
NATURE, CULTURE, POWER

Erin Torkelson

etorkelson@berkeley.edu

Summer Session 2 (July 8 – August 22, 2018), 3 Units

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

Office Hours: Tu/Wed 12:00pm-12:30pm (and by appointment) 199 McCone Hall

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Geography and geographical concepts are constantly in the news – in stories of toxic waste sites, immigration policies, nuclear power, genetic engineering, natural disasters, climate change, poverty, and terrorism. In environmental science courses, you might read about each of these issues and then consider ways of solving these “problems” using new technologies. Useful as it is, this often leaves some of the most important factors – the very things that caused these problems to begin with – completely unexamined, outside or beyond our field of study. In this geography course, we will interrogate how our ideas about our environment have come into being and why those histories matter. We will use three key analytics – **space, nature and power** – to understand how the organizing principles of our world had to be made and were made through contested processes.

Space: Starting with the concept of **space**, we will think about how history and politics do not just happen on an empty landscape, *a terra nullius*, but actively produce, assemble and change space. Spatial organization and spatial concepts – like the world, region, and nation-state – are often taken for granted, as having fixed meanings, or being “real” things. We will examine how our understandings of space have been produced and contested with profound consequences. We will explore the politics and tools of map-making to understand the values conveyed through pictorial images of space over time.

Nature/Culture: We then think about our common-sense, day-to-day ideas of **nature**. Nature is often used to mean either the external environment (as separate from humans, “pristine nature,” or “back to nature”) or an internal essence (like human nature, “that’s just our nature,” or “it’s natural”). We will think about how nature can never be thought of as separate from humans. We will see how nature is used in very political ways, to make something seem more certain, true and fixed. We will look at how ideas of nature work in our lives, in the environment, and in our most intimate formations of race, gender and sexuality. We will learn how the concept of nature – often presented as the opposite of the social or political – is actually anything but.

Power: Finally, we will think about local and global **inequalities**, and the disparities between and within countries and communities. We will learn about different economic theories of property, commodities and labor – and the contemporary consequences of these theories. We will raise geographical questions about the substantial inequalities in our current economic formation, how this was made, and how it is sustained. We will also explore how political economy and cultural politics enable people to make claims to rights, resources and redistribution in powerful and significant ways.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

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

- Understand how environments are shaped by interacting cultural, biological, and political processes that occur at different rates, on different scales, and create spatial variations;
- Understand how people's interactions with and perceptions of environments differ and have changed over time and space;
- Be able to use our key analytical concepts to describe the power-laden processes through which our ideas of nature 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 9:40 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. **You are responsible for signing in every day.**

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 guided reflection in response to a prompt. I will post these prompts on bcourses over the weekend. The prompt will help focus your reading on the author's key arguments.

Reading Journals (four 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 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.

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

Paper: This short paper will draw on your personal experiences to describe a familiar place in terms of the key analytical concepts of the course. You will choose a place with which you are personally familiar, give a description of the place and an explanation of its meaning to them, then give an analysis of the place **using our analytics and methods of analysis**. 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 **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 3rd week of class, and on August 13th each group of students 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 25th, 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 13th.

Final Exam: The final exam is scheduled for August 15th, 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 paper (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 10:50 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

- Lecture: Maps as Powerful Representations of Space

Day 2 - Wednesday, July 10: The Production 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.

- *FILM: Awake: A Dream from Standing Rock (clips)*
- *TWITTER: #MaunaKea*

Day 3 – Thursday, July 11: Ideas 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 16: Mercantilism and Colonialism

- 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 17: 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)
- *FILM: The Price of Sugar, (clips)*

Day 6 - Thursday, July 18: 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)
 - *SPEAKER: Leopold Podlashuc*
 - *CLASS ACTIVITY: The scramble for Africa and the Red Rubber System*
-

PART 3: DENATURALIZING NATION, RACE, GENDER

Day 7 – Tuesday, July 23: Nations and Nationalism

- Brown, W. 2010. Waning Sovereignty, Walled Democracy. In *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*. New York, Zone Books, pg 7-42.
- Ngai, M. 2014. *Impossible Subjects: The Making of the Illegal Alien in Modern America*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, pg 127-165.

Day 8 – Wednesday July 24: Racism and Race

- Magubane, Z. 2003. Simians, Savages, Skulls and Sex: Science and Colonial Militarism in Nineteenth-Century South Africa. In *Race, Nature and the Politics of Difference*. Moore et al., pg 99-121.

Day 9 – Thursday July 25: Gender and Sex

- Bederman, G. 2001. Theodore Roosevelt: Manhood, Nation and “Civilization.” *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pg 170-215.
- Padawer, R. 2016. The Humiliating Practice of Sex Testing Female Athletes. *The New York Times Magazine*. 28 June, pg 1-16.

PART 4: FLORA AND FAUNA

Day 10 - Tuesday, July 30: Plants: Political Ecologies and the Making of American Lawns

- 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 PAPER DUE ON BCOURSES AND IN CLASS

Day 11 - Wednesday, July 31: Animals: The Cultural Politics of the Basotho Cattle Complex

- Ferguson, J. (1985). The Bovine Mystique: Power, Property and Livestock in Rural Lesotho. *Man*, 20(4), 647–674.
- *SPEAKER: Jeff Martin*
- *CLASS ACTIVITY: Wolf Reintroduction and Rangeland Conflicts*

Day 12 - Thursday, August 1: Fungi!?!: Commodity Chains inside and outside Capital

- 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 5: WATER, AIR, SOIL

Day 13 - Tuesday, August 6: Water: Racial Liberalism and Racial Neoliberalism

- Ranganathan, M. (2016). Thinking with Flint: Racial Liberalism and the Roots of an American Water Tragedy. *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism*, 27(3), 17–33.
- Assies, W. (2003). David versus Goliath in Cochabamba: Water rights, neoliberalism, and the revival of social protest in Bolivia. *Latin American Perspectives*, 30(3), 14–36.
- *CLASS ACTIVITY: Cape Town's Day Zero*

FINAL PAPER DUE ON BCOURSES BEFORE CLASS

Day 14 - Wednesday, August 7: Air and Soil: Toxic and Nuclear Legacies

- Masco, J. (2004). Mutant ecologies: radioactive life in post-cold war New Mexico. *Cultural Anthropology*, 19(4), 517-550.
- 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.
- *FILM: The Babushkas of Chernobyl*

PART 6: SUBSOILS

Day 15 – Thursday, August 8: Minerals: Earth-beings and Political Excess

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

Day 16 - Tuesday, August 13: Oil: The Materiality of a Mythic Commodity

- 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 7: LIVING IN OUR CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

Day 17 - Wednesday, August 14: Is there anything natural about “Natural” Disasters?

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

Day 18 - 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>
 - *CLASS ACTIVITY: Podcast on Afrofuturism, and other imagined futures*
-

PART 8: APPLYING THE CONCEPTS

Day 19 - Tuesday, August 20: Student Presentations

Day 20 - Wednesday, August 21: Consolidating our Learnings

Day 21 - Thursday, August 22: FINAL EXAM