

GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS

Erin Torkelson

etorkelson@berkeley.edu

Summer Session 2 (July 7 - August 13, 2020)

Class: Tu/Wed/Th 9:00am-11:30am (via zoom)

Office Hours: by appointment (I will be available immediately before or after class)

A NOTE ABOUT CURRENT CONDITIONS OF POSSIBILITY

It now seems trite to say this: but we are living in very difficult times. As I am working on this syllabus and planning for our course, I am thinking about each of you, your relatives, your siblings, your partners, and all the people you are worried about. Right now, we all have a lot of worry to carry. Even taking this course might feel futile and difficult or productive and inspiring depending on our changing circumstances each and every day. We are all likely stretched very thin, hanging in there, and still woefully unprepared for what could come.

Below you will find a document that looks like a syllabus. You will see readings and assignments, along with weights, but you should know that this is highly flexible. We can and will talk about the syllabus and change it to make it doable in the present moment. As far as I am concerned, no one should have a fear of failing this course. If that is a fear of yours, we can talk one-on-one (telephonically), but under these circumstances, just getting through is enough. If you complete the requirements of this course, you will get a good grade.

If there is one thing I hope you take from our course it is this: as Raymond Williams will tell us on day two, nature and culture cannot be easily disentangled. COVID-19 is not the triumph of nature, a *natural* disease, taking its *natural* course. The virus, the devastation of the virus, and the politics enlivened by the virus are structured by capitalism, colonialism and racism in ways that endanger us all, though not uniformly so. Some of us face far greater challenges than others. As we talk about privatization, commodification, racialization, colonialism, scarcity, quarantine, violence, insecurity, exposure and risk, I hope we can learn deeply and intensely. I also hope we can find

comfort in the intellectual and political work we are engaging this semester with the readings of scholars and activists around the globe. We will consider how it is possible to build new worlds and new communities that we want to live in. Yes, we see the fault lines of the world more starkly with COVID-19. But I hope we also see possibilities, that in dissatisfaction with our current world lies the building blocks for something new. Be kind to yourself. Be kind to others.

To say the same thing one more time: Everything below is flexible. I do not know how possible interacting via various technologies will be for each of you. Please communicate with me, if something is difficult or risky. **DO NOT TAKE ANY HEALTH RISKS FOR THIS CLASS.** Your grade will not suffer.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Why do environmental issues incite such passion and protest? What practices, discourses, and materialities converge in environmental struggles? This reading intensive seminar explores the cultural politics of nature, environment and land in diverse geographical and historical contexts. We ask: what are the dominant images of nature at work, how are those meanings debated and deployed by different actors, and what are the symbolic and material consequences of these conflicts for different constituencies. We examine specific environmental struggles where the politics of race, class, gender and cultural difference figure prominently.

This module seeks to ground distinctive conceptual approaches in diverse geographies, histories and environmental challenges. We emphasize the integration of theory, analysis and empirical research and pose critical question to each other regarding our relationships to advocacy, activism and environmental justice. Special attention is devoted to colonial and imperial circuits through which global environmentalism emerged. We also look at how our conception of nature has been used to produce racial, gendered, and national differences. In turn, we examine contemporary post-colonial struggles and conflicts that politicize relations among environmental resources, rights and cultural identities. Such analyses require investigating relationships between practices of environmentalism, conservation, and sustainable development in relation to humanitarianism, militarism, violence, political economy, poverty & inequality; nationalism sovereignty; NGOs, donors and alleged beneficiaries; environmental justice, resource rights and imaginaries of alternative futures.

Throughout the course, we will use the following key analytics to understand global environmental politics:

1. Space and place are not passive but actively made

2. Nature and culture are not separate but entangled
3. Contemporary environmental politics is produced through histories of racism, colonialism, capitalism
4. Matter, or the materiality of nature matters, and has agency beyond humans

A note on content: Some of the material in this class may be upsetting. We will be discussing racism, gendered violence, exploitation, displacement, and war. If you have questions or concerns related to content, please make an appointment to speak with me in person.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

KNOWLEDGE: By the time you complete this course, you should:

- Understand how human/environment relations are always political.
- Understand that human/environment relations do not just happen on an empty landscape, *a terra nullius*, but actively produce, assemble and change space.
- Understand how racism, capitalism and colonialism determine how humans produce, distribute, value, consume, conserve and degrade nature
- Consider how ideas of nature work in our lives, in the environment, and in our most intimate formations of race, gender and sexuality.
- Understand environmental justice as the work of thinking and acting differently, of changing the world.

SKILLS: This is 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 FORMAT

We will talk about this in detail on day 1 during the introduction, and collectively decide how to approach the course. Writing this without meeting you and knowing of your circumstances, I imagine that a mix of synchronous and asynchronous learning formats is most inclusive at the present moment. I want to maximize your ability to engage with course material on your schedule, while also having some face-to-face time to build our community. Here's what I propose:

Pre-recorded Lectures: Each week, on Monday, I will post three recorded lectures. I will try to keep them under 30 minutes. You can watch these on your own time, but please do so, prior to the corresponding zoom discussion.

Zoom Discussions: Each class day, we will have a 1 hour zoom discussion about the material from 9:00-10:00. During these zoom discussions, one person will be in charge of presenting the material, and particularly presenting how the material pertains to the present moment.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Class participation: 20%

Reading Journals: 15%

Reading Presentations: 15%

Chat: 15%

Group Presentation: 15%

Paper: 20%

Class Participation:

You are expected to watch all recorded lectures and attend all discussion sessions having thoughtfully completed each day's assigned readings. Participation includes responding to instructor questions, participating in large and small group 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. If you are having a problem, and are struggling to attend, talk to me.

Reading Journals:

With the exception of the first week and the last week, you will submit **two** reading reflections per week (8 total). Reading reflections are based on the readings for that day; if there is more than one reading, both should be addressed. Each reflection

should be approximately 300 words long. Reading reflections should address the following questions:

1. What is the main argument of the text?
2. Who is the author in conversation with?
3. What evidence does the author use to support their claims?
4. How does this reading link to others in the course?
5. You may also 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.

Reading Presentations:

All students will be responsible for presenting the readings on one week. The presentations are not meant to be a summary of the material we read, for everyone will have read it. Rather, identify conceptual commonalities or differences among the week's readings; analytically engage specific modes of inquiry, argument, or fieldwork practice; and raise what you take to be critical questions for our collective to explore.

Chat:

We will make a chat group for class discussion. My goal for this is that we use it to communicate ideas we have about the material, as well as articles, images, videos and other things that relate to it. Right now, there is so much relevant media circulating, I want to use the group to consider the politics of the moment.

Environmental Struggle Paper:

This short paper will draw on your personal experiences to describe a familiar environmental issue in terms of the key analytical concepts of the course. The aim of this paper is to use the material we are reading about a diversity of places around the world to understand an environment close to home.

You will choose an environmental struggle with which you are personally familiar, give a description of the environment, and the history and politics of struggle **using our class analytics (above)**.

The paper should be 3-4 pages long (double-spaced, 12pt Times New Roman font, 1" margins). The first draft of this paper is due before class on **Wednesday, July 22**. Please email this draft to me. We will peer review each others' work. The final paper will then be due on bcourses before class on **Thursday, 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 and Wednesday of class will be devoted to student-led presentations on a global environmental struggle that is important to you and that we did not cover in class. I will divide you into groups in the 3rd week of class, and on **August 11 and 12** each group will give a presentation (15-20 min) 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 25, 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 provide a 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 13.

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>Links to an external site.

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:

Since this is a remote learning course, we will depend on bcourses heavily. You will submit your daily writing reflection and your paper (first and second drafts) through bcourses.

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/>Links to an external site.

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. [Links to an external site.](https://slc.berkeley.edu/writing)

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS):

Accelerated summer courses can be very stressful. CAPS can help support your academic success. [Links to an external site.](https://uhs.berkeley.edu/counseling)

Special Accommodations:

If you have any other special circumstances that may affect with your work in this course, please arrange to meet 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

FOUNDATIONS

Day 1 (July 7): Introduction

Day 2 (July 8): Nature and Politics

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

Day 3 (July 9): Colonialism: Routes of Global Environmentalism

- Philip, Kavita. 1998. English Mud: Toward a Critical Cultural Studies of Colonial Science. *Cultural Studies* 12(3): 300-331.
- Livingstone, D. 2002. Tropical Hermeneutics and the Climactic Imagination. *Geographische Zeitschrift Bd. 90 H2(2002)*: 65-88.

POLITICAL ECOLOGIES

Day 4 (July 14): Population: Discourses of “Scarcity” and Malthus’ Eternal Return

- SKIM: Malthus, Thomas. 1798. *An Essay on the Principle of Population*. Selections
- SKIM: Kaplan, Robert. 1994. The Coming Anarchy. *Atlantic Monthly* 273(4) 44-76.
- Hartmann, Betsy. 1998. Population, Environment, Security: A New Trinity. *Environment and Urbanization*. 10(2), 113-128.

Day 5 (July 15): Land: Property, Deterritorialization and Reterritorialization

- Hong, GK. (2014). Property: in *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*. Edited by Bruce Burgett & Glen Hendler, New York, NYU Press.
- Gordillo, Gaston 2011 Longing for Elsewhere: Guarani Reterritorializations. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 53(4):855-881

Day 6 (July 16): Labor: Surplus Value and Surplus People

- Ngai, Mae. *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Gregory, Stephen. *The Devil behind the Mirror: Globalization and Politics in the Dominican Republic*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Day 7 (July 21): Animals: The Production and Commodification of Animals

- Pollan, Michael. 2002. Power Steer. *New York Times Magazine*. 31 March 2002.
- SKIM: Ferguson, James. 1985. Bovine Mystique. *MAN*. 20(4).
- SKIM: Marx, Karl. *Capital Vol 1*. London: Verso. *On commodity fetishism*.

Day 8 (July 22): Plants: Cultivating Plants and Cultivating Cultures

- Robbins, P. (2012). *Lawn people: How grasses, weeds, and chemicals make us who we are*. Temple University Press. Chapters 1 & 2 (pp. 1-32)

Day 9 (July 23): Subsoil: Resource Extraction and the Making and Unmaking of Nation-States

- Watts, M. (2001) Petro-violence: Community, extraction, and political ecology of a mythic commodity. *Violent environments*. 189-212.
- de la Cadena, M. 2010. Indigenous cosmopolitics in the Andes: conceptual reflections beyond “politics.” *Cultural Anthropology* 25(2), 334–370.

CATASTROPHE, RISK, AND VIOLENT EXCLUSION

Day 10 (July 28): Toxicity: Toxic Environments, Racial Liberalism and Slow Violence

- Ranganathan, Malini. 2016. Thinking with Flint: Racial Liberalism and the Roots of an American Water Tragedy. *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism*, 27(3), 17–33.
- Hecht, Gabrielle. 2012. The Work of Invisibility: Radiation Hazards and Occupational Health in South African Uranium Production. *International Labor and Working-Class History*. 81: 94-113.

Day 11 (July 29): Disaster: What’s Natural about Natural Disasters?

- Davis, Mike. 1998. The Case for Letting Malibu Burn. In *Ecology of Fear*. NY: Metropolitan Books: 93-148.
- Adams, Vincanne, Taslim van Hattum, Diana English. 2009. Chronic disaster Syndrome: Displacement, Disaster Capitalism and The Eviction of the Poor in New Orleans. *American Ethnologist*. 36(4): 615-636.

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND NATURE

Day 12 (July 30): Genomics: Prospecting the Human

- Reardon, Jenny and Talbear, Kim 2020. Your DNA is *Our* History: Genomics, Anthropology, and the Construction of Whiteness as Property.

- Duster, Troy. 2005. Race and Reification in Science. 18 February 2005. <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/307/5712/1050.full?ijkey=CrQywb6JKCl&keytype=ref&siteid=sci> (Links to an external site.)

Day 13 (August 4): Militarism: Militarizing Milieus, Ecologies of Empire, Algorithmic War

- Kosek, Jake 2010 Ecologies of Empire: On the Uses of the Honey Bee. *Cultural Anthropology* 25(4): 650-678.
- Meché, Brittany. 2019. Bad Things Happen in the Desert: Mapping Security Regimes in the West African Sahel and the ‘Problem’ of Arid Spaces. In R. Woodward ed. *A Research Agenda for Military Geographies*. London: Edward Elgar.
- SKIM: Amoores, Louise. 2009. Algorithmic War: Everyday Geographies of the War on Terror. *Antipode* 41(1). 49-69.

OUR PRESENT AND FUTURE

Day 14 (August 5): Abolition Geographies in a time of Covid-19

- *Podcast*: Gilroy, Paul and Gilmore, Ruth Wilson. 2020. In conversation with Ruth Wilson Gilmore. <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/racism-racialisation/transcript-conversation-ruth-wilson-gilmore?fbclid=IwAR1O3wbNKnsNHZO8VSDgS6bCvmdE7c8R3GI6xY4uP4klsQQ5tgk7tJEPX98> (Links to an external site.)
- *Podcast*: Remnick, David and Taylor, Keeyanga-Yamahtta. 2020. The Injustice of Covid-19. *The New Yorker*. 13 April 2020. <https://www.newyorker.com/podcast/political-scene/the-injustice-of-covid-19> (Links to an external site.)
- Kushner, Rachel. 2019. “Is Prison Necessary: Ruth Gilmore Might Change Your Mind.” *New York Times*. 17 April 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/17/magazine/prison-abolition-ruth-wilson-gilmore.html> (Links to an external site.)
- Taylor, Keeyanga Yamahtta. 2020. “How do We Change America.” *New Yorker*. June 8 2020. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/how-do-we-change-america> (Links to an external site.)
- *UCHRI video*: Angela Y. Davis, Herman Gray, Gaye Theresa Johnson, Robin D.G. Kelley, and Josh Kun. The Fire This Time: Race at a Boiling Point. *UCHRI YouTube*

Channel. 5 June 2020. [The Fire This Time: Race at Boiling Point | June 5,](#)



[2020 \(Links to an external site.\)](#)

Day 15 (August 6): Thursday, August 15: Epistemologies of the Anthropocene

- 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> (Links to an external site.)

APPLYING THE CONCEPTS

Day 16 (August 11): Student Presentations

Day 17 (August 12): Student Presentations

Day 18 (August 13): Final Exam/Reflections