

FYS 127: Race-ing the Environment Fall 2010

T/TH 1:30-2:45, King 121

Professor Renee Romano
Office: Rice 306
Phone: x6584
Email: rromano@oberlin.edu

Office Hours:
Tuesdays, 11:00-12:15
Thursdays, 3:00-4:30
(and by appointment)



Nature, wilderness, and race seem like basic terms with well-established meanings. But as we will explore together in this course, ideas like nature and race are in fact socially constructed, created by people and societies in different historical moments and subject to change over time. This course brings together two vital areas of study—race and the environment—to ask what we can learn by exploring America’s environmental history through the lens of race. In this course, we will study many different topics related to the relationship between race and the environment in the United States, including how European colonialism changed the American landscape; the construction of the idea of “wilderness” and the founding of National Parks; different racial groups’ cultural beliefs about, and approaches towards, the natural world; whiteness in the mainstream environmental movement; and environmental racism and environmental justice.

As a First Year Seminar, this course is designed to introduce students to some of the most critical skills involved in college-level study, including participating in seminar discussions, critical thinking and reading, analytical writing, and individual and collaborative research skills. To that end, there will be many small assignments of various types. Students are expected to do the readings listed for each before they come to class and to complete all assignments by the due date.

There are also several required meetings outside of the classroom. We will be watching two films in evening sessions. The required screenings are:

October 3: Pocahontas
October 13: Into the Wild

Required Texts

The following books are available at the college bookstore and are on reserve at Mudd:

Melissa Checker, Polluted Promises
William Cronon, Changes in the Land
Kimberly Smith, African American Environmental Thought
Mark David Spence, Dispossessing the Wilderness
Julie Sze, Noxious New York

Readings marked with an asterisk (*) on the syllabus are available on the course blackboard site under the “Course Readings” heading. I highly recommend that you print out the online readings and bring them with you to class.

Assignments

1. Participation, Attendance, Partner Presentation (20%)

Attendance: This is primarily a discussion course and your consistent attendance is required. If you have more than two unexcused absences, your final grade will be affected. Absences will only be excused in cases of illness or personal emergencies. Repeated late arrivals may also affect your grade. Please be present and ready to work at the start of the class.

Discussion: You should come to every class having done the reading and prepared to participate in discussion by speaking, listening attentively to others, encouraging others to comment, arguing respectfully, asking questions, and summing up comments of others. If you are not comfortable speaking in class, please come see me so we can develop strategies to improve your discussion skills. Being able to express your ideas and respond to others is as vital for your success in college as being able to write a good paper, and everyone will be encouraged to hone their discussion skills throughout the semester.

Each student will be responsible for working with a partner to do a short presentation (15-20 minutes) during one class session. These presentations should aim to develop an activity for the class to undertake that will further supplement the readings for that day. The two discussion leaders will be expected to meet with me before the class meeting to talk about the reading and their plans for an activity. Sign ups will take place early in the semester.

2. Paper #1 Initial Draft—Due in-class on September 21

For your first paper, you will choose one article about race from either an academic journal or a popular magazine from before 1940 and write a 5-page critical essay about it. You can find articles through a JSTOR search or other online database, or you might choose to simply go to the library shelves and browse through some old journals and magazines. In your analysis, explore the author’s views, his or her racial thinking, and what the article reveals about the historical moment in which it was written.

3. Paper #1 Revision (20%) —Due by 10:00 am, October 11

4. Paper #2 (10%)—Due in Class on October 19

For this paper, students will be asked to analyze the film, *Into the Wild*—a recent representation of nature and wilderness in popular culture—in light of the readings that we will be doing as a class about the idea of wilderness. There will be an evening viewing of the film on Oct. 13, and the movie will also be available on reserve at Mudd. In this paper of no more than three pages, analyze the presentation of nature and wilderness in this film (in the plot, dialogue, visual framing, music, editing, etc), especially as it relates to issues of race and class.

5. Paper #3 (10%)—Due in class on November 23rd

In this paper, students will be asked to develop their research skills by writing a short paper on environmental issues in your hometown or home county. In your paper, you should provide a demographic sketch of your town/county, information about pollution levels and about current environmental issues and environmental organizing. Students will be asked to do research in governmental databases, on the web, and in newspaper archives. You can find demographic information about your country county (population by race, poverty rate, homeownership, etc.) on quickfacts.census.gov. The website, www.scorecard.org, is a source for information about various types of pollution in your home zip code. More information about specific research sources will be handed out in class. Papers should be no more than three pages.

6. Revision of either paper #2 or #3 (10%)—Due by 4:00 p.m. on December 6th

7. Group Presentation (10%)—To take place during class on Dec. 7 or Dec. 9

The class will be split into four groups early in the semester. Each group will be responsible for preparing a presentation and teaching half of a class session about a particular topic that relates to environmental racism or environmental justice. Possible topics include: transportation issues; food and food policy; Hurricane Katrina or other so-called “natural” disasters; garbage and recycling programs; or energy policy. We will brainstorm other ideas in class as well.

Each group will meet outside of class to research their topic. Groups will be expected to explore what exactly the problem is, how the issue/problem developed historically, what kinds of activism or organizing are going on today in relation to this issue, and what potential solutions to the problem might be.

Groups will then plan a presentation that includes oral presentations, leading of discussion, and an in-class activity. Groups should decide upon one reading for the rest of the class to do in advance of the presentation. Further details about the project and presentation guidelines will be handed out in class.

8. Final Paper (20%)—Due by 4 p.m. on Sunday, December 19th

In a final paper of approximately 8-pages (or an equivalent project), students will be asked to explore a topic of their choosing or one related to their group presentation. Papers might take the form of a case study, a review of a debate related to the group presentation topic, or a creative project. More details will be forthcoming.

Course Policies

Discussion: Talking about race and inequality can be difficult or controversial in the classroom. All of us share a responsibility to make this a safe space for articulating ideas and asking questions. "Safe" is not necessarily the same as comfortable; there may be moments of discomfort in discussion, but students should treat the comments of their classmates with patience and respect.

Classroom Conduct: Please be sure to turn off your cell phones before class begins. Except in cases of sudden emergency, I expect everyone to stay in the classroom for the entire class session. Do not plan on walking out to get a drink or to use the lavatory while class is in session.

Late Policy: Assignments must be submitted on time to receive full credit. If an assignment is due at the beginning of class, it must be turned in at the start of class to count as on time. An assignment that is handed in late will be marked down 1/3 of a grade for every 24 hours it is late (i.e., a B paper would become a B-paper). Assignments submitted more than a week after the original due date cannot receive higher than a C-. Requests for extensions must take place before the assignment is due. I will gladly grant extensions in cases of illness or family emergencies, but I will not give an extension because you have another paper due on the same day, so please plan accordingly.

Incomplete Work: All work must be completed in order to pass this course. You cannot pass the class if you fail to complete any one of the assignments.

Honor Code: Please familiarize yourself with the Oberlin Honor code. This class will follow the policies described online. You should write and sign the honor code on all the written work you hand in for this class. The Honor Code reads: "I affirm that I have adhered to the Honor Code on this assignment." If you have questions about citations, academic honesty, or the acceptability of collaborations, please see me.

Students with Disabilities: If you require any disability-related accommodations in this course, please let me know.

Course Schedule

September 7: Introduction

Part I: Considering Cultural Constructions

September 9: What is Nature?

William Cronon, "In Search of Nature" in Uncommon Ground, 23-56*

Bring in a found object that presents nature in some way

September 14: What is Race?

Audrey Smedley, Race in North America, 1-9, 13-35*

Omi and Winant, Racial Formation in the United States, Introduction and Chapters 4-5, pp. 1-5, 53-91*

September 16: Library Visit (Meet in the lobby of Mudd Library)

September 21: First Paper Due

In Class: Discussion and student presentations

Part II: Race, Culture, and Attitudes towards the Environment

September 23: Race, Culture and Attitudes Towards the Land

William Cronon, Changes in the Land, preface through Chapt. 4, pp. xv-81

September 28: Race, Culture and Attitudes Towards the Land

William Cronon, Changes in the Land, Chapt. 5 to end, pp. 82-186

September 30: African Americans, Latinos, and the Environment

Kimberly Smith, African American Environmental Thought, pp. 1-97

Barbara Deutsch Lynch, "The Garden and the Sea: U.S. Latino Environmental Discourses and Mainstream Environmentalism" *

October 3: Film Night—Disney's Pocahontas (Time and Place to be announced)

October 5: Close to Nature: Racial Constructions and Cultural Stereotypes

Smith, African American Environmental Thought, pp. 98-157

George Gatlin on Indians, Nature, and Civilization, 1844*

Philip Deloria, "Natural Indians and Identities of Modernity" in Playing Indian*

PART III: Race and Wilderness

October 7: The Trouble with Wilderness?

Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness," Uncommon Ground, 69-90*

Roderick Nash, "The Value of Wilderness" in Major Problems in American Environmental History, 395-403*

October 11: Revision of first paper due by 10:00 am

October 12: Creating and Preserving Wilderness: The Case of National Parks

Mark David Spence, Dispossessing the Wilderness (entire)

October 13: Film Night—Into the Wild (Time and Place to be announced)

October 14: Racialized Wilderness

- Mei Mei Evans, "'Nature' and Environmental Justice" in The Environmental Justice Reader, 181-193*
- Evelyn C. White, "Black Women and the Wilderness" in The Stories that Shape Us—Contemporary Women Write about the West, 376-383*
- "Ethnic and Racial Diversity of National Park System Visitors and Non-Visitors Technical Report," 2003*
- Timothy Egan, "Michelle's Next Mission," *New York Times**

October 19: Second Paper Due--Interrogating Contemporary Cultural Representations

PART IV: Environmental Racism and Environmental Justice

October 21: Environmental Racism: What is It and How Should We Understand It?

- "Toxic Wastes and Race," 1987, pp. ix-xvi, 1-27*
- Robert Bullard, "Anatomy of Environmental Racism" in Toxic Struggles, 25-35*
- Charles Mills, "Black Trash," 73-91*
- Lisa Sun-Hee Park and David Pellow, "Racial Formation, Environmental Racism, and the Emergence of Silicon Valley," 403-422*

October 26 and 28: NO CLASS—FALL BREAK

November 2: Environmental Injustices: Questioning the Race Critique

- Anderton, et al., "Studies Used to Prove Charges of Environmental Racism are Flawed" in Environmental Justice: At Issue, 24-37*
- Vicki Been, "Market Forces, Not Racist Practices, May Affect the Siting of Locally Undesirable Land Uses" in Environmental Justice, 38-59 *
- Lynn Blais, "Environmental Racism Reconsidered," *North Carolina Law Review* (November 1996)*

November 4: Environmental Justice: The Beginnings of a Movement

- "Principles of Environmental Justice," 1991*
- Cole and Foster, "A History of the Environmental Justice Movement" in From the Ground Up, 19-33*
- "Environmental Justice: An Interview with Robert Bullard"*
- Dorceta Taylor, "Environmentalism and the Politics of Inclusion" in Confronting Environmental Racism, 53-61*

November 9: Critiquing Mainstream Environmentalism

- "The Soul of Environmentalism"*
- Giovanna Di Chiro, "Nature as Community: The Convergence of Environmental and Social Justice" in Uncommon Ground, 298-320*
- Edwardo Rhodes, "What Has Gone Before: Why Race Was Not on the Original Environmental Agenda," in Environmental Justice in America, 30-42*
- Kim Allen, Vinci Daro, Dorothy Holland, "Becoming an Environmental Justice Activist," in Environmental Justice and Environmentalism, 105-134*

PART V: Case Studies

November 11: A Southern Case Study, Part I

Melissa Checker, Polluted Promises, 1-103

November 16: A Southern Case Study II

Melissa Checker, Polluted Promises, 104-189

November 18: Environmental Justice Issues in Lorain County

Mary Timney, "Environmental Injustices: Examples from Ohio" in Environmental Injustices, Political Struggles, 179-193*

Lorain County Study*

"Breaking Barriers: Food Justice in Lorain County," documentary produced by 2009 FYS 127 students, available on vimeo, <http://vimeo.com/8555777>

"Hungry for Health: A Journey through Cleveland's Food Desert," documentary made by Theresa DeSautels, OC '10, at <http://vimeo.com/13735122>

November 23: Third Paper Due—Environmental Issues in Your Hometown

November 25: NO CLASS—Thanksgiving

November 30: A Northern Case Study, Part I

Julie Sze, Noxious New York, pp. 1-108

December 2: North and Beyond

Julie Sze, Noxious New York, pp. 109-211

David Pellow, "The Global Village Dump: Trashing the Planet: in Resisting Global Toxics, pp. 97-146*

December 7: Group Presentations

December 9: Group Presentations

December 14: Moving Forward, Conclusions and Party

Robin Morris Collin and Robert Collin, "Environmental Reparations," 209-221*

Laura Pulido, "Sustainable Development at Ganados del Valle," 123-139*

Majora Carter, "Greening the Ghetto" talk, posted online at www.ted.com

December 19: Final Paper due by 4:00 p.m.

Full citations for all readings listed on the syllabus are available on the Course Readings section of the class blackboard site.