

ENVST-UA 480/SOC-UA 970 002  
**Environmental Justice & Inequality**  
Spring 2023; T/Th 9:30-10:45; Silver 403

**Professor:** Colin Jerolmack

**Email:** jerolmack@nyu.edu

**Office hours & location:** Wednesdays 2:00-3:30 and by appt.; 295 Lafayette St., 4<sup>th</sup> Fl.

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**COURSE DESCRIPTION:** The poor, indigenous groups, and people of color--many of whom are clustered in global “mega-cities”—have historically been exposed to a disproportionate share of environmental hazards. In this course, which is an intermediate Environmental Studies [EVS] and Sociology elective, we will trace the origins of the uneven distribution of environmental problems--and environmental goods--across communities. We ask how environmental inequality can be identified and measured, examine how residents of underserved communities around the world have mobilized in the name of environmental justice, and explore tensions between the EJ movement and mainstream environmentalism. We will also explore how different societies, cultures, and historical moments have articulated varied (and sometimes competing) visions of environmental justice. The readings, which include both books and academic journal articles, span the fields of sociology, anthropology, philosophy, history, and politics [note that you are expected to read 80-100 pages per week].

**Required Text** [*available for purchase online—used copies are cheap and easy to find*]:

Kai Erickson: *Everything in its Path: Destruction of Community in the Buffalo Creek Flood*

\*all other readings on Brightspace or available through NYU Library. **PAY**

**ATTENTION TO PAGE NUMBER ASSIGNMENTS IN THE SYLLABUS EACH WEEK. PDFs of scanned books may contain more chapters than assigned for the week**

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:** “The College is a “community of the mind.” Its students, faculty, and staff all share the goal of pursuing truth through free and open inquiry, and we support one another’s endeavors in this regard. As in any community, membership comes with certain rights and responsibilities. Foremost among these is academic integrity. *Presenting writing or data generated by someone else, or by software/Artificial Intelligence, as one’s own is a serious offense* and undermines others who are “doing it on their own”; it makes it difficult or impossible to assess fairly a student’s interest, aptitude, and achievement; and it diminishes the cheater, depriving him or her of an education. Most important, academic dishonesty is a violation of the very principles upon which the academy is founded. Thus, when students enter the College, one of the first things that they are asked to do is to sign a community compact, recognizing these principles of academic integrity. For this reason also, violations of these principles are treated with the utmost seriousness.” <http://guides.nyu.edu/c.php?g=276562&p=1844738>

\***Disability disclosure statement:** Academic accommodations are available to any student with a chronic, psychological, visual, mobility, or learning disability, or who is deaf or hard of hearing. Students are asked to register with the Moses Center at 212-998-4980 or [www.nyu.edu/csd](http://www.nyu.edu/csd).

**Week 1: Introduction/Framing Urban Sanitation as an Environmental Justice Issue**

1/24: No reading assigned

1/26: Engels: *The Condition of the Working Class in England* [pp. 36-45, 106-144]; Dowie: *Losing Ground*; 1-8

**Week 2: Environmental Racism and Civil Rights**

1/31: Bullard: *The Quest for Environmental Justice*; 32-61; Taylor: *Toxic Communities*; 47-68

2/2: Cole & Foster: *From the Ground Up*; 19-21, 54-79; Pellow and Brulle: *Power, Justice and the Environment*; 23-36

**Week 3: Waste, Water, and Urban Marginality**

2/7: Pellow: *Garbage Wars* [67-89]; Sze: *Noxious New York*; 27-48; Chahim, Dean. 2022. "Governing Beyond Capacity." *American Ethnologist*.

2/9: Taylor: *Toxic Communities*; 6-20; Cole & Foster: *From the Ground Up*; 34-53; Dillon, L. 2014. "Race, Waste, and Space: Brownfield Redevelopment and Environmental Justice at the Hunters Point Shipyard." *Antipode* 46(5): 1205–1221.

**Weeks 4 & 5: Ex-Urban Environmental Inequality & the Anti-Toxics Movement**

2/14: Gottlieb: *Forcing the Spring*; 227-251, 275-281, 298-306;

2/16: Cole & Foster: *From the Ground Up*; 22-23; 80-102

Watch "Love Canal: Legacy of Doubt": <https://tinyurl.com/y78mc9m8>

Read biography of Lois Gibbs, watch "profile video":

<http://www.goldmanprize.org/1990/northamerica>

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2/21: Erikson: *Everything in its Path*; 9-48; 79-94; 115-132

2/23: Erikson: *Everything in its Path*; 135-156; 186-244

**Week 6: Measuring and Explaining Environmental Inequality—Core Debates**

2/28: Bean, V., and F. Gupta. 1997. "Coming to the Nuisance or Going to the Barrio? A Longitudinal Analysis of Environmental Justice Claims." *Ecology Law Review* 24: 1-56.

3/2: Pastor Jr., Manuel, Jim Sadd and John Hipp. 2001. "Which Came First? Toxic Facilities, Minority Move-In, and Environmental Justice." *Journal of Urban Affairs* 23(1)

Tsal, S.P., K. M. Cardarelli, and A. E. Fraser. 2004. "Mortality Patterns Among Residents in Louisiana's Industrial Corridor, USA, 1970–1999." *Occupational and Environmental Medicine* 61: 295–304.

**Week 7: Popular Epidemiology and Contested Illnesses**

3/7: Brown, Phil. 1987. "Popular Epidemiology: Community Response to Toxic Waste-Induced Disease in Woburn, Massachusetts." *Science, Technology, and Human Values* 12: 78-85; Corburn: *Street Science: Community Knowledge & Environmental Justice*; 48-77.

3/9: Liboiron: *Pollution is Colonialism* [pp. 1-12; 114-56]; **PROJECT PROPOSAL DUE**

**Week 8: \*\*\*SPRING BREAK; NO CLASS\*\*\***

**Week 9: Site Fights: Explaining Activism & Success, Quiescence & Failure**

**3/21:** Gaventa: *Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley*; 1-32; McAdam and Boudet: *Putting Social Movements in Their Place*; 54-91  
**3/23:** Jerolmack, Colin and Edward Walker. 2018. "Please in My Backyard." *American Journal of Sociology*; Pellow and Brulle: *Power, Justice and the Environment*; 78-90

**Week 10: There's No Such Thing as a Natural Disaster**

**3/28:** Klinenberg, Eric. 1999. "Denaturalizing Disaster: A Social Autopsy of the 1995 Chicago Heat Wave." *Theory and Society* 28(2): 239-295.  
**3/30:** Dyson: *Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster*; ix-xii, 1-33

**Week 11: The Principles and Policies of Environmental Justice**

**4/4:** Shrader-Frechette: *Environmental Justice*; 23-48; Schlosberg: *Defining Environmental Justice*; 3-32  
**4/6:** Bullard: *The Quest for Environmental Justice*; 299-302; Pellow and Brulle: *Power, Justice and the Environment*; 131-170; Demsas, "Community Input is Bad, Actually." [The Atlantic](#); Resnikoff & Hanlon, "When Community Input Goes Wrong." [SSIR online](#).

**Week 12: Enclosure and Dispossession**

**4/11:** Fields: "Land Improvement and Taking Amerindian Land" (from *Enclosure*)  
**4/13:** Cronon: "A World of Fields and Fences;" Moreton-Robinson: *The White Possessive* [selected chapters]

**Weeks 13 & 14: Environmental Privilege, Eco-Imperialism, and Indigenous Resistance**

**4/18:** Taylor: *The Rise of the American Conservation Movement* [32-50]; Guha, Ramachandra. 2000. "The Paradox of Global Environmentalism." *Current History* 99(640): 367-370; Park and Pellow: *The Slums of Aspen* [127-47]  
**4/20:** Nixon: *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*; 1-30; Pellow and Brulle: *Power, Justice and the Environment*; 253-276; "Climate Apartheid." 2019. *The Guardian* [online](#); "Their Islands are Being Eroded. So are Their Human Rights." 2019. *New York Times* [online](#).

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**4/25:** Bosworth: *Pipeline Populism: Grassroots Environmentalism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (selected chapters)  
**4/27:** Powell: *Landscapes of Power: Politics of Energy in the Navajo Nation*; preface & ch. 1; Powell, Dana. 2015. "Toward Transition? Challenging Extractivism and the Politics of the Inevitable on the Navajo Nation." *Pp. 215-224 only*.

**Week 15: Contemporary Issues: Climate Loss and Damage and Reparations**

**5/2:** Robinson, Stacy-ann. 2021. "A Just Alternative to Litigation: Applying Restorative Justice to Climate-Related Loss and Damage." *Third World Quarterly*. Khan, Mizan et al. "Twenty-five Years of Adaptation Finance Through a Climate Justice Lens." 2020. *Climatic Change*. The Economist [online](#): "Should Rich Countries Pay for Climate Damage in Poor Ones?"  
**5/4:** Táíwò: *Reconsidering Reparations* [selected chapters].

## GRADING

10% **Participation:** A successful, lively class depends on everyone doing their best to be involved. Class participation includes, of course, what the student does when they are *in* class. Students are expected to have read the material, reviewed notes from the previous class, and be ready and willing to discuss the readings and contribute to class debates. They are also expected to attend to the comments of other students and the instructor. **Each class will feature two students who are charged with bringing to the class several questions, discussion points, and/or critiques they'd like to raise with their peers .** **Everyone must sign up to do this twice. When it's your turn, please email me detailing your questions/comments by 8:00am the day of class.**

30% **Essays:** Two *two-page (single-spaced, 12 point Times New Roman font, one inch margins)* essays will be assigned [15 points each]. These essays must be turned in one week after the date assigned. Papers may be turned in early but will receive one grade deduction for each day they are late. Each two-page essay will be in response to a question that determines whether the student has critically read the assigned material, and students will also be asked to (briefly) apply concepts from the class to a case study of their choice. Please keep it under two pages, and be sure it's your own ideas and writing.

20% **Project Proposal.** Students must write a proposal for a case study [2 pages, single-spaced] where they identify a community/issue with EJ implications, relate it to concepts and case studies covered in class, and propose a research project to assess the scope of the problem and possible interventions. Students are required to find, read, and cite at least two scholarly research articles or books not read in class that offer conceptual or empirical support for their proposed project. Students will be assessed on their command of the concepts and ability to relate them to the particular case under consideration.

40% **Final Paper.** Due May 9th. Students must write a 5-6 page [single-spaced] research paper that follows the guidelines laid out above for the proposal and expands their proposal based on the research they carried out and comments received from their instructors. Students are also required to include three more research articles or books not read in class that offer conceptual or empirical support for their analysis [for a minimum total of 5 articles/books]. For ease of presentation, cite sources as footnotes rather than in a bibliography. The papers will be evaluated on the extent to which the student successfully followed the guidelines specified above and responded to suggestions and critiques that their instructors provided on their proposal. All writing must be your own.

A list of databases for journal articles, organized by topic [e.g., Environmental Science, Sociology, Economics, Anthropology] is available through NYU's library. Start here: <http://arch.library.nyu.edu/>

- For information on identifying and finding research articles, see: [http://www.lib.unc.edu/house/how\\_do\\_i/](http://www.lib.unc.edu/house/how_do_i/)
- For information on when and how to cite sources, see: <http://library.albany.edu/usered/cite/citing.html>