

For the final project in my Honors English seminar this past winter, students were asked to compose a 13-17-page independent research paper on a topic of our own choosing. We began the projects in Week 8, with rough drafts due in Week 10 and our final drafts due the following week. Our professor did not place many constraints upon us in terms of the topics that we could choose, projects merely had to be related to course material in scope and framework. Given the relatively short time frame for completing the project, I wanted to keep my scope limited to the concepts that we discussed most thoroughly and passionately in the classroom. The project I developed for the seminar attempted to answer the following question: “How does Ta-Nehisi Coates’ *Between the World and Me* problematize the conception of the ‘human’ in ‘Anthropocene’ narratives, specifically in relation to Dipesh Chakrabarty’s claim that the ‘human’ has now become an abstract, universalized geological force?” I was drawn to this research question for two primary reasons: it explored issues that we had taken up thoroughly in class but had never quite fully resolved and I felt that the stakes of the project were incredibly high, with climate shift and potential catastrophe seemingly always looming on the horizon and with that shift often experienced differentially because of numerous socioeconomic factors. At the beginning of the quarter, I was unsure about how a class exploring the “Anthropocene” would align with my interests in race, gender, sexuality, and capitalism, but the project I undertook in this seminar allowed me to combine my personal intellectual interests with the content of the course in a deeply engaging manner.

To find relevant and useful information and theoretical perspectives, I first mapped out the theoretical trajectory of my argument and figured out what it was that my argument was lacking. I set out to show that *Between the World and Me* displays the necessity of narrating climate change with awareness of histories of racism and capitalism and a critical attitude toward

narratives that universalize responsibility onto the “human,” so I sought resources that explored connections between racialization, capitalism, industrialization, and climate change.

Specifically, I explored the library’s “Advanced Search” function and databases like JSTOR and Project MUSE using keywords for my argument and frameworks that would be informative for me, words like “race,” “racism,” “capital*,” “climate change,” “Anthropocene,” and “Capitalocene.” I also looked at journals like *Anthropocene Review* to see if anything had been written on what I was investigating. From these searches I found texts like Cedric J. Robinson’s *Black Marxism* and Françoise Vergès’ “Racial Capitalocene,” which were both foundational in formulating my argument. I had difficulty initially obtaining each of the texts, though. The former was checked out from the library and would not be available soon enough to complete my research, and the latter was unavailable since it was published so recently. I was shortly able to resolve the problem with *Black Marxism*, which I soon discovered to be available through eBook. The latter took more work, but I eventually acquired it as a chapter scan with the help of my professor and librarians. A quite fortuitous incident in the research process was when I was checking the index of *Anthropocene Reading*, searching for the term “capitalocene,” and I found an entry for “Coates,” the author of the central text I was exploring. This fortuitous encounter led me to finding one of my central articles for the second half of the paper about the place of reading and literary works in the climate shift era. One information gap that I encountered was in the second half of the paper, where I aimed to make a claim about the phenomenological function of literature in the climate shift era. I was lucky to come across an article that synthesized some thinking in black phenomenology in relation to Coates’ text, and this article ended up being quite helpful in formulating my claims in that portion of the essay.

In order to evaluate the quality of sources selected, I made sure the sources met a number of criteria. Among these criteria are of course considering where the source is being published: is it an academic journal that is peer-reviewed, reputable, and relevant to my topic? A book published by an academic press? Further, I considered who the authors were and what background they have in either antiracist, Marxist, and ecocritical writing: have they published on these topics before? If so, how has their work been received? If not, what have they published on? Ultimately, though, evaluating the quality of a source is not solely a question of evaluating authority, but also the implications and stakes of the argument. For example, Dipesh Chakrabarty's "The Climate of History: Four Theses" comes from a reputable author and journal, *Critical Inquiry*, but explicates what I find to be a deeply problematic framework for understanding climate change. Thus to understand both the viability and implications of an article for one's research, careful and critical reading must be done.

One of my main takeaways from this project is that research is, ultimately, a process, meaning that it cannot be rushed or shortchanged. To find sufficient material and research for a project and review it adequately one must give themselves plenty of time, otherwise the project will suffer. A writer must allow adequate time to perform a number of different searches with a number of different combinations of search terms, to parse the bibliographies of articles they find useful for sources that might bolster or complicate their argument, to explore databases and journals that might be specific to a topic so as to understand the conversation around that topic. Another takeaway was that developing a long, exhaustive bibliography is not necessarily essential to a complex and interesting research project. Often, shorter bibliographies with rich and complex sources that are deeply and critically engaged with can provide a more robust, meaningful, and interesting research project.