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Office Hours:  
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Sociology 353  
Spring 2006  
Maxey 302

## ***Environmental Justice***

Welcome to *Soc 353: Environmental Justice!* How and why are environmental problems experienced differently according to race, gender, class and nationality? How do different communities experience and respond to environmental problems? Why does it matter that there is unequal exposure to environmental risks and benefits? What do we learn about the meaning of gender, race, class and nationality by studying exposure of these groups to environmental hazards? In other words, what does the study of environmental risks tell us about racism, classism, sexism in our nation and world today? These are some of the questions we will take up in the next fifteen weeks together. This course will be highly reading and research intensive. Environmental justice is one of the most important and active sites of environmental scholarship and activism in our country today. We begin with reading classics and new material that covers a range of issues and events that the environmental justice movement and scholars address. The final part of the course will consist of research and teaching presentations on local environmental justice issues by you the students.

### ***Goals and Objectives***

After completing this course you should be able to:

- \* Explain theoretical perspectives on the causes, consequences of unequal exposure to environmental problems.
- \* Define and use scientific and social science concepts central to the field of health, toxics and environmental justice.
- \* Understand multiple ways that race, class, gender and nationality affect one's experience of and responses to ecological problems from toxic exposure to species decline.
- \* Think critically about your own life, how you impact and are affected by dynamics of social inequality and ecological problems.
- \* Know more about regional environmental justice issues and movements.

### ***Operating Assumptions***

- \* People's experiences of and knowledge about the world (including environmental issues) differs by race, class, gender and nationality.
- \* Although we recognize that different members of society have different perspectives on environmental problems, ecological damage such as species decline, toxic contamination, air and water pollution are real, and the rate of damage is increasing.

### ***Class Format***

Environmental problems are not "out there" in the world, they are created and experienced by each of us. We each contribute to ecological problems as we go about our daily lives, eating, using

electricity, buying clothing and computers and so forth. And each of us is affected by ecological problems as we consume unhealthy food, breath polluted air, watch our communities change, or feel a sense of hopelessness as the problems multiply. Therefore, this class will be very interactive with lots of room for thoughtful input from each of you.

### ***Classroom Conduct***

#### *Being there*

While I understand that it can be difficult to get to class on time for all of us, please make an effort to be to class on time. If you know in advance that you need to arrive late or leave early just let me know beforehand.

#### *In Class*

I expect to be transformed from the process of teaching, of interacting with all of you. And in turn, I expect you to be transformed by the interactions you have in this class, with me as an instructor, with other students, with videos, assignments and readings. In this sense I expect our classroom to be the site of fairly intense energy. I will be fully present as a person, and I expect each of you to be the same. Please come to class prepared to listen and learn.

#### *Discussions*

Discussions can be times of rich learning, but they can also be scary for many of us. In order to create as much safety as possible, you need to agree to the following ground rules:

- \* Come to class as intellectually and psychologically prepared as you can.
- \* Raise your hand and wait until called before speaking.
- \* Listen to and be respectful of your classmates.
- \* Be open to new possibilities

#### *Late Policy*

Computer problems, illness, out of town travel and general chaos affect us all! Each of you will receive two coupons good for two days extra on assignments, no questions asked. Beyond that, late assignments will be marked down one letter grade per day. No exceptions. Coupons not valid for final project presentation.

### ***Required Texts*** -- Available at Reid Campus Center Bookstore

*Killing Me Softly toxic waste, corporate profit and the struggle for environmental justice* Eddie Girdner and Jack Smith

*No safe place: toxic waste, leukemia, and community action* Phil Brown, Edwin Mikkelsen

*The Silicon Valley of Dreams* David Pellow

*New Perspectives on Environmental Justice: Gender, Sexuality, and Activism* Rachel Stein

*Dumping in Dixie* Robert Bullard

*The Tainted Desert* Valerie Kuletz

*Power, justice, and the environment : a critical appraisal of the environmental justice movement* David Pellow

*Environmental Justice: Creating Equality, Reclaiming Democracy* Shrader-Frechette, Kristin

Additional readings will be on reserve for Latina/os and the Environment, Asia, Africa and Latin America

**Readings are listed in syllabus for the day that they will be discussed.**

## **Assignments**

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### **Book Review Projects 25%**

Five book reviews (5 points each) will be conducted throughout the course. Each book review should be 2-4 pages. You may choose which of the five books you wish to review with the exception that everyone must do a book review of the final text. Your book review should include the following categories:

- What is the problem that is outlined? Why is the problem happening? Who are the actors?
- Describe any scientific issues (health problems, what is cause, why). You may need to do additional research here.
- List new or key terms.
- Define or clarify key concepts.
- Outline main argument of text and how claims are supported.
- What in your mind, is the significance of this text?
- List questions or critiques you may have for the author or to raise with others in the class.

Note that in the case of anthologies you need to cover the overall theme of the book, but do not need to answer all questions for each chapter. Do be sure that main themes of the text are reflected in your review. Book reviews are due one week following last appearance of text on syllabus.

### **Essays One and Two 15% each**

These essays will be designed to show your ability to synthesize broad questions from the readings. Think of them as a cross between a research paper and a take home exam. You will be able to choose from at least two topics for each essay. Topics will be provided one week in advance.

### **Participation 15%**

This is your class, and to make it work, everyone needs to be involved. Because this is a seminar style course most classes will consist of discussions led by all of you! Each student will sign up to lead three discussions. Discussion leaders will meet in advance and work together to provide a summary of the main arguments of the text, list and define key terms, present explanation of scientific information listed and come with a series of “discuss-able” questions. Discussion leaders are encouraged to solicit questions from the class in advance over email.

### **Team Project 15% and Final Paper 15%**

Students will work in teams to prepare regional assessments on environmental justice issues of your choosing. We will meet in class to plan student research team projects. Possible topics include: African Americans, Native Americans or Latinos in Washington, Idaho and Oregon, Latina women in Oregon, etc. Teams will have 40 min each to present and teach their findings at the end of the semester. A detailed write up of the projects will be due during finals week (see syllabus). More details on this project will be provided.

***Grading:***

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Team Presentation	30%
Paper I	15%
Paper II	15%
Book Reviews	25%
Participation	15%

***Course Schedule:***

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***WEEK ONE***            ***WHAT IS ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE?***

Jan 17, 19

Reading:            Thursday: Killing Me Softly (first half)

***WEEK TWO***            ***ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS, RISK ASSESSMENT AND ROLE OF SCIENCE***

Jan 24, 26

Reading:            Tuesday: Killing Me Softly (second half)  
                          Thursday: No Safe Place (first half)

***WEEK THREE***        ***CLASS: LIVING AND WORKING CONDITIONS***

Jan 31, Feb 2

Reading:            Tuesday: No Safe Place (second half)  
                          Thursday: Silicon Valley of Dreams (first half)

***WEEK FOUR***

Feb 7, 9

Reading:            Tuesday: Guest Lecture Aric Mayer  
                          Thursday: Silicon Valley of Dreams (second half)  
**Paper One questions to be handed out end of class Thursday**

***WEEK FIVE GENDERED EXPERIENCES OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS***

Feb 14, 16

Reading:            Tuesday: New Perspectives (first half)  
                          Thursday: New Perspectives (second half)  
**PAPER ONE DUE under Kari's door Thursday end of day**



***WEEK TWELVE***      ***INTERNATIONAL***

April 18, 20

Reading:      Tuesday: TBA. On Reserve  
                    Thursday: **Student Presentations**

***WEEK THIRTEEN***

April 25, 27

Reading:      Tuesday: **Student Presentations**  
                    Thursday: **Student Presentations**

***WEEK FOURTEEN***

May 2, 4

Reading:      Tuesday: **Student Presentations**  
                    Thursday: Environmental Justice: Creating Equality, Reclaiming Democracy

***WEEK FIFTEEN***                      ***COURSE CLOSING***

May 9

Reading:      Tuesday: Environmental Justice: Creating Equality, Reclaiming Democracy  
                    Book Review for this text due last day of class, May 9

Final papers from Team Projects due Friday May 12