

GEOG 450:211

ENVIRONMENT, SOCIETY, AND JUSTICE

Fall 2023
Tuesdays/Fridays 10:20 AM to 11:40 AM
Business School (BRR) Room 5105, Livingston

Co-Instructors: Nia Cambridge & Dhruv Gangadharan
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Office Hours: Wednesdays and Fridays, 1:00 PM - 3:00 PM
Book online: <https://calendar.app.google/b6vozv5dKNRrMrvU8>

COURSE DESCRIPTION

"A geographical imperative lies at the heart of every struggle for social justice; if justice is embodied, it is then therefore always spatial, which is to say, part of the process of making a place." - Ruth Wilson Gilmore

The core question of this class is how and why the environmental problems of our time, speak to questions of social, political, and economic injustice. Around the world, colonized and historically oppressed people disproportionately carry the burdens of environmental injustice – from pollution to superstorms. How ought we make sense of uneven yet enduring socio-environmental geographies? What does it take to transform the world as we know it, centering the demands of Indigenous, Black, and globally colonized peoples? While this course cannot answer all of these questions, it will set us on a path to explore these questions in the hope of building a new environmentally just world. This course will introduce us to geographic modes of thinking about relationships between nature, society, and justice. We will leave this class dreaming about how we get free.

To address these issues our course is broken into three parts. In Part I, we will explore “classical” approaches to thinking about the relationship between nature and society, with a focus on the social inequalities and environmental degradation generated by such approaches. In Part II, we will examine alternative approaches to thinking about the relationship between nature and society including, 20th-century environmentalism, critical political economy and environmental justice frameworks. Finally, in Part III, we will apply the histories and theories from Parts I and II to critically engage with contemporary environmental issues. We will explore a host of environmental topics to wrestle with questions of environmental inequality and justice.

There is **one required book** for this course, which is available in the bookstore:

Robbins, P., Hintz, J., & Moore, S.A. (2022). **Environment and Society: A Critical Introduction**. New York: Wiley Blackwell.

All other course readings are linked in this syllabus or posted on Canvas.

Core Curriculum: This course satisfies the SAS Core Curriculum's **Historical Analysis [HST]** requirement. By the end of this course, students will be able to explain the development of some aspect of a society or culture over time, including the history of ideas or history of science. This course also satisfies the SAS Core Curriculum's **Social Analysis [SCL]** requirement. By the end of this course, students will be able to employ tools of social scientific reasoning to study particular questions or situations, using appropriate assumptions, methods, evidence, and arguments.

This course also satisfies the following learning goal in the Geography program:
Identify and explain key physical and social environmental issues (e.g., environmental justice, climate change, and land-surface transformation).

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Requirements and Percentage of Grade Associated with Each Requirement

Participation	10
Reading Quizzes	5
Exam 1	15
Exam 2	15
Homework	30
Final Project	25
100 pts	

Participation

Participation will be graded according to the rubric below. We will provide many opportunities to speak in small and large group discussions.

	2.5 pts	2 pts	1.5 pts	1 pt	0.5 pt	Total
Peer engagement	Actively supports, engages and listens to peers (ongoing)	Makes a sincere effort to interact with peers (ongoing)	Limited interaction with peers	Virtually no interaction with peers	No interaction with peers	
Reading & Preparation	Arrives fully prepared at almost every session	Arrives mostly, if not fully, prepared (ongoing)	Preparation, and therefore level of participation, are both inconsistent	Rarely prepared and rarely participates	Never prepared	

Class Discussion	Plays an active role in discussions (ongoing)	Participates constructively in discussions (ongoing)	When prepared, participates constructively in discussions	Comments are generally vague or drawn from outside of the assigned material	Never participates	
Academic Contribution	Comments occasionally advance the level and depth of the dialogue	Makes relevant comments based on the assigned material (ongoing)	When prepared, makes relevant comments based on the assigned material	Demonstrates a noticeable lack of interest (on occasion)	Demonstrates a noticeable lack of interest in the material (ongoing)	
						/10 pts

Students should attend all classes. If you expect to miss one or two classes, please use the University absence reporting website <https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/> to indicate the date and reason for your absence. We will automatically receive an email from this system.

Reading Quizzes

In addition to thoughtfully reading everything assigned, you will be expected to take short surveys about the readings. These quizzes will be given at random over the course of the semester at the beginning of lecture, and the best five will count towards your final grade.

Exams

There will be two midterms, which will be based on: 1) material discussed in class, and 2) required readings. *Make-up exams will only be given in the event of religious observance, documented illness, documented family emergency, or documented Rutgers team event.*

Homework

Letter Response

Research shows the best way to learn a new topic is to teach it! Therefore, as your homework assignment for part one, we ask you to take a concept or theme from the course and write a letter explaining it to a friend or family member. This assignment will test your mastery of the course material and help you practice communicating complex topics to a broader audience. The letter must be 500 - 750 words and should rely on the course materials to explain your theme. All letters should be uploaded to CANVAS by **Tuesday, October 3rd at 11:59 PM.**

Critical Summary – Environmental Justice in Media

Environmental justice issues are happening all around us. Therefore, we encourage you to remain up-to-date on current environmental events. For this assignment, you will select a

news article, podcast episode, or informational video/documentary on an environmental justice issue. You will then write a short (450 - 500 words) two-paragraph reflection on the media piece. In the first paragraph, you should summarise the environmental justice issue, identifying the place in question, the affected population, the perpetrator of environmental injustice, the groups calling for environmental justice, and the proposed solution. In the second paragraph, you are expected to critically engage with the environmental justice issue highlighted in the piece, using course readings and concepts covered in class. Due on CANVAS by **Friday, November 3rd at 11:59 PM**

Critical Summary – Environmental Justice in Academia

Find an article on environmental justice in an accredited journal. Then, write a short (450 - 500 words) response to the article. Your response should include a brief summary of the article, along with a critical reflection on the content using the readings and concepts discussed in class. We encourage you to look up academic articles that cover issues related to the environmental justice issue you chose for your final project. All summaries are due on CANVAS by **Wednesday, November 22nd at 11:59 PM.**

Extension/Late Grading Policy

We encourage you to submit all work on time, but we understand that things happen. Late work will be accepted; however, there will be a 10% deduction per week that the assignment is late. Except for emergency situations, extensions will not be granted at the last minute. If you anticipate an assignment will be late, please contact us at least 24 hours before the due date to discuss the possibility of an extension. Please note that we reserve the right to decline extension requests.

Final Project

For the final project, you will create a digital 5-7-page Zine on an environmental justice issue of your choice. The zine should explore a theme using the lens of environmental justice that teaches people about the environmental justice implications of your topic and educates people about the environmental justice activism around your topic. You will collect images and other materials to illustrate your topic. You will also be responsible for including analytical text that will help readers understand: the nature of the problem, who it impacts and harms the most, and what activists are doing to eradicate the problem. When defining the nature of the problem you should use at least three class materials from parts I and II to analyze the issue. In this way, you will not only learn how to conduct research but also how to analyze and write on complex environmental justice issues. From this assignment, you will also be able to use art to educate the wider public on environmental justice issues.

For more on Zines see: <https://thecreativeindependent.com/guides/how-to-make-a-zine/>

For sample Zines, a rubric, and more detailed information and benchmarks please see our Canvas page. Since this is the final assignment, we will break the assignment into parts, allowing students to get feedback and support at each stage of the final. Therefore, the due dates for this projects are staggered:

- Due Date 1: 250 word proposal on selected topic due **November 10th**
- Due Date 2: 2-page Draft Outline of Zine due **December 1st**

- Due Date 3: Working Draft of Zine for an in-class workshop on **December 12th**
- **Final Zine Due: December 15th at 11:59 PM**

Grading

Below is the standard undergraduate grade scale. We will give grades as percentages, but they will appear as letter grades in your final report. All grades will be posted on Canvas.

Letter	Percentage	Grade Point
A	90 - 100	4.0
B+	85 - 89	3.5
B	80 - 84	3.0
C+	75 - 79	2.5
C	70 - 74	2.0
D	60 - 69	1.0
F	Below 60	0.0

Key Dates

- **Tuesday, October 3:** Letter Writing Assignment Due at 11:59 PM
- **Friday, October 13:** First Exam
- **Friday, November 3:** EJ in the Media Assignment Due at 11:59 PM
- **Friday, November 10:** Zine Proposal Due
- **Friday, November 17:** Second Exam
- **Wednesday, November 22:** EJ in Academia Assignment Due at 11:59 PM
- **Friday, December 1:** Zine Outline Due
- **Tuesday, December 12:** Zine Workshop
- **Friday, December 15:** Final Project Due at 11:59 PM

CLASSROOM POLICIES, MECHANICS, AND SUPPORT

Communication: If you have a quick question that we can answer in 1-2 sentences, please email us at nia.cambridge@rutgers.edu and dhruv.gangadharan@rutgers.edu. We will do our best to respond within 24 hours, except on weekends. If you have any other questions or concerns, we encourage you to sign up for our office hours, which are on Wednesdays and Fridays from 1:00 PM - 3:00 PM. Please book online: <https://calendar.app.google/b6vozv5dKNRrMrvU8>. If your schedule does not permit you to meet during office hours, email us to schedule another meeting time.

Safe Space: We are 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. We expect you to respect each other and the diversity of opinions in the classroom. Disruptive behaviour, 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. Before you submit your research project, we will discuss appropriate citation practices in class. **However, please do not hesitate to ask if you have any questions about how or what you should cite.** We would much rather help you cite appropriately than penalise you for doing it wrong.

You can also visit the **Rutgers Academic Integrity** site for more information and citation guides (<http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/resources-for-students/>) or you can visit the **Rutgers Learning Center** for more general writing assistance (<https://rlc.rutgers.edu/>).

Counselling, Alcohol and Other Drug Assistance Program & Psychiatric Services (CAPS): University is stressful, particularly when juggling many courses, jobs, and family responsibilities. Please let us know if you are struggling in any of these areas. CAPS can also help support your academic success. <http://health.rutgers.edu/medical-counseling-services/counseling/>

Special Accommodations: If you have any special circumstances that may affect your work in this course, please see us as soon as possible. If something unforeseen happens during the semester, let us know right away. We can be more helpful if you talk to us well before assignment deadlines.

Acknowledgement: The instructors thank Dr. Andrea Marston and Dr. Teona Williams for their generous support in designing this course.

COURSE AGENDA

PART I: INTRODUCING NATURE & SOCIETY

Week 1: The End of Nature?

- **Tue, Sept 5: Introduction**
 - *No readings*
- **Fri, Sept 8: Welcome to the Anthropocene**
 - Heise, U. (2016). "Introduction: From End of Nature to the Beginning of the Anthropocene" in *Imagining Extinction: The Cultural Meanings of Endangered Species.*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, pp. 1-18.
 - Zalasiewicz, J., Williams, M., Smith, A., Barry, T. L., Coe, A. L., Bown, P. R., ... & Gregory, F. J. (2008). Are we now living in the Anthropocene? *GSA Today* 18(2), 4-8.

Week 2: A Many-Headed Crisis

- **Tue, Sept 12: Reframing Crisis – Race & Racism**
 - Pulido, L. (2018) "Racism and the Anthropocene" in *Future Remains: A Cabinet of Curiosities for the Anthropocene*, Mitman, G., Emmett, R., and Armiero, M. (Eds.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 116-128.
 - Vergès, F (2017) "Racial Capitalocene" in *Futures of Black Radicalism*, Johnson, G.T. and Lubin, A. (Eds.). New York: Verso. Read online: <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3376-racial-capitalocene>
- **Fri, Sept 15: Reframing the Crisis – Colonialism & Capitalism**
 - Klein, N. and Sproat, K. (2023) "Why was there no water to fight the fire in Maui." *The Guardian*. Read online: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/aug/17/hawaii-fires-maui-water-rights-disaster-capitalism>.
 - Wang, C. (2023) "How 19th-century pineapple plantations turned Maui into a tinderbox". *The Guardian*. Read online: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/aug/27/maui-wildfire-water-plantations-ecology>.

Week 3: Nature as Property & Resource

- **Tue, Sept 19: Making Nature a Commodity**
 - Environment and Society, Chapter 3. Markets and Commodities.
- **Fri, Sept 22: Nature as Accumulation Strategy**
 - Smith, N. (2007) Nature as Accumulation Strategy. *Socialist Register 2007: Coming to Terms with Nature*, 43: 16–36.

Week 4: Institutions and Commons

- **Tue, Sept 26: Population and Scarcity**

- Environment and Society, Chapter 2. Population and Scarcity.
- Malthus, T. (1798) Chapter 1 in *An Essay on the Principle of Population*.. London: ElecBook, pp. 7-12.

- **Fri, Sept 29: The Commons**

- Environment and Society, Chapter 4. Institutions and “The Commons”.
- Hardin, G. (1968). The Tragedy of the Commons. *Science*, 162(3859), 1243–1248.
- Mildenburger M. (2019) “The Tragedy of *The Tragedy of the Commons*,” *Scientific American*. Read Online:
<https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/voices/the-tragedy-of-the-tragedy-of-the-commons/>

Week 5: Denaturalizing Economy

- **Tue, Oct 3: The Political Economy**

- Environment and Society, Chapter 7. Political Economy.
- **Letter Writing Assignment due at 11:59 PM**

- **Fri, Oct 6: Uneven Development**

- Magdoff, F. and Foster, J.B. (2010) “What every environmentalist needs to know about capitalism”. *Monthly Review* 61(10). Read online:
[https://monthlyreview.org/2010/03/01/what-every-environmentalist-needs-to-know-about-capitalism/#:~:text=Capitalism%20is%20a%20system%20that,correspondingly%20dangerous%20to%20ecological%20sustainability\).](https://monthlyreview.org/2010/03/01/what-every-environmentalist-needs-to-know-about-capitalism/#:~:text=Capitalism%20is%20a%20system%20that,correspondingly%20dangerous%20to%20ecological%20sustainability).)

Week 6: End of Part I

- **Tue, Oct 10: Review/Catch up**
 - *No readings*
- **Fri, Oct 13: FIRST EXAM**

PART II: SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Week 7: Rethinking Environmentalism

- **Tue, Oct 17: Conservation and Preservation**
 - Environment and Society, Chapter 5. Environmental Ethics.
- **Fri, Oct 20: Challenging Wilderness**
 - Finney, C. (2014). Chapters 1 & 2 of *Black Faces, White Spaces*. Chapel Hill: UNC Press, pp. 21–50.

Week 8: Critical Natures

- **Tue, Oct 24: Social Construction of Nature**
 - Environment and Society, Chapter 8. Social Construction of Nature.
- **Fri, Oct 27: Struggle over Natures**
 - Gilio-Whitaker, D. (2019). "Environmental Justice Theory and its Limitations for

Indigenous Peoples" in *As long as grass grows: the indigenous fight for environmental justice from colonization to Standing Rock*. Boston: Beacon Press.

- Documentary screening in class: "There is Something in the Water" (2019) by Ian Daniel and Elliot Page

Week 9: Environmental Justice and Intersectionality

- **Tue, Oct 31: Differential Impacts of Environmental Degradation**
 - Pulido, L. (2017) "Environmental Racism." In *The International Encyclopedia of Geography* (1-13). New York: John Wiley & Sons.
 - *Environment and Society*, Chapter 9. Feminism and the Environment.
- **Fri, Nov 3: Intersectional Environmental Justice**
 - Hernandez, J. (2022) "Ecowars: Seeking Environmental Justice" in *Fresh Banana Leaves: Healing Indigenous Landscapes through Indigenous Science*. Huichin (unceded Ohlone land aka Berkeley, California): North Atlantic Books, pp. 99-118.
 - CRC (2017[1977]) "The Combahee River Collective Statement." In *How We Get Free* (edited by Keeanga-Yamahatta Taylor). Chicago: Haymarket Books, pp. 15-28.
 - **EJ in the Media Assignment Due at 11:59 PM**

Week 10: Toxins and Trash

- **Tue, Nov 7: Waste**
 - *Environment and Society*, Chapter 19. E-Waste.
- **Fri, Nov 10: Pollution**
 - Dillon, L. and Sze, J. (2016) "Police Powers and Particulate Matters: Environmental Justice and the Spatialities of In/Securities in U.S Cities". *English Language Notes*, 54(2): 13-23.
 - Webb-Hehn, Katherine. (2019). Dangerous Conditions May Exist in this Area. *Scalawag Magazine*. Read online: <https://scalawagmagazine.org/2019/06/birmingham-epa-superfund/>.
 - **Zine Proposal Due on Canvas at 11:59 PM**

Week 11: End of Part II

- **Tue, Nov 14: Review/Catch Up**
 - *No readings*
- **Fri, Nov 17: SECOND EXAM**

Week 12: Thanksgiving Break

- **Tue, Nov 21: NO CLASS (Thursday Classes)**
- **Wed, Nov 22 (Friday Classes): EJ in Academia Assignment Due at 11:59 PM**

PART III: KEY ISSUES

Week 13: Disaster & Risk

- **Tue, Nov 28: Risk and Technology**
 - Environment and Society, Chapter 6. Risks and Technology.
- **Fri, Dec 1: Unnatural Disasters**
 - Bonilla, Yarimar. "The coloniality of disaster: Race, empire, and the temporal logics of emergency in Puerto Rico, USA." *Political geography* 78 (2020): 102181.
 - Rivera, Danielle Zoe. "Disaster colonialism: A commentary on disasters beyond singular events to structural violence." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 46, no. 1 (2022): 126-135.
 - **Zine Outline Due at 11:59 PM**

Week 14: Worldmaking in the Age of Environmental Catastrophe

- **Tue, Dec 5: Freedom is a Place**
 - Group A: Mauna Kea, Hawaii
 - All My Relations Podcast (2020a) [For the Love of the Mauna, Part 1.](#)
 - All My Relations Podcast (2020b) [For the Love of the Mauna, Part 2.](#)
 - All My Relations Podcast (2021). [Hawaiian Resistance, Tourism & Abolition: For the Love of the Mauna, Part 3.](#)
 - Group B: Standing Rock, North & South Dakota
 - Whyte, K. P. (2016). [Why the Native American pipeline resistance in North Dakota is about climate justice.](#) The Conversation.
 - Code Switch Podcast, [A New Movement on Standing Rock](#)
- **Fri, Dec 8: Art as Revolution**
 - Feminist Geography Collective: FLOCK. (2021). [Making a Zine, Building a Feminist Collective: Ruptures I, Student Visionaries, and Racial Justice at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.](#)

Week 15: Final Wrap-Up

- **Tue, Dec 12: Zine Workshop**

FINAL PROJECT DUE: FRI, DEC 15 AT 11:59 PM