As becomes more and more evident every day, climate change is increasingly a dominant and sometimes devastating factor for human society and natural systems on a global scale. Much has been, and will continue to be, written about how we as a society can reduce the future impacts of climate change and adapt to the impacts that have already occurred or are inevitable.

But climate change is in many ways the tip of the iceberg. It is just one of many ways in which human activities are causing large-scale shifts to natural systems on regional, continental, and global levels. Moreover, those impacts are increasingly the result of a combination of rapid technological and economic change, and the aggregation of millions and billions of decisions of individual people around the world.

This shift in human relationships with our planet has led many earth scientists to identify a new geologic period of time – the Anthropocene Epoch – characterized by human dominance of global systems such as oceans, climate, atmosphere, and the biosphere. A burgeoning new scholarly community is busily examining the implications of this new concept for human society.

Given the trends that earth scientists have identified, what are the ramifications for our legal system here in the United States? Again, there has been much written on the implications of climate change for environmental law. But the scope of the changes wrought by the Anthropocene will go far beyond environmental law, and implicate our entire legal system.

I've been working on these issues, and have just published an article in the Georgetown Law Journal, appropriately called Law in the Anthropocene Epoch. In a series of blog posts, I will summarize my analysis in that article, with the hopes of encouraging more legal scholars and lawyers and policymakers to think about how our legal system can and should respond to the Anthropocene – responses that will require decades to fully understand and work out.

The first post will be a short summary of what we know about the Anthropocene and human dominance of the planet. Next I'll discuss how those changes will impact human society. Then I will explain why this will necessarily lead to dramatic and important changes to our legal system. My final two posts will explore some of the implications of those changes for our private law and public law systems respectively.