

AFR 372C: Race, Capitalism & the Environment (30532)

WGS 340 (45624) / GRG 356T (37059)

Flags: Global Cultures & Cultural Diversity in the U.S.

Spring 2019

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Image courtesy of North Carolina Environmental Justice Network

Overview

This course offers an introduction to environmental politics through the fields of political ecology, critical race studies and eco-feminism. We will examine environmental contestations to understand how humans relate to nature in the context of global racial capitalism and the possibilities for creating a more sustainable world. We will explore how racism is foundational to environmental exploitation and consider why global struggles for racial justice are crucial for protecting both people and the earth. Reflecting principles of environmental justice,

the course material respects the lived experiences, leadership and intellectual insights of racialized peoples as a vital source of knowledge.

Drawing on literature and film, investigative reporting and primary documents, in addition to academic publications, we will investigate:

What is the relationship between race and nature in capitalism?

Why does racial justice matter for the earth?

How does environmental racism work in a globalized world?

What strategies do marginalized peoples employ to survive and enact social change?

How do we build a world that values the diversity of human and non-human life?

What's this class about?

This is an interdisciplinary survey course, combining critical theory, social science and environmental humanities, to examine how the exploitation of natural resources is connected with the racism of colonization and capitalism. We will begin with an introduction to the structural logics that shape the modern world, including the human-nature binary, settler colonialism and racial capitalism. We will apply these concepts to explore contestations over water, land, food, waste, metal, and weather, by diverse actors including governments, corporations and social movements. Our goal is to understand how space and resources are manipulated to reproduce unequal environments, reflecting racial, classed and gendered dynamics, and how alternate visions for socio-ecological sustainability seek to challenge and undo racial capitalism. In closing, we will reflect on how the planetary crises we face demand a rethinking of humans, earth and life itself.

Topics include:

- conservation and wilderness preservation
- waste and toxicity
- food justice and sovereignty
- urban ecology, clean water and safe housing
- sustainable energy production
- global climate justice

What will you take away from this class?

- An introduction to why environmental issues are political problems
- Experience applying critical race and gender analysis in addressing socio-ecological issues
- An appreciation for the significance of movements for environmental justice
- Invaluable critical thinking, reading and writing skills, as well as practice working in both teams and independently
- A sense of your capacities and potential contributions in creating change

How will you learn?

The course is structured as weekly units organized around key concepts. Each week, we will closely read foundational scholarly texts that offer a nuanced understanding of complex environmental problems. We will apply these theoretical insights to specific case studies to explore their relevance in the real world, through guest speakers, documents produced by grassroots movements, journalistic accounts and primary research. Alongside these critical analyses, we will engage with creative work from various genres (memoirs, short stories, nonfiction essays, poetry and film), to inspire deeper reflection on the complexities of environmental issues and their impact on human and non-human lives, including our own. Reflecting ethical commitments to diverse knowledges, the class will incorporate work by a range of thinkers, activists, and artists, and encourage you to consider yourselves as knowledge producers based on your unique skills and interests.

About me

I am a geographer working in critical race and feminist studies. I use cultural methodologies, including performance and visual methods, to study environmental racism in collaboration with those whose lives are devastated by global capitalism. I enjoy teaching as part of my scholarship and activism, and am interested in how we can create a more just university. In my past life, I ran afterschool programs for high school youth, developed curricula for nonprofits, and danced professionally. I am a lifelong student of movement, trained in traditional and contemporary South Asian dance forms, yoga and Aikido, and I bring this bodily sensibility to my work.

Course site and materials

The course Canvas site is an invaluable resource: <https://utexas.instructure.com>. All class materials will be uploaded on Canvas, including readings, detailed instructions for assignments and grading rubrics. No textbook purchase is required.

*** Note: Class schedule and readings may be modified from the original syllabus.*

*Please check Canvas regularly for updates.***

Assessment

Your course grade includes 4 components, each worth 25% of your total grade: Participation, a cumulative in-class Exam, a Group Project, and an independent Creative Writing Project. I describe each component below. Additional instructions and grading rubrics for each assignment will be provided on Canvas.

Grading policy, late work and extra credit

Every assignment is worth points, totaling 1000 points for the course. The chart below shows each assignment, its point value, and percentage of the total grade.

Discussion forum posts and responses must be completed by the assigned date and time; *no exceptions will be made*. For the Group and Creative writing projects, I will deduct 10% from the final grade for each day that an assignment is late. After 3 days, the assignment will not be accepted and you will receive 0 points.

Opportunities for extra credit are built into class participation (maximum points shown in parentheses below). For example, if you attend every class, you will have earned 10 points extra credit. For an additional 10 points, you may attend a lecture or event and write a response post on the Discussion Forum. See below for details. Final grades are firm and there will be no additional curve.

Component (due date)	Points (Max)	% of Grade
Participation	250 (300)	25
Attendance	50 (60)	
Discussion Forum Reflections (10)	100 (110)	
Discussion Forum Responses (10)	50 (55)	
In-Class Activities	50 (65)	
Optional response to event (Apr. 28)	(10)	
Exam	250	25
Cumulative in-class exam (Apr. 1)		
Group Project	250	25
Proposal (Mar. 25)	50	
Preparation (Apr. 5)	100	
Presentations (Apr. 29, May 1)	75	
Peer evaluations (May 3)	25	
Creative Writing Project	250	25
Proposal (Feb. 15)	25	
Preparation (Mar. 15)	75	
Process (Apr. 19)	50	
Product (May 15)	100	
TOTAL	1000	100

Participation (25%)

Attendance

Attendance will be taken every class (total 50 points). You are allowed up to 5 absences without a point penalty, regardless of the reason. However, you are responsible for any class content missed due to absences. *Please check in with other students to cover material you miss; I will not go over class content with you individually.* Since this is a discussion-based course, missing class will adversely impact your understanding of course material and preparation for exams.

In-class activities

You will periodically receive points for participation in in-class activities (total 50 points). *You cannot make up points from in-class activities*, regardless of the reason you miss class.

Discussion forum: Reflections and Responses

Most weeks, you are required to post on the Discussion Forum reflecting on readings in response to a prompt (see schedule below). Engaging consistently with the readings in this way will help you prepare for class and serve as a helpful way to review for exams. Your reflections must be posted by 11:59pm on Sunday. The goal of the reflections is to learn how to engage seriously with scholarly work. Each post is worth a maximum of 10 points (total 100 points).

Each week, in addition to your own reflection, please read your classmates' posts and respond to at least one of them. Your responses must be posted by 10am on Mondays to receive credit. You can earn 5 points each week for one substantial response (total 50 points).

Optional response to event

For an additional 10 points, you may attend a relevant lecture or event (on or off campus) and write a post on the Discussion Forum that engages course material. If you are not sure if the event is appropriate, please check with me first. Extra credit responses must be submitted by 11:59pm Sunday April 28th to receive credit.

Exam (25%)

You will take one in-class exam on April 1 that will assess your ability to *define key terms, apply concepts, and synthesize arguments*. The exam will be cumulative and draw on all course material, including readings, class discussions and lectures.

Group project (25%)

This project is an opportunity for you to *apply and communicate critical analysis* with the class on a contemporary environmental topic of interest to you. With your assigned group members, you will choose a *current event* that will you be researching and teaching the class about. The project is scaffolded, involving four phases: Proposal (memo outlining topic and individual contributions-50 points); Preparation (annotated bibliography involving background research- 100 points); Presentation (a concise and creative sharing of knowledge with the class- 75 points); and Peer evaluations (post-project reflection on group members' contributions-25 points). *Each assignment, apart from the Peer evaluations, will receive a shared group grade*, requiring group members to contribute equally and practice producing knowledge through collaboration.

Creative writing project (25%)

For the final project, you will write a nonfiction essay in response to a prompt, that explores the question of *human-environment relations, ecological sustainability and*

racial justice. This project is also scaffolded, involving four phases: Proposal (memo outlining topic and form- 25 points); Preparation (annotated bibliography involving background research- 75 points); Process (rough draft for peer review- 50 points); and Product (the final revised submission- 100 points). Nonfiction essay writing offers practice in *conducting secondary research* on a topic that you care about and *writing persuasively for a general audience*.

Schedule

**** Class schedule and readings will be updated on Canvas, please check regularly.****

Note: Readings for each day are listed under “Prepare for Class” and should be read *prior* to arriving in class. All required reading will be posted on the Canvas site.

Assignments should be submitted *before* the dates and times listed.

DATE	CLASS FOCUS	PREPARE FOR CLASS	ASSIGNMENTS DUE TODAY
Week 1: Openings			
Wed 1/23	Introductions Syllabus review	-	-
Week 2: On Humans and Nature			
Mon 1/28	Politicizing nature	William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness”; Michael Watts, “Nature as Artifice and Artifact”	Discussion Forum 1 (**due Sun. 1/27**)
Wed 1/30	Reflecting on our environmental relations	Lauret Savoy, <i>Trace</i> (pp1-48)	
Week 3: On Race and Nature			
Mon 2/4	Environmental racism and justice	Moore et al, <i>Race, Nature and the Politics of Difference</i> , “Introduction”; Willie Wright, “As Above, So Below”	Discussion Forum 2 (**due Sun. 2/3**)
Wed 2/6	Guest speaker: PhD student, Suzanne Nimoh: “Anacostia: The politics of race and nature in Washington, DC”	Katherine McKittrick, “Plantation Futures”; Brett Williams, “A River Runs Through Us”; Anacostia Unmapped, “The Lion and the Map”: http://www.anacostiaunmapped.com/stories/#/the-lion-and-the-map-1/	
Week 4: On Settler Colonialism			
Mon 2/11	Conquest and genocide	Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, <i>An Indigenous People’s History</i> : Ch 2 (pp32-44); Nick Estes and Jaskiran Dhillon, “Standing Rock, #NoDAPL, and Mni Wconi”: https://culanth.org/fieldsights/1007	Discussion Forum 3 (**due Sun. 2/10**)

		-introduction-standing-rock-nodapl-and-mni-wiconi	
Wed 2/13	Decolonization	Robin Kimmerer, <i>Braiding Sweetgrass</i> (TBD); Heather Davis & Zoe Todd, "On the Importance of a Date"	Creative writing: Proposal (** due 2/15**)
Week 5: Metal			
Mon 2/18	Primitive Accumulation and Extractivism	Eduardo Galeano, <i>Open Veins of Latin America</i> , Selections; Additional readings (TBD)	Discussion Forum 4 (**due Sun. 2/17**)
Wed 2/20	Case study: Aluminum	Mimi Sheller, <i>Aluminum Dreams</i> : Ch6; Pavithra Vasudevan, "An Intimate Inventory"	
Week 6: Land			
Mon 2/25	Environmental racism, Austin Guest speaker: Susana Almanza, Director of PODER	PODER handouts and reports	Discussion Forum 5 (**due Sun. 2/24**)
Wed 2/27	Property and uneven development	George Lipsitz, "The Racialization of Space and the Spacialization of Race"; Eliot Tretter, <i>Shadows of a Sunbelt City</i> : Ch 5 (pp. 96-113)	
Week 7: Waste			
Mon 3/4	Gendered burden of toxic waste	Winona LaDuke, <i>All Our Relations</i> : Ch1 (pp.11-26); Susan Mann, "Pioneers of US Ecofeminism and Environmental Justice"	Discussion Forum 6 (**due Sun. 3/3**)
Wed 3/6	Case Study: Transnational activism en los dos Nogales	Giovanna Di Chiro, "Living Is for Everyone"; Joni Adamson, "Throwing Rocks at the Sun"	Creative Writing: Preparation (** due 3/15**)
Week 8: Food			
Mon 3/11	Food justice and sovereignty Guest speaker: Simone Benz, Sustainable Food Center	"Struggles of La Via Campesina" Report; Monica White, <i>Freedom Farmers</i> , Selections	Discussion Forum 7 (**due Sun. 3/10**)
Wed 3/13	Political economy of food Guest speaker: Nisrin Elamin	Nisrin Elamin, "The Scramble for Land": https://www.pambazuka.org/land-environment/south-sudan-scramble-land/ ; Additional readings (TBD)	
SPRING BREAK: No class on 3/18 and 3/20			
Week 9: Water			

Mon 3/25	The Water Wars, Bolivia Film: "Tambien la Lluvia / Even the Rains"	Erik Swyngedouw, "The political economy and the political ecology of the hydro-social cycle"; Benjamin Dangl, <i>The Price of Fire</i> : Introduction, Ch1	Discussion Forum 8 (**due Sun. 3/24**) Group Project: Proposal (**due Mon. 3/25**)
Wed 3/27	On commodification and commoning	Karen Bakker, "The 'commons' vs. the 'commodity'"; <i>This Stretch of the River</i> , selections	
Week 10: Intermission			
Mon 4/1	In-class exam		-
Wed 4/3	Group project research day		Group Project: Preparation (**due Fri. 4/5**)
Week 11: Weather			
Mon 4/8	Unnatural disasters	Neil Smith, "There's no such thing as a natural disaster"; Angela Last, "Fruit of the Cyclone"	Discussion Forum 9 (**due Sun. 4/7**)
Wed 4/10	Recovery Case study: In the aftermath of Irma and Maria	Fortwangler et al., "Green Islands for All?": https://ethnobiology.org/forage/blog/green-islands-all-avoiding-climate-gentrification-caribbean?fbclid=IwAR3LvJ9nCcGO8zPV51gLpppR_01PoAgkmdhkpdzIWERMm-WsWITZnd2QgF0 ; Additional readings (TBD)	
Week 12: Earth			
Mon 4/15	Global climate justice	Kyle Whyte, "Way Beyond the Lifeboat": https://kylewhyte.marcom.cal.msu.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/12/2018/07/WayBeyondtheLifeboat.pdf ; Additional readings TBD	Discussion Forum 10 (**due Sun. 4/14**)
Wed 4/17	Narrating the apocalypse	Amitav Ghosh, <i>The Great Derangement</i> , Selections; Gergan et al., "Earth Beyond Repair?"	Creative writing: Process (** due Fri. 4/19 **)
Week 13: Life			
Mon 4/22	Life after/in colonial and capitalist violence	Michelle Murphy, "Alterlife and Decolonial Chemical Reactions"	Discussion Forum 11 (**due Sun. 4/21**)
Wed 4/24	Rethinking life Film: "Pumzi"	Kriti Sharma, <i>Interdependence</i> , Selections	

Week 14: Sharing			
Mon 4/29	Group presentations		Group Project: Presentation; Optional response to event (** due Sun. 4/29**)
Wed 5/1	Group presentations		Group Project: Presentation; Peer Evaluation (** due 5/3**)
Week 15: Closing			
Mon 5/6	Worldbuilding the apocalypse	Alexis Pauline Gumbs, <i>M Archive</i> , Selections	
Wed 5/8	Taking it forward; evaluations	N. K. Jemisin, <i>How Long 'Til Black Future Month</i> , Selections (TBD)	
FINAL: Creative Writing: Product (** due 5/15**)			

University Policies

Academic Integrity

I anticipate and encourage you to work collaboratively. All knowledge we produce builds on and is in conversation with others. However, passing off ideas as your own without reference is, simply put, **plagiarism**.

*** Please take care when reading, writing or doing research! ***

- Do not cut and paste from other sources, even when taking notes
- Be sure to quote and cite any words, images or material that are not your own
- You must cite sources even when you paraphrase

NOTE: Please follow MLA rules for all citations. Learn more:

<http://guides.lib.utexas.edu/citesources>

You are expected to abide by the University of Texas Honor Code: “As a student of The University of Texas at Austin, I shall abide by the core values of the University and uphold academic integrity.” When you use words or ideas that are not your own (or that you have used in previous classes), you must cite your sources. Otherwise you will be guilty of plagiarism and subject to academic disciplinary action, including failure of the course. **Plagiarism is taken very seriously at UT.** Learn more about Academic Honesty and the University Honor Code which can be found at the following web address: http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acint_student.php

Q Drop Policy

To drop a class after the 12th class day, you’ll need to execute a Q drop before the deadline, which typically occurs near the middle of the semester. Texas law only permits six Q drops while you are in college at any public Texas institution. Learn more: <http://www.utexas.edu/ugs/csacc/academic/adddrop/qdrop>

Accommodations

Services for Students with Disabilities

If you have special needs that impact your ability to learn effectively, please speak with me *during the first two weeks of class*. If you have a documented disability, you have a right to accommodations. Please contact Services for Students with Disabilities, 512-471-6259 (voice) or 1-866-329-3986 (video phone).

<http://ddce.utexas.edu/disability/about/>

Counseling and Mental Health Center

If you are struggling with personal circumstances, including anxiety, depression, stress, difficult life events or concerns about your lifestyle, these can affect your ability to learn. Mental health professionals on campus are available to support you:

<http://www.cmhc.utexas.edu/individualcounseling.html>

Sexual Assault Support and Title IX Reporting

The university offers resources for victims of sexual assault. Learn about your options:

https://www.cmhc.utexas.edu/vav/vav_sexualviolence.html

Title IX is a federal law that protects against sex and gender-based discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, sexual misconduct, dating/domestic violence and stalking at federally funded educational institutions. UT Austin is committed to fostering a learning and working environment free from discrimination in all its forms.

When sexual misconduct occurs in our community, the university can:

1. Intervene to prevent harmful behavior from continuing or escalating.
2. Provide support and remedies to students and employees who have experienced harm or have become involved in a Title IX investigation.
3. Investigate and discipline violations of the university's [relevant policies](#).

Faculty and staff are considered “Responsible Employees” or “Mandatory Reporters,” which means that they are required to report violations of Title IX to the Title IX Coordinator. ***I am a Responsible Employee and must report any Title IX related incidents that are disclosed in writing, discussion, or one-on-one.*** Before speaking with me or any faculty or staff member, consider whether you want the incident reported.

https://www.cmhc.utexas.edu/vav/vav_reportingoptions.html#A

To speak with someone for support or remedies without making an official report, email advocate@austin.utexas.edu. You may also speak confidentially with licensed staff at the UT Counseling and Mental Health Center and University Health Services. For more information about reporting options and resources, visit titleix.utexas.edu or contact the Title IX Office at titleix@austin.utexas.edu.

Learning Resources

The Sanger Learning Center

Services offered: classes and workshops, private learning specialist appointments, peer academic coaching, and tutoring for more than 70 courses in 15 different subject areas. For more information: <http://www.utexas.edu/ugs/slc>, 512-471-3614, JES A332

Undergraduate Writing Center: <http://uwc.utexas.edu/>

Libraries: <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/>

Women's and Gender Studies Librarian:

Gina Bastone, g.bastone@austin.utexas.edu, 495-4414, PCL 2.312X

ITS: <http://www.utexas.edu/its/>

Student Emergency Services: <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/emergency/>

Important Safety Information:

If you have concerns about the safety or behavior of fellow students, TAs or Professors, call BCAL (the Behavior Concerns Advice Line): 512-232-5050. Your call can be anonymous. If something doesn't feel right – it probably isn't. Trust your instincts and share your concerns.