JUSTICE, NATURE &
THE GEOGRAPHIES OF IDENTITY
Geography 31

Professor: Jake Kosek
Meeting Time: Thursday 9-12
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COURSE DESCRIPTION:
Nature, identity and politics intersect in the pages of newspapers almost every day—in stories of toxic waste sites, immigration policies, crime, genetic engineering, indigenous struggles, or terrorism. In all these and many other cases, ideas of race, class, and gender intersect with ideas of nature in often tenacious and troubling ways. Starting with the traditional environmental justice movement in the U.S., we will look at how people disproportionately experience exposure to hazards, are denied access to resources, and are excluded from decision-making processes along lines of race, class and gender. Our approach will be to understand these traditional ideas of environmental justice as well as to examine less traditional sites of environmental justice, such as the laboratory, war zone, urban mall, and courtroom.

The course therefore seeks to define environmental justice more broadly. We will look at cases beyond the U.S., comparing concepts of environment and justice from Dixieland to Gangland, Yosemite mountain parks to Gambian community gardens, Indonesian rainforests to Aboriginal science, exploring the daily expressions and lived consequences of key terms such as race, class, nature and politics. Using diverse material, including historical documents (on eugenics to contemporary Walt Disney productions) and methods, from History and Anthropology, to Geography and Science Studies, we will explore the complex engagements of nature, culture and power and the effects these formations have on contemporary political struggles. The central goal of the course is to improve students’ ability to think conceptually and critically, and to question received wisdom, cherished assumptions and common-sense ideas of nature, identity and politics.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:
Final exam: 30% of grade, Class assignments: 35% of grade, Class participation: 35% of grade.

Class Assignments and Participation
Lectures will be complemented by sessions devoted to fuller class discussion of the readings. Class assignments on topics related to the class lectures will be given two weeks in advance of their due dates.

Short Paper & Project
You will be expected to write one short paper of five-to-seven pages and one out of class project to be explained in class. These should be based on class readings, lectures, and our
discussions. They are directly related to specific questions from class and should require limited outside or additional reading. The papers are designed to encourage critical reflections on course themes and material in a more in-depth way than is possible in class. Details will be discussed in class before the first writing assignment. Papers are due on March 17th and April 21st.

Final Exam
Questions, including ones on the final exam, will be handed out Dec. 1 to allow you to prepare for the proctored final exam on Dec. 18th. The final exam will consist of some of these questions, other short-answer questions, and key terms. The final exam will comprise 50% of the course grade.

I. INTRODUCTION POLITICS AND HISTORY OF NATURE
Week 1 January 20th: Introduction

Week 2 January 27th: Nature and Politics

II. RACE, NATURE AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE
Week 3 February 3rd: Race and Nature

Week 4 February 10th Environmental Justice

III. CATASTROPHE & RISK AND VIOLENT EXCLUSIONS
Week 5 February 17th: Unequal Natures

IV. POLITICAL ECOLOGIES
Week 6 February 24th: On Population and Politics

Week 7 March 3rd: The Production and Commodification of Nature

Week 8 March 10th: The Production of Nature

V: NATURAL BOUNDARIES: THE HISTORY AND POLITICS OF NATURE AND CULTURE
Week 9 March 17th: The Organic Machine
VI. SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND NATURE


Week 12 April 7th: Do Artifacts Have Politics?


Week 13 April 14th: The Politics and Science of Global Warming

VII:  PAST AND FUTURE NATURES

Week 14 April 21:  War and Nature


- 2nd Paper due at the beginning of class

Week 15/April 28th: Rethinking Politics


*Final Exam: Wed, May 11, 11:50-2:50 (exam group 10)*