

University of California, Santa Cruz

Sociology 125: Society & Nature Summer Session I 2007

Lecturer: Brian J. Gareau

LOCATION: SOCIAL SCIENCES 2, ROOM 179
TUESDAYS AND THURSDAYS 1:30-5:00 PM

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Environmental sociologist Michael Bell once stated that “social and environmental interactions are best understood as a kind of ecological dialogue, an unfinalizable conversation in which one interchange leads to another.” Sociologists like Bell have tried to devise the best way to think about society/nature interlinkages for a long time. A chief concern of many environmental sociologists is the continued survival of both society and nature. Such a task is not easy. Indeed, Bell went on to note that, for most students, courses that deal with society and nature are “depressing,” and that he too often feels “disheartened and discouraged.” The condition of the environment today can often lead to discouragement. However, the topic must not be ignored, and society/nature relations must be improved. The changes that are necessary to make society/nature relations long-lasting will not be easy: many sociologists link the severity of environmental degradation to a particular way in which modern society is organized today, capitalism.

This course will accomplish several goals. First, it will review the state of the environment as it exists today, both in the U.S. and globally from a critical theoretical point of view. Second, the course will review theories that are critical of capitalism as a social formation, explain how it functions, and describe the environmental implications. The second goal will involve reviewing cases studies, both local and global. Third, the course will discuss the link between these theories and the contemporary objective of environmental governance, which has entered a “neoliberal” moment. Finally, the course will discuss how critical sociologists are beginning to think about society-nature relationships in a nuanced way, as “hybrids.”

The broad goal of the course is to provide students with a critical theoretical understanding of the relationship between society and nature (or as a hybrid, as “socationature”) in capitalist societies, and provide ideas about how to make our future more “sustainable.”

REQUIREMENTS

THREE BOOKS:

Michael M. Bell. 1998. An Invitation to Environmental Sociology (Sociology for a New Century Series). Thousand Oakes, CA: Pine Forge Press.

John Bellamy Foster. 2002. Ecology Against Capitalism. NY: Monthly Review Press.

Michael Goldman. 2005. Imperial Nature: The World Bank and Struggles for Social Justice in the Age of Globalization. New Haven: Yale University Press.

E-RES: (Password: SOC125)

Readings from: Bunker 1984; Buttel 2000; Buttel 2004; Castree 2002; Cronon 1995; Gareau 2005; Gould, Pellow and Schnaiberg 2004; McCarthy 2004; McCarthy and Prudham 2004; O'Connor 1998; Polanyi 2001; Roberts and Thanos 2003; Slater 1995; Swyngedouw 1999; Swyngedouw 2004; Szasz 1994

RESEARCH PROJECT:

Students will select a research topic related to social relations and environmental impact from a list provided by the instructor. The students will devise a research project, and submit a 5-7 page research paper due at **the end of the third week of Summer Session**. If the class stays at or below 20 students, then all students will **present during the last week of class**, which will be reflected in the students' evaluation. This is an excellent opportunity for building a resume! (Wikipedia is not allowed in this upper-division course)

EXAMINATIONS:

There will be a mid-term in-class exam covering the first half of the course, and a final in-class exam covering the second half of the course.

ATTENDANCE/PARTICIPATION:

Sociology 125 is a seminar-format class that combines lecture with group discussion. Students' final grade will depend, in part, on the quality of their participation in class discussion. Obviously, adequate participation requires regular attendance. You must be respectful of other's viewpoints, experiences, orientation, etc. when discussing the concepts in this class. Debate is inevitable and useful, but be respectful. If you are not, you will be asked to withdraw from the course.

Each of you will be expected to keep abreast of the reading, **prepare and make a presentation on materials from at least one of the scheduled sections**. We have a good deal of material to cover, so the success of the seminar depends on **the active participation of everyone**. During the first meeting we shall organize ourselves and generate a schedule of presentations.

You must come prepared with a one-page (at least) write-up on the day's reading every class. Make notes, comments, questions, critiques on the readings. Readings should be studied before the class for which they are assigned.

Organization of the class by week

WEEK ONE

TUESDAY: Introductions
Course overview: Syllabus, readings, assignments, expectations. Assign seminar leaders.

THURSDAY: Introducing Key Themes and Theories:

-The state of the environment in the U.S. and globally.
The successes and failures of nation-state and international attempts to alleviate environmental degradation.

-Society, Nature, Enlightenment, History
Marxism, liberalism, nation-state, civil society, industry, production, capitalism, contradictions

Read: Heilbroner and Thurow (E-Res)
Smith, Marx, Keynes
Bell pp- Part I
Wallerstein (E-Res)

Seminar Leaders: _____

WEEK TWO

TUESDAY: Commodifying Conditions of Production
Land, Labor, Capital
Consumption, Environment, and Human Identity
Modifying Human Biology

Read: Polanyi (E-Res)
Bell- Part II
O'Connor (E-Res)- Is Sustainable Capitalism Possible?

Seminar Leaders: _____

THURSDAY: Local Case Studies:
Ecological History of the Monterey Bay
The Nature of Construction and Construction of Nature at Felton Creek:
1860-1990

Read: O'Connor (E-Res)- Case studies with names listed above

Seminar Leaders: _____

WEEK THREE

TUESDAY: Marxist Critiques of Capitalism

Read: Foster (the entire book)

Seminar Leaders: _____

THURSDAY: RESEARCH PAPERS DUE!!! MAKE SURE TO READ AS WELL!!!

Global Case Studies:
NAFTA and the Environment
Persistent Inequality

Read: Timmons and Roberts (E-Res)
McCarthy (E-Res)
Arrighi et al. (E-Res)

Seminar Leaders: _____

WEEK FOUR

TUESDAY: International Economic and Environmental Governance
“Green Neoliberalism”
International Monetary Fund
World Trade Organization
World Bank
Multinational Corporations

Read: Goldman (1st half of the book)

Seminar Leaders: _____

THURSDAY: World Bank Continued

Read Goldman (2nd half of the book)

Seminar Leaders: _____

WEEK FIVE

TUESDAY: New Ways of Conceiving Society & Nature
The Greenness of Marxism
Hybrids
Actor-Networks Considered, and Return to an Informed Marxism
Socionature
Making these theoretical discussions practical!

Read: Castree (E-Res)
Swyngedouw (E-Res)
Rudy and Gareau (E-Res)
Gareau (E-Res)

Seminar Leaders: _____

THURSDAY: Final Essays Due
Class Presentations (10-15 minutes each)
Class Summary/Conclusions

E-Res and Further Readings:

- Bunker, Stephen G. 1984. Modes of Extraction, Unequal Exchange, and the Progressive Underdevelopment of an Extreme Periphery: the Brazilian Amazon, 1600-1980. *American Journal of Sociology* 89 (5):1017-64.**
- Buttel, Frederick H. 2000. Ecological Modernization as Social Theory. *Geoforum* 31 (1):57-65.**
- Buttel, Frederick H. 2004. The Treadmill of Production: An Appreciation, Assessment, and Agenda for Research. *Organization and Environment* 17 (3):323-36.**
- Castree, Noel. 2002. False Antitheses? Marxism, Nature and Actor-Networks. *Antipode* 34 (1):111-46.**
- Cronon, William. 1995. The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature. In William Cronon (ed.), *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.**
- Gareau, Brian J. 2005. We Have Never Been 'Human': Agential Nature, ANT, and Marxist Political Ecology. *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism* 16 (4):128-40.**
- Gould, Kenneth Alan, David Pellow and Allan Schnaiberg. 2004. Interrogating the Treadmill of Production: Everything You Wanted to Know About the Treadmill but Were Afraid to Ask. *Organization and Environment* 17 (3):296-316.**

- McCarthy, James. 2004. Privatizing Conditions of Production: Trade Agreements and Environmental Governance. *Geoforum* 35 (3):269-393.
- McCarthy, James and Scott Prudham. 2004. Neoliberal Nature and the Nature of Neoliberalism. *Geoforum* 35:275-83.
- O'Connor, James. 1998. *Natural Causes: Essays in Ecological Marxism*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Polanyi, Karl. 2001. *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Roberts, J. Timmons and Nikki Demetria Thanos. 2003. *Trouble in Paradise: Globalization and Environmental Crises in Latin America*. New York: Routledge.
- Slater, Candace. 1995. Amazonia as Edenic Narrative. In William Cronon (ed.), *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Swyngedouw, Erik. 1999. Modernity and Hybridity: Nature, Regeneracionismo, and the Production of the Spanish Waterscape, 1890-1930. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 89 (3):443-65.
- Swyngedouw, Erik. 2004. Scaled Geographies: Nature, Place and the Politics of Scale. In E. Sheppard and R. McMaster (eds.), *Scale and Geographic Inquiry: Nature, Society and Method*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Szasz, Andrew. 1994. *EcoPopulism: Toxic Waste and the Movement for Environmental Justice*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.