the Mississippi Flood (1927)**

Burtis S. Brown, [“Details of the Failure of a 90-Foot Molasses Tank,”](#) *Engineering News-Record* 82, no. 20 (May 15, 1919): 974-76

Richard M. Mizelle, Jr., [“Black Levee Camp Workers, the NAACP, and the Mississippi Flood Control Project, 1927-1933,”](#) *Journal of African American History* 98, no.4 (2013): 511-530

Module 9.2 Disaster Relief and the New Deal Order

Michelle Landis Dauber, *The Sympathetic State: Disaster Relief and the Origins of the American Welfare State* (University of Chicago Press, 2013), chap. 4 (“Crafting the Depression”) [Canvas]

Pare Lorentz, [The River](#) (1938), 31 min.

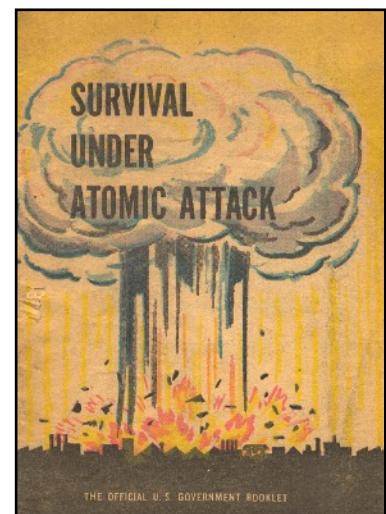
Week 10: The Rise of the Disaster-Security State**Week of Nov 4****Module 10.1 Civil Defense**

Wilbur J. Cohen and Evelyn F. Boyer, [“Federal Civil Defense Act of 1950: Summary and Legislative History,”](#) *Social Security Bulletin*, April 1951, pp. 11-16

National Security Resources Board, [Survival Under Atomic Attack](#) (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1950), pp. 3-31

[Duck and Cover](#) (1951), 9 min.

“No such thing as ‘natural disasters’”



Module 10.2 Cold War Disaster Research and Relief

Federal Disaster Relief Act (1950) [Canvas]

Julia F. Irwin, "[Raging Rivers and Propaganda Weevils: Transnational Disaster Relief, Cold War Politics, and the 1954 Danube and Elbe Floods,](#)" *Diplomatic History* (2015): 893-921

Recommended: Scott Gabriel Knowles, *The Disaster Experts: Mastering Risk in Modern America* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), chap. 5 ("What Is a Disaster?") [Canvas]

Week 11: Nuclear Accidents & Disasters, Fast & Slow

Week of Nov 11

Module 11.1 Imagining Nuclear Annihilation

Alex Wellerstein, "[The 'New' Nuclear Arms Race](#)" (video lecture), Chain Reaction 2019: A New Moment in San Francisco, June 10, 2019

Alex Wellerstein, [NUKEMAP](#) (website)

Module 11.2 The Technopolitics of Meltdown

[The KGB's Report on Explosion and Fire at Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant](#), April 26, 1986, Wilson Center Digital Archive

[KGB Intelligence Message on the Chernobyl Accident](#), February 3, 1987, Wilson Center Digital Archive

Kate Brown, "[Chernobyl's disastrous cover-up is a warning for the next nuclear age.](#)" *The Guardian*, April 4, 2019

[ABC "World News" report on Mikhail Gorbachev's televised address on the Chernobyl accident](#), May 14, 1986 (3 min.)

Week 12: Consumer Politics & Environmental Activism

Paper #2 due this week (between Nov 18 and Nov 25)

Week of Nov 18

Module 12.1 Car Crashes and "Body Rights"

Ralph Nader, *Unsafe at Any Speed: The Designed-In Dangers of the American Automobile* (1965), preface [Canvas]

Mohun, *Risk*, chap. 8 ("Negotiating Automobile Risk"), [Recommended: chap. 11 ("Consumer Product Safety")]

[The Corvair in Action](#) (1960), 6 min.

Module 12.2 Environmental Racism and Environmental Justice

"No such thing as 'natural disasters'"



U.S. National Library of Medicine, "[Polychlorinated Biphenyls \(PCBs\)](https://toxtown.nlm.nih.gov)," ToxTown, <https://toxtown.nlm.nih.gov>

"[Principles of Environmental Justice](#)" from the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, October 24-27, 1991, Washington, D.C.

Robert D. Bullard, "Anatomy of Environmental Racism and the Environmental Justice Movement," in *Confronting Environmental Racism: Voices from the Grassroots*, ed. Robert D. Bullard (Boston: South End Press, 1993), pp. 15-40 [Canvas]

Week 13: NASA, FEMA & Federal Disaster Management

Week of Nov 25

Module 13.1 Systems Thinking and the Risks of Space Flight

Ronald Reagan, [Address on the Space Shuttle Challenger](#), January 28, 1986, 4 min.

"An Oral History of the Space Shuttle Challenger Disaster," *Popular Mechanics*, January 28, 2016 [Canvas]

Recommended: Report to the President by the Presidential Commission on the Space Shuttle Challenger Accident (June 1986), [pp. 1, 40, 105, 149, 177-78, 198-201](#)

Module 13.2 Terrorism as Disaster

Federal Emergency Management Agency, [World Trade Center Building Performance Study: Data Collection, Preliminary Observations, and Recommendations](#) (Washington, D.C.: Federal Insurance and Mitigation Administration, 2002), Executive Summary and Introduction (pp. 1-21)

Lee Clarke, *Worst Cases: Terror and Catastrophe in the Popular Imagination* (University of Chicago Press, 2006), chap. 6 ("Living and Dying in Worst Case Worlds") [Canvas]

THANKSGIVING RECESS

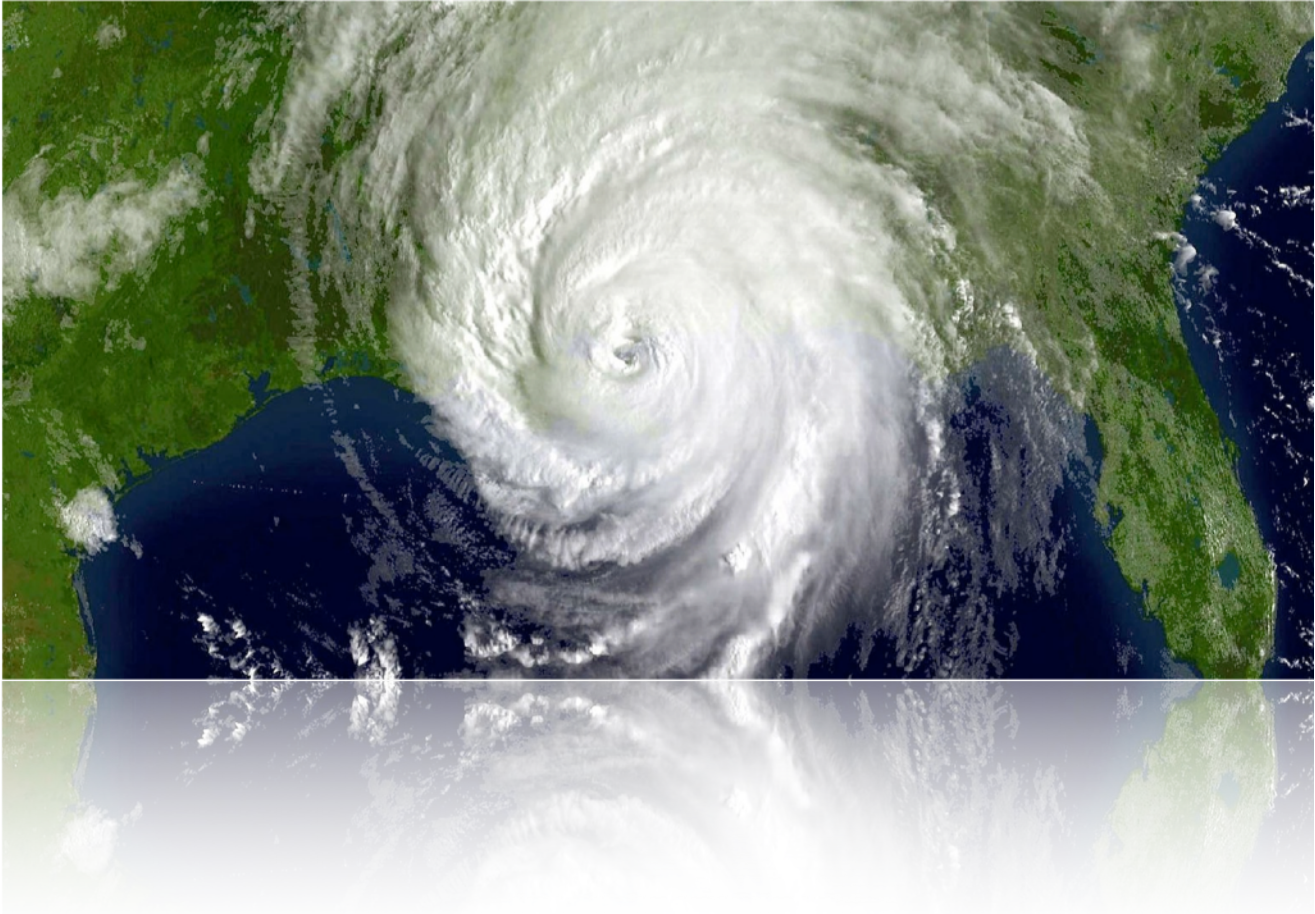
Week 14: Unnatural Disasters in the Twenty-First Century

Week of Dec 2

Module 14.1 Infrastructure, Racialized Space, and Hurricane Katrina (2005)

Mia Bay, "Invisible Tethers: Transportation and Discrimination in the Age of Katrina," in *Katrina's Imprint: Race and Vulnerability in America*, ed. Keith Wailoo, Karen M. O'Neill, Jeffrey Dowd, and Roland Anglin (Rutgers University Press, 2010), pp. 21-33 [Canvas]

John A. Powell, Hasan Kwame Jeffries, Daniel W. Newhart, and Eric Stiens, "Towards a Transformative View of Race: The Crisis and Opportunity of Katrina," in *There is No Such Thing as a Natural Disaster: Race, Class, and Hurricane Katrina*, ed. Chester Hartman and Gregory D. Squires (Routledge, 2006), pp. 59-84 [Canvas]



Module 14.2 Climate Change, Climate Crisis, Climate Catastrophe

IPCC, [Summary for Policymakers](#), in *Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, Core Writing Team, H. Lee and J. Romero, eds. (Geneva, Switzerland: IPCC, 2023), pp. 1-34, doi: 10.59327/IPCC/AR6-9789291691647.001

Documentary short: [Lowland Kids](#) (2019), directed by Sandra Winther (22 min.)

****This course will not have a traditional final exam. Your final exam grade will be based on your Canvas discussion posts for the Week 14 modules. This approach is designed to boost everyone's grade while not contributing to end-of-semester exam-related stress.****

Final exam schedule: <https://scheduling.rutgers.edu/scheduling/exam-scheduling/final-exam-schedule>

Final exam policies: <https://scheduling.rutgers.edu/scheduling/exam-scheduling/final-exam-schedule/final-exam-policies>

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