

---

## GEOG N4: WORLD PEOPLES AND CULTURAL ENVIRONMENTS

---

Erin Torkelson

[etorkelson@berkeley.edu](mailto:etorkelson@berkeley.edu)

Summer Session 2 (July 8 – August 15, 2018), 3 Units

Class: Tu/Wed/Th 9:30am-12:00pm, 575 McCone Hall

Office Hours: Tu/Wed 1:00pm-1:45pm (and by appointment) 199 McCone Hall

---

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

---

This course engages the question of how human societies have developed in relation to their natural environments, including earth, water, flora, fauna, soil and subsoil. In particular, we will focus on the ways that *nature* has always been inseparable from the development of complicated and unequal *social* worlds, with an emphasis on historical and contemporary processes of colonialism, racism, and capitalism. These socio-natural processes have local and global dimensions, and we will thus be exploring across multiple spatial scales, asking how cultural environments have come into being and what roles they play in environmental conflicts today.

Throughout the semester, we will return to several guiding questions: What are the relationships between nature, culture, power, and inequality? How has the fraught history of global development been connected to nature and natural resources? What kinds of cultural environments are we making (and threatening) today?

Our approaches to these questions will be guided by four key analytical concepts: **1) place & scale, 2) nature & culture, 3) capitalism & inequality, and 4) history & materiality.** All of these will become clear as we move along!

To help us think materially about nature and culture, the majority of the course is organized in terms of the “natural” world. The first two weeks focus on defining our key analytical concepts. The next three weeks are structured in relation to natural biomes: flora and fauna; water, air, and soil; and subsoils. The final week will be devoted to student presentations, review, and the final exam.

---

### COURSE OBJECTIVES

---

**KNOWLEDGE:** By the time you complete this course, you should: Understand how cultural environments are shaped by interacting biophysical and social processes that occur at different rates, on different scales, and create spatial variations; Understand how people’s interactions with and perceptions of nature differ and have changed over time and space; Be able to use our key analytical concepts to describe the processes through which *specific* “cultural environments” have emerged.

**SKILLS:** This is an introductory level class designed to cultivate skills essential for further university coursework, including **close reading, analytical writing, research, and oral**

**presentation abilities.** These skills are so important that I will be taking time throughout the course to discuss strategies and tools for active reading, note-taking, public speaking, using the library, and so on.

---

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

---

Class participation	20%
Reading Journals	15%
Quizzes	15%
Media Critique	15%
Group Presentation	15%
Final Exam	20%

***Class Participation:*** You are expected to attend all scheduled classes having thoughtfully completed each day's assigned readings. Participation includes responding to instructor questions, participating in large and small group conversations and activities, and listening respectfully to other members of the class. Challenge yourself to speak if you have a tendency to stay silent and make space for others if you have a tendency to dominate discussion.

Attendance and punctuality are factored into your participation grade, with 5% docked for every unexplained absence. Class will begin at exactly 10:40 a.m. (Berkeley time) and showing up late will affect your participation points. More than 20 minutes late counts as an absence. In the case of absence due to medical or family emergency, a doctor's note or other reasonable documentation is required.

***Reading Journals:*** With the exception of the first class and the entire last week, you will submit one reading reflection for every day of class (14 total). Reading reflections are based on the readings for that day; if there is more than one reading, both should be addressed.

Guided Reflections (two weeks):

The first two weeks of reading journals will be a response to a prompt. I will post these prompts on bcourses over the weekend. The prompt will, ideally, help focus your reading on key points.

Reading Journals (three weeks):

The next three weeks will be more open-ended. I will not post a prompt for these. Each reflection should be approximately 300 words long. Reading reflections should address the following questions:

1. What is this text about?
2. What is the main argument of the text?
3. What does the author use to support their claims?
4. Provide two open questions related to the reading.

All reading reflections are due on the bcourses discussion board by 8:00 a.m. the morning of class. After you have posted your reflection, you will be able to see your peers' reflections, and you should read these before coming to class.

I will not grade all of these reflections, and when they are not graded you will get points just for having done the work. However, I will grade randomly at least five times over the six weeks. In these cases, you will receive full grades for thoughtfully and accurately completing the questions above, and you can get bonus points for incorporating your own thoughts or opinions and/or making relevant links to readings and discussions from previous weeks.

**Quizzes:** Each week there will be at least one unannounced reading quiz (sometimes more than one!) You should come to class prepared accordingly.

**Media Critique:** Identify a recent (last year or so) article from a major newspaper (the *New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Guardian*) or news service (this could be one of the major electronic on-line sources (Huffington Post, BBC, Reuters) which addresses a major **environmental** issue. The article should be substantive, serious and a major story (around 1500 words). Provide the exact source and reference in your bibliography. The purpose of this critique is for you to provide a critical reading of the media piece on the basis of the conceptual toolkit you have acquired in the class. Your essay should consist of the following:

1. A brief summary of the argument and claims made in the article including the sorts of evidence and data which is invoked or deployed (this should be no more than 400 words).
2. The major environmental policy issue as reflected in the article and what the debates are surrounding the issue in environmental circles.
3. Identify a key concept (not referred to in the article, but from this class: 1) place & scale, 2) nature & culture, 3) capitalism & inequality, and 4) history & materiality) which helps understand some aspect of the content of the article and explain why it is useful in understanding the problem being addressed
4. Provide an alternative analysis from that of the author, explaining how and in what ways it differs from that of the author and why it might offer different prescriptions (policies, solutions).

The critique should be no more than 1500 words, double-spaced, 12pt Times New Roman font, 1" margins.

The first draft of this paper is due before class on **Tuesday, July 23**. Please submit this draft on bcourses AND **bring a hard copy to class** to use for an in-class peer review session. The final paper will then be due on bcourses before class on **Tuesday, July 30**. I will share a rubric for grading this paper, but part of the assessment will be based on your efforts to improve between drafts by incorporating feedback from your peers.

**Group Presentation:** The last Tuesday of class will be devoted to student-led presentations on the cultural aspects of environmental change in a particular place. I will divide you into groups in the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of class, and on August 7<sup>th</sup> each group of students will give a

presentation (15-20min) on an issue of their choice. Requirements for this assignment are as follows:

1. **You must discuss the topic you have chosen with me by July 26<sup>th</sup>, either via email or (preferably) in office hours.** Examples of possible topics include water use in California's Central Valley; fracking in Pennsylvania; eco-tourism in Ecuador's Galapagos Islands; smog in industrial China, palm oil production in Indonesia, etc.
2. Presentations should involve all group members. Everyone should speak during presentation, and everyone should be involved in some aspect of research and/or presentation preparation.
3. Presentations must include some kind of visual and/or auditory media. This can include handouts, PowerPoint slides, writing on the board, showing a (very brief!) video clip, playing a song, etc. You can get creative here!
4. Presentations should describe the place in question; provide relevant historical context; explain the issues, different opinions, and challenges connected to a particular aspect of human-environment relations in that place; and connect the topic to key ideas in prior course readings and discussions, including our four analytical concepts.
5. During the presentation, other students should prepare questions for the presenters. We will have 2-3 questions at the end of each presentation.
6. Bibliography and Labor Report: Each group must submit give me brief typed document (no more than 2 pages) explaining the division of labor among group members and giving an annotated bibliographic list of consulted sources. Annotated bibliographies should contain a minimum of 10 sources and should briefly explain what you learned from each source. These are due in class on August 7<sup>th</sup>.

***Final Exam:*** The final exam is scheduled for August 15, the last day of class, and will be inclusive of all course content. I will discuss this exam in more detail in the last two weeks of the course, but it will involve in-class essays and short answer questions.

---

## CLASSROOM POLICIES, MECHANICS, AND SUPPORT

---

***Safe Space:*** I am committed to creating a safe space for everyone to discuss, debate and grapple with the complex and potentially sensitive ideas and issues presented in this class. I expect you to respect each other and the diversity of opinions in the classroom. Disruptive behavior, offensive comments, and personal attacks will not be tolerated.

***Academic Honesty:*** This course has a zero-tolerance policy for cheating, plagiarism, and other forms of academic dishonesty. Any evidence of academic dishonesty will be grounds for failing the assignment and, under certain conditions, the course. **If you have any question about what constitutes academic dishonesty or how to correctly cite your sources, please**

**contact me for clarification.** You can also visit the UC Berkeley Library's citation guide for more information: <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/research-support/cite-sources>.

Generally, please follow these rules:

1. If the ideas are not yours, CITE them.
2. If the words are not yours, QUOTE and CITE them.
3. When in doubt, QUOTE and CITE.

**Bcourses:** You will submit your daily writing reflection and your media critique (first and second drafts) through bcourses. I will also post some (not all!) of my powerpoint slides online for you to review. Keep in mind that my slides do not have a lot of information on them; they are "memory cues" rather than information dumps, so I also recommend taking notes in class. Speaking of which...

**Technology and Note-taking:** I have a no laptops, tablets, or cell phones policy in class. Unless you have magical memory powers, I suggest you buy a notebook and take notes the old-fashioned way.

**Breaks:** We will take a 10-minute break at approximately 11:50 a.m. every day. I recommend bringing a snack to eat during this time. Please respect the time limit.

**Disabled Students' Program (DSP):** If you are a member of DSP and require any special accommodation, please talk to me in the first week of the semester. <https://dsp.berkeley.edu/>

**Writing Support:** The SLC Writing Program is designed to support all undergraduate student writing. They have specialized support for students whose first language is not English. <https://slc.berkeley.edu/writing>

**Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS):** Accelerated summer courses can be very stressful, especially given the high costs of living in the bay area, and CAPS can help support your academic success. <https://uhs.berkeley.edu/counseling>

**Special Accommodations:** If you have any other special circumstances that may affect with your work in this course, please come see me as soon as possible. If something unforeseen happens during the semester, let me know right away. I can be much more helpful if you don't wait until assignments are due to talk to me.

---

## COURSE SCHEDULE

---

Please complete the readings *BEFORE* the lecture for which they are assigned. Course readings have been compiled into a reader which is available for purchase at Copy Central (2411 Telegraph Ave).

---

### PART 1: CONCEPTS

#### Day 1 - Tuesday, July 9: Course Introduction

- Hochschild, A. (1998). *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa*. New York: Houghton Mifflin. (In Class)

### **Day 2 - Wednesday, July 10: The Politics of Space and Place**

- Massey, D. (1994). "Global sense of place." Chapter 6 in *Space, place, and gender* (pp. 146-156). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Whyte, K. (2017). The Dakota Access Pipeline, Environmental Injustice, and U.S. Colonialism. *Red Ink: An International Journal of Indigenous Literature, Arts, & Humanities*, 19(1), 154-169.

### **Day 3 – Thursday, July 11: Histories of Nature and Culture**

- Williams, R. 1980 [1972]. Ideas of Nature. In *Problems in Material Culture*. London: Verso. (pp 67-85).

## PART 2: HISTORICAL GROUNDS

### **Day 4 - Tuesday, July 15: Extracting and Enclosing Nature**

- Galeano, E. (1971) *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of Pillage*. New York: Monthly Review Press. Chapter 1: Lust for Silver, Lust for Gold (pp. 11-50)

### **Day 5 - Wednesday, July 16: Cultivating Culture**

- Mintz, S. W. (1985) *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*. New York: Penguin. Chapter 3: Consumption (pp. 74-150)

### **Day 6 - Thursday, July 17: Roots and Routes**

- Carney, J. A. (2001). *Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Chapters 1 & 4 (pp. 9-30, 108-141)

## PART 3: FLORA AND FAUNA

### **Day 7 - Tuesday, July 23: Plants**

- Schroeder, R. A. (1997). "Re-claiming" land in the Gambia: gendered property rights and environmental intervention. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 87(3), 487-508.
- Robbins, P. (2012). *Lawn people: How grasses, weeds, and chemicals make us who we are*. Temple University Press. Chapters 1 & 2 (pp. 1-32)

\*\*\*DRAFT OF CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT PAPER DUE ON BCOURSES AND IN CLASS\*\*\*

### **Day 8 - Wednesday, July 24: Animals**

- Ferguson, J. (1985). The Bovine Mystique: Power, Property and Livestock in Rural Lesotho. *Man*, 20(4), 647–674.
- Berger, J. (1980) *Why Look at Animals?* New York: Penguin. Chapter 3 (pp. 12-38).

**Day 9 - Thursday, July 25: Fungi?!**

- Tsing, A. L. (2015). *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Chapters 4-7 (pp. 57-106)
- 

PART 4: WATER, AIR, SOIL

**Day 10 - Tuesday, July 30: Water**

- Worster, D. (1982). Hydraulic society in California: An ecological interpretation. *Agricultural History*, 56(3), 503–515.
- Ranganathan, M. (2016). Thinking with Flint: Racial Liberalism and the Roots of an American Water Tragedy. *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism*, 27(3), 17–33.

\*\*\*FINAL CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT PAPER DUE ON BCOURSES BEFORE CLASS\*\*\*

**Day 11 - Wednesday, August 1: Air and Soil**

- Pulido, L. (2000). Rethinking Environmental Racism: White Privilege and Urban Development in Southern California. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 90(1), 12–40.
  - Masco, J. (2004). Mutant ecologies: radioactive life in post–cold war New Mexico. *Cultural Anthropology*, 19(4), 517-550.
- 

PART 5: SUBSOILS

**Day 12 – Thursday, August 2: Minerals**

- de la Cadena, M. (2010). Indigenous cosmopolitics in the Andes: conceptual reflections beyond “politics.” *Cultural Anthropology*, 25(2), 334–370.

*FILM: The Devil’s Miner (2005, 82 min)*

**Day 13 - Wednesday, August 3: Oil**

- Watts, M. (2001) "Petro-violence: Community, extraction, and political ecology of a mythic commodity." *Violent environments* pp. 189-212.

\*\*\*DEADLINE TO DISCUSS PRESENTATION TOPICS WITH ME\*\*\*

---

PART 6: LIVING IN A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

**Day 14 - Wednesday, August 7: What’s Natural about “Natural” Disasters?**

- Davis, M. (1998). The Case for Letting Malibu Burn. In *Ecology of Fear*. New York: Metropolitan Books. pp 93-148.

**Day 15 - Thursday, August 8: The Anthropocene or The Racial Capitalocene?**

- Crutzen, P J. (2006) "The "Anthropocene"." *Earth system science in the anthropocene*. Springer Berlin Heidelberg, pp. 13-18.
  - Todd, Z. (2015). Indigenizing the Anthropocene. *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters Among Aesthetics, Politics, Environment and Epistemology*, 241-254.
  - Vergès, F. (2017). Racial Capitalocene. In: Johnson, G. T. and A. Lubin (eds.) *Futures of Black Radicalism*. New York: Verso. Available online: <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3376-racial-capitalocene>
- 

**PART 7: APPLYING THE CONCEPTS**

**Day 16 - Tuesday, August 13: Student Presentations**

**Day 17 - Wednesday, August 14: Exam Review & Wrap-Up**

**Day 18 - Thursday, August 15: FINAL EXAM**