

USP 589 Urban Environmental Justice: History, Theory, and Practice

Spring 2025 Credits 4

Tuesdays 10am - 12:40pm Urban Center Building I Room 220

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Office Hours: TBD

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According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), as of February 5, 2025, "'Environmental justice' (EJ) means the just treatment and meaningful involvement of all people, regardless of income, race, color, national origin, Tribal affiliation, or disability, in agency decision-making and other Federal activities that affect human health and the environment so that people:

- are fully protected from disproportionate and adverse human health and environmental effects (including risks) and hazards, including those related to climate change, the cumulative impacts of environmental and other burdens, and the legacy of racism or other structural or systemic barriers; and
- have equitable access to a healthy, sustainable, and resilient environment in which to live, play, work, learn, grow, worship, and engage in cultural and subsistence practices."¹

Yet, when environmental justice is evoked, it is often in response to cases, processes, and practices of environmental injustice. Dr. Robert Bullard, acknowledged as the father of EJ, along with activists and scholars have documented, studied, and made visible how the uneven distribution of environmental harms and the uneven development of environmental goods have impacted the most vulnerable, non-white populations and low-income residents. Moreover, they have shown that these populations are disproportionately exposed to environmental hazards while also prevented from accessing healthy environments and benefiting from environmental amenities.

Course Description:

This course combines lecture and seminar styles to introduce students to various ways of understanding urban "nature" at the intersection of environmental justice and planning practices. Students will contrast dominant ecological frameworks with those used in the social sciences (e.g., urban political ecology, actor-network theory,

¹ US EPA. "Environmental Justice." United States Environmental Protection Agency, November 3, 2024. <https://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice>.

ecological gentrification), with attention to the social, political, and economic contexts in which they arose, and implications of each for research, planning, management policy, and politics.

Lectures will guide the first half of the class, with the second half dedicated to student-driven discussions. We will discuss urban environmental history as it connects to environmental thought, urban ecology, and social processes with an emphasis on race, class, and gender. After discussing urban environmental history, we will explore how power and inequity have been and continue to be embedded within planning practices through methodological and theoretical approaches and social science frameworks such as urban political ecology, actor-network theory, and ecological gentrification. We will then focus on historical and current urban environmental initiatives, plans, and reports to identify how (in)equity and (in)justice manifest in these documents and their impacts on people and place.

Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes

The course objectives are to:

- Introduce students to a variety of epistemological and ontological interpretations of urban “nature” used by researchers, i.e., different ways of “knowing” and the different ecologies that result
- Differentiate constructivist frameworks used in the social sciences from positivist frameworks used in urban ecology and other qualitative and quantitative approaches
- Evaluate the implications of using these different approaches: for research, for planning, for management and policy, and for politics.

Students will be able to:

- Describe various approaches to understanding urban natures, including urban ecology, urban political ecology, actor-network theory, and others, and understand the differences and complementarities between these different frameworks
- Relate different frameworks to each other and to the historical and political economic contexts in which they arise
- Explain what is gained and what is lost by using a particular approach
- Identify and explain how a particular theory and/or approach is expressed in urban environmental initiatives, plans, and reports
- Identify and explain how power, (in)equity, and/or (in)justice is expressed in urban environmental initiatives, plans, and reports

Course Structure & Assignments

This is a graduate level course designed with the first half of the class dedicated to lecture to guide students through course materials and help students work through theoretical frameworks and approaches. Our goals each week are to critically engage with the readings, to situate them conceptually in relation to the other readings, and to think about their theoretical and methodological implications and impacts on urban environmental planning via seminar arraignment to promote discussion and the exchange of ideas and insights. Grades are based on the following:

(15%) Participation & Attendance

You are responsible for reading the assigned materials before class and coming ready to discuss. We'll be building each week on the previous readings, so it's vital to come to class and to keep up with the readings. Everyone must join in the discussion. To help move the discussion forward, you should come to class each week with one or two discussion questions. You will need to post these to the week's Discussion Questions Forum on Canvas **by 8pm Sunday**, so others have a chance to review them before we meet.

(25%) Discussion Facilitation

Everyone will be required to lead the seminar discussion session at least once along with a partner or as a group. You should be prepared to walk us through the key concepts/arguments/theories from the week's readings and connect them to the **case study, initiative, plan, or report**, for that week. You must only cover a focused section not its entirety, so skim the **case study, initiative, plan, or report** and choose wisely. **Inform the class which section you will be covering via email by 6pm Friday before your discussion facilitation.** Look over the discussion questions posted to Canvas by your peers as you organize your questions and discussion topics. Please prepare an outline/diagram/visual aid to steward us through this process. This can be a one-page handout, or you can use the blackboard/whiteboard or a PowerPoint slide.

(35%) Reading Responses

You are responsible for writing a short reading response (~350 to 500 words) for 7 of our class meetings. You don't have to prepare a response the week that you lead discussion. Your response should not simply summarize the key arguments from the readings; rather, it should synthesize the key insights you take from the ensemble of readings and discuss how they can be applied to the **case study, initiative, plan, or report for that week. Responses can also include** raising new questions and/or responding to some of the questions raised by others (see above). Please submit your responses via **Canvas by Monday 8pm.**

(25%) Paper

In addition to your weekly reading responses, you are required to write a final paper of 3,000 to 4,000 words, or 6 to 8 single-spaced pages (12 pt. Times New Roman, 1" margins). This should be a well-structured essay that applies some of the theory we have covered in the course to an urban **case study, initiative, plan, or report** of your choice. Please submit as a Word or PDF document. You will have 5-8 minutes to present your paper to the class on our last day and receive feedback.

Grading

My general rubric for graduate-level assignments is as follows:

- A+ or A Demonstrates original thought and synthesis of ideas, sophisticated, cogent analysis, and is clearly written or presented. Excellent work = Plus
- A- or B+ Presents above average analysis with appropriate evidence to support the ideas and is clearly written or presented. Very good work = Check plus
- B or B- Shows a basic level of understanding, with analysis limited to the most obvious arguments. Writing is competent. Adequate work = Check.
- C+ or below Misunderstands or misrepresents the material or is so poorly written presented as to obscure the analysis. Inadequate work. = Minus

P/NP option

P/NP grades have no impact on your grade point average (GPA), but P/NP courses on your transcript could possibly be viewed unfavorably by committees evaluating you for scholarships, graduate school, etc. Before choosing the P/NP option, review the university's policy and discuss with your academic advisor whether it is the right choice for you. You sign up for the P/NP grading option on Banweb; the instructor cannot see what you chose until they submit your final grade for the course. Make sure to check the deadline for changing your grading <https://www.pdx.edu/regISTRATION/academic-calendar>. Contact the registrar with any questions about the policy and registration.

Academic Honesty

Students are expected to be ethical not only in the classroom, but also out of the classroom. It is in all students' interest to avoid committing acts of academic dishonesty and to discourage others from committing such acts. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to the following examples, engages in any form of academic deceit; refers to materials or sources or uses devices not authorized by the instructor for use during any quiz or assignment; provides inappropriate aid to another person in connection with any quiz or assignment; engages in Plagiarism. Plagiarism is the act of claiming someone's work as your own through copying it without giving the creator of the work credit. Plagiarism can also include using another person's theories, ideas, or phrases without proper attribution. The simplest way to avoid plagiarizing is to always cite the sources from which you gather information or develop arguments – just cite anything you use from someone else (it actually makes your work stronger!). Plagiarism is a serious issue and is a violation of the [PSU Student ConductCode](#). University policy requires instructors to report all instances of plagiarism and penalize the perpetrator(s) according to guidelines set. Please see me if you ever have any questions about how to cite your work.

Submitting work online

For assignments that require uploading files to Canvas, it is the student's responsibility to verify that:

- (1) all files are submitted in Canvas prior to the deadline and
- (2) all submitted files are those that the student intends to be graded for the assignment

Submitting the "wrong" file by accident is not acceptable grounds for a deadline extension. Assignment grades will be based on the file submitted prior to the posted deadline. Files submitted in a format that cannot be accessed by the instructor cannot be graded and will therefore receive a 0. Acceptable file formats are MS Office formats (e.g. Word, Excel, PowerPoint) or PDF files. Individual assignment instructions may contain a required file format.

Technology Access

Proficiency in the use of Canvas, PSU email, and other computer tools such as ZOOM or part of google suite is required for this course. This course requires consistent access to functioning computer equipment and Internet access throughout the length of the course. Reliance on a cellular connection may not provide reliable and fast access to online learning resources. Here are some broadband programs that are free or low-cost: <https://www.hightspeedinternet.com/resources/are-there-government-programs-to-help-me-get-internet-service>.

Student Resources

As PSU students, you have access to a number of excellent resources to assist you with writing and research. The PSU Writing Center offers in-person appointment and on-line tools to help you craft your papers (<https://www.pdx.edu/writing-center/>). The PSU library system also offers a number of resources to help you research more effectively and efficiently (<https://library.pdx.edu/services/students/>). I highly recommend you utilize both of these sources given that this course relies heavily on your writing and research for evaluation.

Emergency Funds: <https://www.pdx.edu/dean-student-life/emergency-funds>

Access and inclusion for Students with disabilities

PSU values diversity and inclusion; My goal is to create a learning environment that is accessible, equitable, inclusive, and welcoming. I am committed to fostering mutual respect and full participation for all students. If any aspects of instruction or course design result in barriers to your inclusion or learning, please notify me. Additionally, the Disability Resource Center (DRC) provides reasonable accommodations for students who encounter barriers in the learning environment. The DRC works with students who have physical, learning, cognitive, mental health, sensory, and other disabilities.

If you have, or think you may have, a disability that may affect your work in this class and feel you need accommodations, contact the Disability Resource Center to schedule an appointment and initiate a conversation about reasonable accommodations.

If you already have accommodations, please contact me to make sure that I have received your faculty notification letter from the DRC so we can discuss your accommodations.

The DRC is located in 116 Smith Memorial Student Union, Suite 116. You can also contact the DRC at 503-725-4150 or, drc@pdx.edu. Visit the DRC online at <https://www.pdx.edu/disability-resource-center/>.

Sexual Harassment and Safe Campus

Portland State is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of prohibited discrimination and sexual harassment (sexual assault, domestic and dating violence, and gender or sex-based harassment and stalking). If you have experienced any form of gender or sex-based discrimination or sexual harassment, know that help and support are available. Information about PSU's support services on campus, including confidential services and reporting options, can be found on PSU's Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response website at: <http://www.pdx.edu/sexual-assault/get-help> or you may call a confidential IPV Advocate at 503-725-5672 or schedule Online at <https://psuwrc.youcanbook.me>. You may report any incident of discrimination or discriminatory harassment, including sexual harassment, to:

- PSU's Title IX Coordinator: Julie Caron by calling 503-725-4410, via email at titleixcoordinator@pdx.edu or in person at Richard and Maureen Neuberger Center (RMNC), 1600 SW 4th Ave, Suite 830
- Deputy Title IX Coordinator: Yesenia Gutierrez by calling 503-725-4413, via email at yesenia.gutierrez.gdi@pdx.edu or in person at RMNC, 1600 SW 4th Ave, Suite 830

Please be aware that all PSU faculty members and instructors are required to report information of an incident that may constitute prohibited discrimination, including sexual harassment and sexual violence. This means that if you tell me about a situation of sexual harassment or sexual violence that may have violated university policy or student code of conduct, I have to share the information with my supervisor, the University's Title IX Coordinator or the Office of the Dean of Student Life. However, the Title IX Coordinators will keep the information confidential and refer you to a confidential advocate. For more information about Title IX please complete the required student module *Creating a Safe Campus*.

	Course Materials: USP 589 Urban Environmental Justice
Week 1 4/1/25	Introduction to Environmental Justice
	<p><u>Readings</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bullard, Robert D. "From Civil Rights to Black Lives Matter." In <i>Lessons in Environmental Justice: From Civil Rights to Black Lives Matter and Idle No More</i>, edited by Michael Mascarenhas, 2–18. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2020. • Alston, Dana. "The Summit: Transforming a Movement." <i>Race, Poverty and the Environment</i> 2, no. 3/4 (April 1, 2010): 14–17. • The Principles of Environmental Justice (EJ)." Delegates to the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, October 24, 1991. <p>Course Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreements for Multicultural Interaction in the (virtual) Classroom, Adapted from the East Bay Meditation Center Agreements • Getting and Giving Feedback on Academic Work [An excerpt from "How to Be a Good Graduate Student" by Marie des Jardins (March 1994)] • How to succeed in a graduate seminar
Week 2 4/8/25	Environmental (In)Justice
	<p><u>Case Study/Initiative/Plan/Report</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States: A National Report on the Racial and Socio-Economic Characteristics of Communities with Hazardous Waste Sites." Commission for Racial Justice United Church of Christ, 1987. <p><u>Readings</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pulido, L. (2000). Rethinking Environmental Racism: White Privilege and Urban Development in Southern California. <i>Annals of the Association of American Geographers</i>, 90(1), 12–40. https://doi.org/10.1111/0004-5608.00182 • Morello-Frosch, Rachel, Miriam Zuk, Michael Jerrett, Bhavna Shamasunder, and Amy D. Kyle. "Understanding The Cumulative Impacts Of Inequalities In Environmental Health: Implications For Policy." <i>Health Affairs</i> 30, no. 5 (2011): 879–87. • Jampel, Catherine. "Intersections of Disability Justice, Racial Justice and Environmental Justice." <i>Environmental Sociology</i> 4, no. 1 (January 2, 2018): 122–35. https://doi.org/10.1080/23251042.2018.1424497. • Markley, Scott. "Federal 'Redlining' Maps: A Critical Reappraisal." <i>Urban Studies</i> 61, no. 2 (2024): 195–213. https://doi.org/10.1177/00420980231182336. <p><u>Interactive Tools</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mapping Inequality Redlining in New Deal America https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=5/39.779/-94.58

Week 3 4/15/25	Urban Environmental History
	<p><u>Case Study/Initiative/Plan/Report</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Taylor, Dorceta E. "Race, Class, Gender, and American Environmentalism." Portland, OR: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Research Station, 2002. <p><u>Readings</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rosen, Christine Meisner, and Joel Arthur Tarr. "The Importance of an Urban Perspective in Environmental History." <i>Journal of Urban History</i> 20, no. 3 (1994): 299–310. Whiston Spirm, Anne. "Constructing Nature: The Legacy of Fredrick Law Olmsted." In <i>Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature</i>, edited by William Cronon, 91–113. W. W. Norton & Company, 1996. Jones, Karen R. "'The Lungs of the City': Green Space, Public Health and Bodily Metaphor in the Landscape of Urban Park History." <i>Environment and History</i> 24, no. 1 (February 1, 2018): 39–58. <p><u>Additional readings (not required, but related):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parsons, Kermit Carlyle, and David Schuyler. "From Garden City to Green City: The Legacy of Ebenezer Howard." Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002. [Intro & Chapter 1]
Week 4 4/22/25	Just Sustainability & EJ Planning
	<p><u>Case Study/Initiative/Plan/Report</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Llyod Ecodistrict Road Map 2012 <p><u>Readings</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agyeman, Julian. <i>Sustainable Communities and the Challenge of Environmental Justice</i>. New York: New York University Press, 2005. Chapter 3 Just Sustainability in Theory: 79-106 & 4 Just Sustainability in Practice: 107-132. Schmitt, Peter, and Sabine Weck. "Towards Just Planning: On the Relationship between Procedural and Distributive Justice in Local Development Actions." <i>Planning Practice & Research</i> 39, no. 5 (September 2, 2024): 753–771. https://doi.org/10.1080/02697459.2024.2359221. Brinkley, Catherine, and Jenny Wagner. "Who Is Planning for Environmental Justice—and How?" <i>Journal of the American Planning Association</i> 90, no. 1 (January 2, 2024): 63–76. https://doi.org/10.1080/01944363.2022.2118155. Kato-Huerta, J., & Geneletti, D. (2023). A distributive environmental justice index to support green space planning in cities. <i>Landscape and Urban Planning</i>, 229, 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landurbplan.2022.104592. <p><u>Additional readings (not required, but related):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ribot, J. C., & Peluso, N. L. (2003). A Theory of Access*. <i>Rural Sociology</i>, 68(2), 153–181. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1549-0831.2003.tb00133.x

Week 5 4/29/25	Urban Political Ecology
	<p><u>Case Study/Initiative/Plan/Report</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Parks and Nature: Racial Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Action Plan 2018-2023” Metro <p><u>Readings</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Robbins, Paul. “Political versus Apolitical Ecologies.” In <i>Political Ecology: A Critical Introduction</i>, Second Edition., 11–24. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012. Harrill, Rich. “Political Ecology and Planning Theory.” <i>Journal of Planning Education and Research</i> 19, no. 1 (1999): 67–75. Svarstad, Hanne, and Tor A. Benjaminsen. “Reading Radical Environmental Justice through a Political Ecology Lens.” <i>Geoforum</i> 108 (January 1, 2020): 1–11. Mollett, Sharlene, and Caroline Faria. “Messing with Gender in Feminist Political Ecology.” <i>Geoforum</i>, Risky natures, natures of risk, 45 (March 1, 2013): 116–25. <p><u>Additional readings (not required, but related):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Heynen, Nik. “Urban Political Ecology II: The Abolitionist Century.” <i>Progress in Human Geography</i> 40, no. 6 (2016): 839–45. https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132515617394.
Week 6 5/6/25	Actor Networks
	<p><u>Case Study/Initiative/Plan/Report</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Building a Better 82nd Ave, November 2024” <p><u>Readings</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Holifield, Ryan. “Actor-Network Theory as a Critical Approach to Environmental Justice: A Case against Synthesis with Urban Political Ecology.” <i>Antipode</i> 41, no. 4 (2009): 637–58. Blok, Anders. “Urban Green Assemblages: An ANT View on Sustainable City Building Projects.” <i>Science & Technology Studies</i> 26, no. 1 (January 1, 2013): 5–24. Fernandez, Mariela, Brandon Harris, and Jeff Rose. “Greensplaining Environmental Justice: A Narrative of Race, Ethnicity, and Justice in Urban Greenspace Development.” <i>Journal of Race, Ethnicity and the City</i> 2, no. 2 (July 3, 2021): 210–31. https://doi.org/10.1080/26884674.2021.1921634. <p><u>Additional readings (not required, but related):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Murdoch, Jonathan. “Inhuman/Nonhuman/Human: Actor-Network Theory and the Prospects for a Nondualistic and Symmetrical Perspective on Nature and Society.” <i>Environment and Planning D: Society and Space</i> 15, no. 6 (1997): 731–56.
Week 7 5/13/25	Neoliberal Natures & Green Gentrification
	<p><u>Case Study/Initiative/Plan/Report</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>West Oakland Specific Plan Final Plan June 2014</i> (pp. 1–530). (2014). City of Oakland Department of Planning and Building. https://www.oaklandca.gov/resources/read-the-final-west-oakland-specific-plan

	<p><u>Readings</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Castree, Noel. "Neoliberalism and the Biophysical Environment 1: What 'Neoliberalism' Is, and What Difference Nature Makes to It: Neoliberalism and the Biophysical Environment 1." <i>Geography Compass</i> 4, no. 12 (2010): 1725–33. • Dooling, Sarah. "Ecological Gentrification: A Research Agenda Exploring Justice in the City." <i>International Journal of Urban and Regional Research</i> 33, no. 3 (2009): 621–39. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2427.2009.00860.x. • Checker, Melissa. "Wiped Out by the 'Greenwave': Environmental Gentrification and the Paradoxical Politics of Urban Sustainability." <i>City & Society</i> 23, no. 2 (2011): 210–29. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-744X.2011.01063.x. • Gould, Kenneth, and Tammy Lewis. "Conceptualizing Green Gentrification." In <i>Green Gentrification</i>, 23–41. Routledge, 2016. <p><u>Additional readings (not required, but related):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bakker, Karen. "The Limits of 'Neoliberal Natures': Debating Green Neoliberalism." <i>Progress in Human Geography</i> 34, no. 6 (2010): 715–35. • Quastel, Noah. "Political Ecologies of Gentrification." <i>Urban Geography</i> 30, no. 7 (2009): 694–725. • Gould, K. A., & Lewis, T. L. (2018). From Green Gentrification to Resilience Gentrification: An Example from Brooklyn. <i>City & Community</i>, 17(1), 12–15. https://doi.org/10.1111/cico.12283 <p><u>Interactive Tools</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ParkServe Mapping Tool https://parkserve.tpl.org/mapping/
Week 8 5/20/25	Ecologies of Power & Control
	<p><u>Case Study/Initiative/Plan/Report</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Report of the Park Board Portland Oregon 1903: With the Report of Messrs. Olmsted Bros. Landscape Architects, Outlining a System of Parkways, Boulevards and Parks for the City of Portland." Portland, Oregon Park Board, 1903. <p><u>Readings</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taylor, Dorceta E. "Central Park as a Model for Social Control: Urban Parks, Social Class and Leisure Behavior in Nineteenth-Century America." <i>Journal of Leisure Research</i> 31, no. 4 (1999): 420–77. https://doi.org/10.1080/00222216.1999.11949875. • Loughran, Kevin. "Urban Parks and Urban Problems: An Historical Perspective on Green Space Development as a Cultural Fix." <i>Urban Studies</i> 57, no. 11 (2020): 2321–38. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098018763555. • Weizman, Eyal. "Settlements: Optical Urbanism." In <i>Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation</i>, 111–37. Verso Books, 2012.

Week 9 5/27/25	Decolonization
	<p><u>Case Study/Initiative/Plan/Report</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Señákw https://senakw.com/ <p><u>Readings</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cantzler, J. M., & Huynh, M. (2016). Native American Environmental Justice as Decolonization. <i>American Behavioral Scientist</i>, 60(2), 203–223. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764215607578 • Anguelovski, I., Brand, A. L., Ranganathan, M., & Hyra, D. (2022). Decolonizing the Green City: From Environmental Privilege to Emancipatory Green Justice. <i>Environmental Justice</i>, 15(1), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1089/env.2021.0014 • Simpson, M., & Bagelman, J. (2019). Decolonizing Urban Political Ecologies: The Production of Nature in Settler Colonial Cities. In <i>Social Justice and the City</i>. Routledge. • Barry, J., & Thompson-Fawcett, M. (2020). Decolonizing the Boundaries between the 'Planner' and the 'Planned': Implications of Indigenous Property Development. <i>Planning Theory & Practice</i>, 21(3), 410–425. https://doi.org/10.1080/14649357.2020.1775874
Week 10 6/3/25	Presentations
	Share in of reports for the final paper!
	Finals Week!!! Final Projects Due on 6/10/2025, by 11:59 pm