

**A CALL TO ARTS**



**FOR  
ENVIRONMENTAL  
JUSTICE**

**Environmental Justice in Literature and Culture  
ENR 3900/ENGL 4600  
Spring 2020 | University of Wyoming**

<b>Times/Location</b>	T/TH 8:10-9:25 a.m., Classroom Building 141
<b>Instructor</b>	Dr. Matthew Henry, Scholar in Residence Haub School of Environment and Natural Resources Ross Hall 402   mhenry12@uwyo.edu   (307) 766-5080
<b>Office Hours</b>	Tuesdays and Thursdays 10 a.m.-11:30 a.m. and by appointment
<b>Required Texts</b>	In keeping with our theme of social justice, I have made most of our readings available for free on our WyoCourse site. However, the following texts <b>are required</b> and can be purchased at the University bookstore or online. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Linda Hogan, <i>Solar Storms</i> (1997)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Ann Pancake, <i>Strange as this Weather Has Been</i> (2007)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Helena María Viramontes, <i>Under the Feet of Jesus</i> (1996)</a></li> </ul>
<b>Course Description<sup>1</sup></b>	<p>Environmental justice can be defined as “the right of all people to share equally in the benefits bestowed by a healthy environment.”<sup>2</sup> Yet it has been well documented that the impacts of environmental degradation are distributed unevenly along the lines of race, class, gender, and ethnicity. This grim reality is worsened by a rapidly changing climate. While we are collectively experiencing a time of unprecedented transition, those rendered vulnerable by structural inequalities are likely to experience the worst impacts of this transition.</p> <p>In this class, we will explore the intersection of environmental and social justice issues through an analysis of literary fiction, drama, poetry, drama, visual art, music, and other media. We will study how environmental issues are deeply connected with issues of race, class, gender, ethnicity, and the legacies of slavery and colonialism. We will also consider the generative potential of the arts for imagining a “Just Transition,” a concept long championed by environmental justice and labor organizations to describe an alternative economic paradigm predicated on environmental sustainability and economic and social equity.</p> <p>The working thesis for this class is that the arts and humanities are critical to this process because 1) they serve a documentary function, providing insight into complex historical factors driving environmental injustice and 2) they function as a form of “scenario-imagining,” providing underrepresented the communities a platform to plan for a Just Transition. As part of a semester-long project, you will have the opportunity to imagine, in your own words, what a Just Transition might look like.</p>
<b>Prerequisites</b>	Satisfactory completion of COM 1 requirements; ENR 2000 highly recommended.
<b>Grading</b>	Grading will be on a straight scale, with no plus/minus grading. A: 100-90%, B: 89.9-80%, C: 79.9-70%, D: 69.9-60%, F: < 60%

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<sup>1</sup> Cover image credit goes to the Unitarian Universalist Young Adults for Climate Justice (UUYACJ) organization, a faith-based climate justice organization. For more information on their tree banners and work using the arts to raise awareness about climate justice issues, visit <https://www.uuyacj.org/news--updates/this-is-a-call-to-arts-for-environmental-justice>.

<sup>2</sup> Adamson, Joni et al, “Introduction: Environmental Justice Politics, Poetics, and Pedagogy,” *The Environmental Justice Reader: Politics, Poetics, Pedagogy*, Ed. Joni Adamson, Mei Mei Evans, Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2002: 4.

## ASSIGNMENTS & PROJECTS (1000 pts.)

### Engagement (150 pts.)

I expect you to attend class having read assigned materials and ready to engage in class discussions and activities in a meaningful way. Part of this grade will be dedicated to assessing your daily contributions in class, and part will come from unannounced reading quizzes worth 10 pts. each.

### Discussion Lead (150 pts.)

To democratize the classroom and encourage you to take a more active role in the learning process, you will lead class discussion, in groups of three, for 30 minutes one time during the semester. How discussion unfolds will be up to you, but will generally involve crafting multi-tiered discussion questions, handouts, and group activities. Guidelines will be provided.

### Life-Writing Journal (200 pts.)

Scholar-activist Giovanna DiChiro describes “life-writing” as a genre “embodied in personal struggles and life choices” that endow a sense of “*active* hope.” Within the context of environmental and social justice, she argues, life-writing can be a powerful way to see ourselves as “social and environmental change agents” rather than passive observers, deniers, or cynics.<sup>3</sup> As you work toward your final Just Transition Project, you’ll keep a life-writing journal recording your reactions to class readings and discussions and your thoughts on how you might become a social and environmental change agent through daily practices, civic engagement, and your professional trajectory. Guidelines will be provided, but you will also be encouraged reflect on your own life experiences and personal beliefs. Journals will be due for my review four times throughout the semester.

### Mid-Term Essay (200 pts.)

For your mid-term, you will write a research-based analytical essay (5-7 pages) focused on one or more of the texts we’ve read so far. Guidelines will be provided.

### Just Transition Project (300 pts.)

For your final project, you will engage in a form of scholarship or speculative storytelling to outline your vision for a Just Transition based on our class discussions and outside research. Keeping up with your Life-Writing Journals will help you build toward this final project.

In keeping with our course’s central thesis about the importance of the interdisciplinary arts and humanities in redressing past injustices and imagining a Just Transition, you will have three options for this project:

- A research-based analytical essay (i.e., academic writing)
- A work of creative nonfiction (memoir, journalistic, other)
- A creative project (fiction, visual, or audio)

Guidelines will be provided.

### Extra Credit (??? pts.)

Throughout the semester, there may be opportunities to participate in activities or attend events on campus directly related to our course. I will announce extra credit opportunities and guidelines as they become available.

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<sup>3</sup> See Di Chiro, “Seaweed, ‘Soul’-ar Panels, and Other Entanglements,” in *Humanities for the Environment: Integrating Knowledge, Forging New Constellations of Practice*,” edited by Joni Adamson and Michael Davis,

## COURSE CALENDAR

### Week 1 | Welcome & Origins

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- 28 Jan**      **Introduction: What is environmental justice?** | To open the semester, we will get to know each other and talk about what, exactly, environmental justice *is* – and why we’ll be studying it through the lens of literary fiction, poetry, drama, film, music, and other cultural representations. We’ll cover the arc of U.S. environmental thought to understand the origins of environmental justice.
- Icebreaker and Group Syllabus Activities
  - 17 Principles of Environmental Justice (**In-Class Handout**)
  - Overview of the History of Environmental Thought in the United States
- 30 Jan**      **EJ and the Environmental Humanities** | We’ll discuss the evolution of EJ thought and why interdisciplinarity is critical to ensuring socially just approaches to environmental decision-making.
- Giovanna Di Chiro, “Environmental Justice” (**C**)
  - Rob Nixon, from the introduction to *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (**C**)
  - Julie Sze, from “The Literature of Environmental Justice” (**C**)

### Week 2 | Origins & Indigenous Issues

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- 04 Feb**      **Just Transition** | We’ll consider the generative potential of the humanities for redressing past injustices and imagining livable, equitable futures. We will focus on a Just Transition, a concept that will inform our discussions and assignments for the remainder of the semester.
- Climate Justice Alliance, “Just Transition” (**C**)
  - Joni Adamson, “Campaign for a Just Transition” (**C**)
  - Giovanna Di Chiro, “Seaweed, ‘Soul’-ar Panels, and Other Entanglements” (**C**)
  - **DUE: Life-Writing Journals on Canvas by class time**
- 06 Feb**      **Settler Colonialism + Collective Continuance** | We’ll discuss Hogan’s novel, settler colonialism, and Kyle Whyte’s notion of collective continuance, Indigenous peoples’ “adaptive capacity to maintain its members’ cultural integrity, health, economic vitality, and political order.”
- Linda Hogan, *Solar Storms* pp. 11-59
  - Kyle Whyte, “Settler Colonialism, Ecology, and Environmental Justice” (**C**)

### Week 3 | Indigenous Issues

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- 11 Feb**      **Ecofeminism** | Hogan’s novel features an intergenerational cast of strong female characters. Today we’ll talk about how an ecofeminist reading of the novel can help us understand the gendered dimensions of water use and land development perpetuate environmental injustices.
- *Solar Storms* pp. 60-166
  - Gaard, “Women, Water, Energy: An Ecofeminist Approach” (**C**)

**13 Feb**      **Colonial Déjà vu?** | We'll explore how Hogan's novel portrays climate change as a continuation of a centuries-old cycle of colonial violence enacted against Indigenous peoples.

- *Solar Storms* pp. 167-236
- Kyle Whyte, from "Is It Colonial Déjà vu? Indigenous Peoples and Climate Injustice" (C)
- View clips from Joel Heath's "People of a Feather" (In Class)

#### Week 4 | Indigenous Issues

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**18 Feb**      **Traditions of Resistance** | Scholars have noted that the Indigenous resistance movement against large hydroelectric projects in *Solar Storms* represents a fictionalization of events that took place in Quebec in the 1970s-80s. Today, we'll consider how the novel also serves as an important conduit through which to view the 2016-17 #NoDAPL movement in Standing Rock, North Dakota.

- *Solar Storms* pp. 237-312
- Nick Estes, "Introduction" from *Our History is the Future* (C)
- Prolific the Rapper & A Tribe Called Red, "Black Snakes" (In Class)

**20 Feb**      **Traditions of Resistance** | We will continue discussing traditions of resistance and revisit the notion of collective continuance discussed earlier in the unit.

- *Solar Storms* pp. 312-end
- Randall Amster, "Blockadia" (C)
- "We are the Seventh Generation: A Conversation with Winona LaDuke" (C)
- **DUE: Life-Writing Journals on Canvas by class time**

#### Week 5 | Food Justice

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**25 Feb**      **What is Food Justice?** | Today we will discuss food justice and food sovereignty movements in the United States and how they intersect with a range of other social and environmental issues.

- Amanda Strong, *Biidabaan (The Dawn Comes)* (C)
- Alkon and Agyeman, introduction to *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class, and Sustainability* (C)
- Joni Adamson, from "Medicine Food" (C)

**27 Feb**      **Gratitude & Growing Justice** | Today we'll explore the role of community gardens in the food justice movement. Ross Gay, a poet and board member of the Bloomington Community Orchard, poem suggests the radical possibility of gratitude through gardening as a form of resistance. We'll also discuss the Growing Food and Justice for All Initiative.

- Ross Gay, "Catalog of Unabashed Gratitude" (C)
- Bagoo, "Review of *Catalogue of Unabashed Gratitude* by Ross Gay" (C)
- "Unabashed Gratitude and Structures of Care, with Poet Gardener Ross Gay" (In Class)
- Alfonso Morales, "Growing Food and Justice" (C)

## Week 6 | Latinx Environmentalisms

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**03 Mar**      **Why Latinx Environmentalisms?** | In conjunction with our discussion of Viramontes' novel, we'll consider Latinx environmental "ways of knowing" that emerged in response to historical marginalization of non-white perspectives in mainstream environmental thought.

- Helena María Viramontes, *Under the Feet of Jesus* pp. 3-90
- Wald, Vazquez, Ybarra, and Ray, "Introduction" from *Latinx Environmentalisms* (C)

**05 Mar**      **Goodlife Writing** | Priscilla Ybarra defines the Latino/a practice of "goodlife writing" as writing that "embraces the values of simplicity, sustenance, dignity, and respect." As we finish Viramontes' novel, we'll discuss how goodlife writing reflects Chicano/a environmental values that long predate mainstream American environmentalism and offer a path to envisioning a Just Transition.

- *Jesus* pp. 93-130
- Priscilla Ybarra, "Defining Goodlife Writing" (C)

## Week 7 | Latinx Environmentalisms

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**10 Mar**      **Goodlife Writing + ¡Sí, se puede!** | We will continue our discussion of goodlife writing and explore discuss the rise of the United Farmworkers and the California Grape Strike. We will begin watching "Dolores," a documentary about Dolores Huerta who founded the first farmworkers unions with Cesar Chavez but whose trailblazing work has largely gone unrecognized.

- *Jesus* pp. 133-176
- Priscilla Ybarra, from "Active Subjectivity in Migrant Farmworker Fiction" (C)
- First half of "Dolores," documentary about Dolores Huerta (In Class)

**12 Mar**      **¡Sí, se puede!** | Today we will finish "Dolores." No readings for today – work on your mid-term research essay, which is due on March 13.

- Finish "Dolores," documentary about Dolores Huerta (In Class)
- **DUE: Mid-Term Research Essays – Friday, March 13 @ 11:59 PM on Canvas**

## Week 8 | NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK

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## Week 9 | Environmental Racism

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**24 Mar**      **What is Environmental Racism?** | We'll examine the concept of environmental racism through José Casas' play "Flint," an ethnographic, documentary-style play drawing on interviews with Flint residents.

- José Casas, first half of "Flint" (C)
- NPR, "Lead-Laced Water in Flint: A Step-By-Step Look at the Makings of a Crisis" (C)
- Robert Bullard, "The Threat of Environmental Racism" (C)
- Omi and Winant, "Racial Formation Theory" (C)



**26 Mar**      **Privilege** | We'll continue our discussion of environmental racism by discussing the second half of "Flint" and the role of white privilege in urban development.

- José Casas, second half of "Flint" (C)
- Laura Pulido, "Rethinking Environmental Racism: White Privilege and Urban Development in Southern California" (C)

## Week 10 | Environmental Racism

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**31 Mar**      **Katrina and Magical Realism** | Today we'll watch *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, which some view as response to Hurricane Katrina and the intersection of racial inequality and climate vulnerability. How can the genre of magical realism help marginalized communities imagine alternative futures?

- Cedric Johnson, "The Neoliberal Deluge" (C)
- Ben Holgate, from *Climate and Crises: Magical Realism and Environmental Discourse* (C)
- *Beasts of the Southern Wild* first half (In Class)

**02 Apr**      **America's First Climate Refugees** | *Beasts of the Southern Wild* takes place on Isle de Jean Charles off the coast of Louisiana, home to the Indigenous Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw peoples, considered America's first climate refugees because of coastal subsidence due to sea level rise. We'll examine the historical factors driving coastal erosion and the politics of climate change in Louisiana.

- Coral Davenport, "Climate Refugees" (C)
- Breanna Burke, "*Beasts of the Southern Wild* and Indigenous Communities in the Age of the Sixth Extinction" (C)
- *Beasts of the Southern Wild* second half (In Class)
- **DUE: Life-Writing Journals on Canvas by class time**

## Week 11 | Extraction & Energy

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**07 Apr**      **Cultures of Extraction** | In coal communities, extraction is central to cultural identity and has historically been equated with patriotism and service to the nation. Along with our analysis of Pancake's novel, we'll discuss how this phenomenon has left communities vulnerable to economic exploitation and environmental degradation.

- Ann Pancake, *Strange as this Weather Has Been* pp. 1-85
- Rebecca Scott, from introduction to *Removing Mountains* (C)

**09 Apr**      **Gender and Anti-Coal Activism** | Coal mining has historically been a male-dominated vocation tied to traditional conceptions of masculinity. This has a direct bearing on anti-coal EJ activism in Appalachia, which tends to be led by women. In connection with Pancake's novel, we'll explore why.

- Pancake, *Strange* pp. 86-136
- Bell and Braun, "Coal, Identity, and Gendering of Environmental Justice Activism" (C)

## Week 12 | Extraction & Energy

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**14 Apr**      **Sacrifice Zones** | What constitutes the greater good? Valerie Kuletz explored this question in *The Tainted Desert*, which defines “geographies of sacrifice” as regions viewed as expendable in pursuit of an exclusionary notion of the greater good. We’ll discuss how this relates to Pancake’s novel.

- Pancake, *Strange* pp. 137-243
- Valerie Kuletz, introduction from *The Tainted Desert* (C)

**16 Apr**      **Politics and Free Speech** | In communities economically dependent on the global energy economy, speaking out against industry maltreatment of workers and the environment can have negative social consequences. In conjunction with Pancake’s depiction of anti-coal activism, we’ll explore a case of artistic censorship that took place in Wyoming several years ago.

- Pancake, *Strange* pp. 242-292
- Lockwood, introduction to *Behind the Carbon Curtain* (C)

## Week 13 | Extraction & Energy

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**21 Apr**      **Post-Extraction Futures** | As wrap up our discussion of Pancake’s novel, we’ll explore how communities facing energy transitions and the environmental legacies of extraction can use the arts to shape alternative futures. We’ll focus on environmental reclamation art in Pennsylvania and Ohio.

- Pancake, *Strange* pp. 293-end
- Matthew Henry, “Extractive Fictions and Postextraction Futurisms” (C)

**23 Apr**      **Fracking Narratives** | Today we’ll discuss the representational difficulties of hydraulic fracturing, a complex process that often occurs out of sight and is supported by deceptive public relations campaigns from the oil and gas industry.

- Julia Kasdorf, “Introduction” and selected poems from *Shale Play* (C)
- Stephen Rubin, photographs from *Shale Play* (C)
- View parts of Josh Fox’s *Gasland* (In Class)
- **DUE: Life-Writing Journals on Canvas by class time**

## Week 14 | Global South

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**28 Apr**      **Unimagined Communities** | The implementation of large dam technology has long been central to efforts to “modernize” in the global south, often with disastrous results for communities located downstream. Today, we’ll turn to activist writing to discuss the Sardar Sarovar Dam controversy and the environmental impacts of American economic imperialism in postcolonial India.

- Arundhati Roy, “The Greater Common Good” (C)
- Rob Nixon, “Unimagined Communities” from *Slow Violence* (C)



**30 Apr**

**Submerged Perspectives** | With a focus on regions of South America impacted by multi-national resource development initiatives, we will explore what Macarena Gómez-Barris calls “submerged perspectives,” or forms of artwork, performance, and ritual that resist domination and recuperate alternative ways of knowing and being with more-than-human nature.

- Macarena Gómez-Barris, “Introduction” & “A Fish-Eye Episteme” from *The Extractive Zone* (C)
- Carolina Caycedo, “Yuma: Land of Friends” (In Class)

### **Week 15 | Wrap-Up**

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**05 May** In-Class Conference – Just Transition Projects

**07 May** In-Class Conference – Just Transition Projects

### **Week 16 | FINALS WEEK**

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**12 May** **DUE: Just Transition Projects on Tuesday, 12 May by 10:00 a.m.**