

Topics in Environmental History: Race & (Global Environmental) Justice

HI2400 C22

Professor William San Martín, Salisbury Labs 008

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Course Overview

Welcome everyone to Topics in Environmental History: Race & (Global Environmental) Justice

I'm Prof. William San Martín. I'm a historian and scholar of science and technology studies passionate about global environmental issues at the interaction of knowledge, policy, and inequalities.

This is the third time I'll be teaching this course, and I'm very excited.

How will this class work?

To reduce risk while on campus, **I decided to move this class to a fully remote format for the first two weeks of the term.** We can re-assess conditions on campus after this,

and hopefully return to fully in-person. Please follow this link to join this class while in remote-only format <https://wpi.zoom.us/j/93408817142> (Links to an external site.)

What to do before our first day of class?

There are no readings assigned for our first day. However, make sure you read our overview module and important information about expectations and grades. Ask questions if you have them. Also, make sure you introduce yourself in our [class introduction](#).

Reading assignments?

All readings will be posted on this Canvas site, so no textbooks required, and no need to buy any books. I'll be posting both required readings and assignments in the next few days.

My availability

I'll hold office hours on **Mondays after class (1-2pm) or by appointment**. If you want to meet during office hours, **let me know in advance if you'd prefer to meet online or in-person**. If online, please use this [link \(Links to an external site.\)](#) to join. I am also available for socially distancing outdoor meetings on Campus by appointment. I'm a big fan of walking meetings so we can also do that if the weather allows.

Welcome again and reach out if you have any questions!

Excited to meet you all,

Prof. San Martín

Course Description & Expectations



Landfill, Nicaragua

Photo by [Hermes Rivera \(Links to an external site.\)](#) on [Unsplash \(Links to an external site.\)](#)

Course Description:

Environmental change will catalyze social conflicts across the globe over the course of the next century. This course examines the history of race and social inequality in modern environmental conflicts. It asks how history can inform current debates on socio-ecological change and environmental justice globally. Using a comparative approach, we will interrogate the ways racial inequality—and its links with class, gender, and other dimensions of social inequity—has been at the center of the history of global environmental conflict. In doing so, we will position the history of environmental conflict within a long history of democratization and social (in)justice. We will pay particular attention to 1) rethinking the divide between the so-called “developed” and “developing” world; 2) the interrelations between local, national, and global processes of change; and 3) the place of social organization and social justice in current debates about sustainability and environmental change.

Teaching Methodology:

- This course is hands-on and application-oriented. By its design, you will have the opportunity to explore, clarify, and strengthen your analysis and problem-solving skills. Please be aware that it is expected that you will experience a certain level of ambiguity and perhaps even a feeling of being overwhelmed at times.
- You will be reading experts in their fields and materials published in peer-reviewed journals and academic publishers. That means the assigned readings might often be difficult to understand and might require re-reading, taking notes, working with peers, or asking for assistance.
- We will explore historical and present-day problems that will be unclear and uncharted. You will be expected to deal with the ambiguity and have the courage to explore different ideas without knowing the answers.
- This course will be presented through a combination of reading materials, structured group discussions and activities, individual assignments, and group presentations/projects.
- You will need to work in groups so you must make yourself available to your group members outside of the scheduled classroom time. To be successful in this course, you must use effective time management and project planning tools.

Expectations & Policies:

- **Critical thinking is central to facing our socio-environmental crisis and finding new ways of being and doing:** Students are expected to think critically, communicate their thoughts, and actively participate in a collaborative learning community. Our only way to think "outside the box" and develop new solutions is to look at the evidence and our assumptions with a critical eye. That means engaging with options different from ours and finding common ground between our divergent realities and the principles we want to follow collectively.
- **Attendance and participation are mandatory:** All students are expected to read/watch the assigned materials, which will form the basis for course discussions and assignments. Life happens; if you can't attend a session, be responsible and proactive, reach out and find ways to avoid missing important information/content.
- **Deadlines are sometimes flexible:** I want you to take this class and its assignments seriously. I expect you to plan accordingly and save the time to engage with the assigned materials and prepare the assignments meaningfully. If you anticipate that you won't be able to provide the time/mental effort that

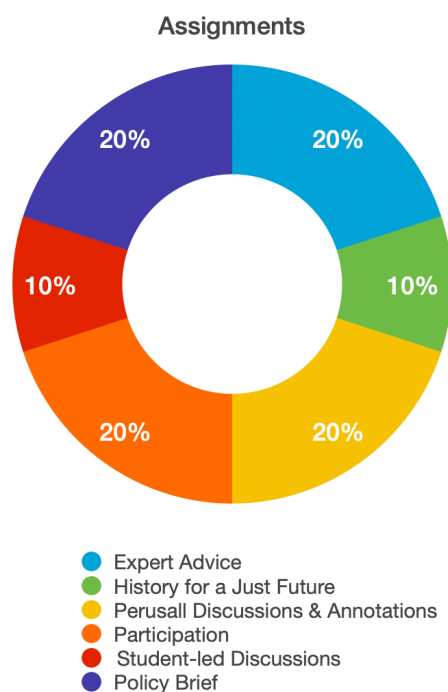
an assignment requires, reach out to me as soon as you can to check if an extension is possible. Sometimes an extension will affect the following assignment so that an extension won't be possible. Sometimes an extension is completely fine.

- **Questions are a prerequisite to learning:** You will learn from experts and established scholars. This is a challenging class, and therefore, it is expected that you might feel disoriented. You might feel confused about the arguments or where this course is going. Reach out before it's too late, ask questions in class, or reach out to me after class. I want to make sure you understand where we are going and why.

Grades & Assignments

Grading Summary

ASSIGNMENTS	
Expert Advice	20%
History for a Just Future	10%
Perusall Discussions & Annotations	20%
Participation	20%
Student-led Discussions	10%
Policy Brief	20%
TOTAL	100%



Perusall Annotations & Discussions

In this course, we will use Perusall to access, read, and annotate all assigned materials (readings, videos, etc.) for each class session. Students **have to launch each** Perusall assignment from the link in the weekly modules. We will go over this on a live demonstration on our first day of class.

If you need more assistance, reach out to me, or access the Perusall help page for students at:

[https://support.perusall.com/hc/en-us/articles/360033995074-Getting-started \(Links to an external site.\)](https://support.perusall.com/hc/en-us/articles/360033995074-Getting-started-Links-to-an-external-site.)

We are using Perusall this term to change the solitary act of reading into a collaborative and thought-provoking exercise.

Here are some guides to help you annotate texts and videos:

- Identify key ideas, assumptions, gaps in knowledge, and conclusions
- Trace the development of ideas/arguments throughout the source
- Expand on ideas and provide additional data and examples
- Connect ideas, assumptions, etc. to other information (knowledge from other readings, discussions, materials)
- Clarify passages (terms, concepts, etc.) for yourself and others
- Explain or reword difficult to read text or concepts
- Ask questions that can build the conversation and deepen learning
- Share answers, perspectives, and external knowledge in threads
- Annotate text, images, equations, and videos

Keys to high engagement with the sources:

- Begin reading/viewing the sources several days before the class session
- Break the reading/viewing into several times – this allows you to answer questions and pose new insights based on what others are writing
- Distribute your thoughtful comments and questions throughout the source
- Read/view the entire source
- Answer questions
- Upvote thoughtful questions and helpful answers

Perusall provides a score based on the above metrics. That should give you an idea of how you are engaging with the materials and how to improve. This is only a tool to improve reading and analysis skills and to facilitate collaborative learning. This score will not be part of your final grade. However, active engagement with the assigned materials, meaningful analysis throughout the materials, and engaged discussion with your peers will be considered for your Perusall Annotations & Discussions grade.

Student-led Discussions

Throughout the term, student teams will be in charge of leading our class discussion (30 minutes). Check on People for "Student-led Discussions" Teams to find out what team number you are, and look in our weekly modules (some of them still in progress) to learn what assigned material your team will lead.

Teams should:

- Get in touch and organize their session in advance.
- Read and discuss the assigned material.
- Find links and relations with previous materials/class discussions and other materials assigned for that day.
- Integrate discussions and annotations from their peers on Perusall (team members must also annotate and discuss the assigned material on Perusall).

Guidelines for Student-led Discussions

- Discussions should include a combination of a very short presentation/summary (we all read the materials), and, more importantly, active dialogue with the class. The main goal is to advance in our understanding of the arguments and implications of the assigned material in relation to the goals of this class.
- Discussion should build on the main points from the assigned material and actively integrate previous materials and analysis from Perusall discussions.
- The discussion should problematize the findings in the readings (find the underlying arguments and question them in a meaningful way) and advance on prior knowledge.
- Groups should include short complementary written or audiovisual materials for in situ analysis in their segment. You might need to do additional research, so plan accordingly.
- Teams need to submit the attached self-assessment

rubric Download attached self-assessment rubric within a week after their session ([submit here](#)). In this rubric, you will assess (as a team) what areas were well executed and what areas needed additional work. Based on this rubric, you will provide a suggested grade. The instructor will consider your self-assessment and the recommended grade, and either approve it as the official grade for this assignment or give a different one with an additional explanation if needed.

- Revise the rubric as a team as you prepare for your session.

Participation

Attendance and participation in this class are mandatory. In-class discussions and analyses of assigned materials will be the core of our sessions and, therefore, a central component of your learning process. In-class participation includes asking questions,

making connections with previous or complementary materials and generally contributing to advancing our discussions in a constructive and collegial way.

I understand not everyone feels comfortable or wants to speak in public. If you are interested in developing these skills and practicing some tips to improve how you actively participate in academic/professional discussions (all critical skills for future graduate programs or in team management settings in future job opportunities), reach out to me. I was a timid student in college, and I'd be happy to share experiences and maybe offer some tips. If you feel comfortable talking in public, make sure you help those who feel less comfortable by leaving room for them to speak or meaningfully engaging others' thoughts and ideas.

Since I do want you to feel comfortable and try different ways to participate in our in-class discussions, you will be able to pick how you would like to earn your participation grade.

You will be able to pick among the following options:

- *In-class participation* (50%) + 30 minutes discussion with Prof. San Martín about a recommended material in this class (50%).*

For this discussion, you will have to make an appointment a week in advance and come prepared to lead a conversation with me about any of the recommended materials in this class or others that you suggest, and I pre-approve.

- *In-class participation* (50%) + analysis of an in-class discussion (50%).*

For one of our sessions, take notes of the discussion and write a report of the main themes/arguments/positions and lessons that you take. Make sure you provide a good summary and make creative connections with previous discussions/materials, including the main lessons from the session. The report should have around 800-1500 words.

- *In-class participation* (50%) + letter for future students (50%).*

In the last week of class, write a letter for future students explaining the main lessons from this course. Provide details about the key assigned materials and their importance to understand the main arguments of this class. Provide tips and tricks to navigate the course and my teaching/grading style.

- *In-class participation* (50%) + email to an author you read in this class (50%).*

Write an email to an author you read/watched as part of this class. You can cc me in the email or submit a digital copy. In the email, thank them for their work and explain how their work helped you understand a problem/issue by first time or in a different way.

Make sure you demonstrate a good understanding of the piece of work you read/watched and that you are specific on how their research can help you in your professional or personal development. Remember to be respectful and be prepared for a kind response or no response at all. If you need tips on what to say or the right tone, reach out to me.

** Includes in-class participation, board discussions, and submissions of in-class activities*

Final Project: Policy Brief

The Policy Brief is our final assignment for this class. It's meant to provide you with a flexible platform where you can 1) deepen some of the themes/arguments we discussed in this class, 2) integrate readings and materials discussed in this class, 3) implement key concepts, perspectives, and methods in environmental history research discussed thought the term, and 3) develop a narrow research project that links a specific topic with the broader history of environmental inequalities and injustice.

In these, you will be expected to apply many of the skills developed in the previous assignments as well as ideas, concepts, and methods discussed in this class.

This project is an individual assignment, and you have the freedom to work on any theme discussed in this class or any other of your interest pre-approved by me.

What is a Policy Brief?

A policy brief is a concise synthesis of a particular issue. It provides evidence, a clear argument, and recommendations. It is aimed at government policymakers, decision-makers, and others who are interested in formulating or influencing decision-making or policy. Policy briefs can take different formats.

For more details about how to write a policy brief and its formats please check the information [here \(Links to an external site.\)](#) [\(Links to an external site.\)](#) and the examples posted on this (I'll add examples from previous classes) module on Canvas.

What theme should I pick?

You are picking the main theme and focus of your policy brief, there is no assigned prompt. You chose the area/topic/problem you would like to focus on and address a particular prompt/question within it. That means you also decide who would be your target audience. Suggestion: pick a theme that would allow you to use several of the assigned readings for this class and one that you are very excited to continue learning. Being happy with your topic is a requirement.

There are different formats, which one should I follow?

As you can see from the examples above, policy briefs vary on extension and format.

For this assignment, there is no word limit or pre-established format. Since you would be the expert on that particular topic, it is your decision what structure works better for you and the question(s) you want to answer. But remember, a policy brief follows a different format from a regular history essay or paper. 1) it looks different: visual organization, figures, maps, diagrams are key (you need to make sure the document is attractive to read and well organized -long text sections are not recommended); 2) it reads differently: a policy brief is succinct, the logic flow of ideas should be clear to the unfamiliar reader, and there is no room for personal interpretations (the link between evidence and claims needs to be clear and solid).

Of course, I'm available to help you brainstorm or make decisions.

What sources should I use?

Regarding sources and materials, it is a requirement that you integrate at least 10 sources. These can be a combination of readings and materials from this class, additional peer-reviewed articles or books, or newspaper articles (historical or present). Your topic will define what kind of materials you must need to integrate, but I would recommend that at least four of those readings should be from our assigned materials. The Perusall annotations and group discussions should help you to frame your ideas and decide what sources might help you with your Policy Brief.

I understand some methods of research will be unavailable during social-distancing measures are in place. But there are plenty of resources online. Also, consider that WPI has access to many international historical newspapers where you can search by keywords or specific dates. Ask me or our librarians if you need help.

What is the goal of my policy brief?

The most important thing is the coherence between the (historical) evidence, analysis, and recommendations that you provide. You want your policy brief to effectively provide an evidence-based argument(s) and convey specific advice about a particular topic. In other words, you need to convince your policymaker or community member to 1) continue reading after the title 2) trust that your argument is based on enough evidence, and 3) implement your advice. Easy, right?!

Policy briefs require more work researching, thinking, and structuring before starting the writing process than traditional papers. Plan accordingly. Giving your draft to somebody else to read always helps, that's why we are having an open feedback house for your abstracts and a formal peer-reviewing session. And remember to take advantage of the Writing Center. They are working online and happy to help.

As always, reach out if you have any questions. Enjoy the brainstorming process and have fun learning about something that you're excited about!

Resources & Support

[Need Accommodations? Course Adaptations or Accommodations](#)

I fully support the use of accommodations.

If you have not already done so, students who believe that they may need accommodations in this course are encouraged to contact the Office of Accessibility Services (OAS) as soon as possible to ensure that such accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion. The OAS is located in Daniels Hall. Their phone number is 508.831.4908 and email is accessibilityservices@wpi.edu. Furthermore, please reach out to me to allow me to advocate with you and implement accommodations.

[Need Help with your Research? Research and Instructional Support](#)

This class requires students to find information sources for research papers and projects. Appropriate sources include scholarly and peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, and well-respected news magazines and newspapers.

Please check the following instructional videos on research tools available via our library.

- WPI Library Search Box: <https://youtu.be/mqsqDeCOBN8> (Links to an external site.)
- Locating Relevant Databases at WPI: <https://youtu.be/WGe9Qa9H86c> (Links to an external site.)
- Searching a Database and Retrieving Full-Text Articles at WPI: <https://youtu.be/aBW5OdTy94Y> (Links to an external site.)
- Google Scholar: [Google Scholar](#) (Links to an external site.)
- Evaluating Sources for Credibility: <https://youtu.be/oeGMT30xnP4> (Links to an external site.)
- You can always reach out to our WPI's Research and Instruction Librarians throughout the term at any time

Need Help with your Writing?

The Writing Center offers one-on-one consultations to help you improve as a writer. Writing Center tutors will read your written work, give you feedback about your document's strengths and weaknesses, and help you chart a path forward as you revise. For this term, all consultations will take place via online connection and document sharing instead of a face to face, but you'll still get real-time feedback through conversation with a peer tutor. Consultations are free and open to all WPI students for all classes and projects, and tutors will happily work with you at any stage of the writing process (early brainstorming, revising a draft, polishing sentences in a final draft). To learn more about their online tutoring and how to schedule a one-hour appointment, go to the Writing Center homepage: wpi.edu/+writing

Schedule

Week 1. Environmental Conflict & (In)Justice: Key Concepts and Current Agendas (Remote)

Session 1 (1/12) Introduction

- David Schlosberg - Defining environmental justice in the Australian context

Session 2 (1/13) Key Concepts & Questions

- Environmental (in)justice (Schlosberg)
- Critical climate justice (Sultana)
- More-than-human solidarity and multispecies justice in the climate crisis (Tschakert)
- In-class Activity -Key Concepts, Arguments, & Questions

Recommended

- U.S. National Environmental Justice Advisory Council

- U.S. National Environmental Justice Advisory Council Links to an external site.
- "Pollution is Segregated" Says the Father of Environmental Justice
- Interview - Dr. Farhana Sultana
- Why Indigenous Environmental Justice Matters

Week 2. Placing Justice in a (longer) History of Inequalities I (Remote)

Session 3 (1/20) Student-led Discussion (Teams 1-3 -Follow order as below)

- Inequality and Economic Growth (Stiglitz)
- Labor Environmentalism in Colombia and Latin America (Chomsky and Striffler)
- Environmental Justice 2017 Conference - Keynote Conversation 1: 'Looking Back' - Full video

Week 3. Placing Justice in a (longer) History of Inequalities II (Hopefully in-person)

Session 4 (1/24) Understanding Justice in the History of (power) Disparities

- History for a Just Future

Session 5 (1/27) Building new research agendas

- Providing Expert Advice -Towards a Just Energy Transition for the Sucre Region, Bolivia, 2051

Week 4. Chemicals & Toxicity

Session 6 (1/31) Metrics, Politics, & Bodies (Teams 4-6 -Follow order as below)

- The Politics of Measurement and Action (Pine and Liboiron)
- Love Canal. Hazardous Waste and the Politics of Fear (Layzer)
- Chemical Infrastructures of the St. Clair River (Murphy)

Session 7 (2/3) Understanding Chemicals, Risk, and Toxicity in the 21st Century

Recommended

- Endocrine Disruptors Action Group (EDAction) -Web
- The Lawyer Who Became DuPont's Worst Nightmare (New York Times)
- Dark Waters (Trailer)

Week 5. Water & Sanitation

Session 8 (2/7) Markets, Knowledge, & Policy (Teams 7-9 -Follow order as below)

- Bringing Water Markets Down to Earth: The Political Economy of Water Rights in Chile, 1976-95 (Bauer)
- Towards Gender Equality through Sanitation (Burt, Nelson & Ray)

- Indigenous Knowledge and the Desertification Debate: Problematising Expert Knowledge in North Africa (Davis)

Session 9 (2/10) Building a Framework for Water Justice

Recommended

- LeeAnne Walters, 2018 Goldman Environmental Prize, United States
- Virtual water trade
- Water footprint calculator

Week 6. Food & Agriculture

Session 10 (2/14) Food & the legacies of the Global Cold War

- Transformations of the Earth. Toward an Agroecological Perspective in History (Worster)
- Miracles of Modernization. The Green Revolution and the Apotheosis of Technology (Cullather)
- A Modern Agrarian Future: The Life and Work of Agroecologist Fernando Funes Monzote (Cuba Platform)

Session 11 (2/17) Farm to table; table to the planet

Recommended

- The struggle for maize campesinos, workers, and transgenic corn in the Mexican countryside (Fitting)
- The Death of Ramón González The Modern Agricultural Dilemma (Wright)
- The Paradox of US Pesticide Policy during the Age of Ecology (Kinkela)

Week 7. Nature & Human Rights

Session 12 (1/21) The rise of the rights of nature

- Rights of Nature: Institutions, Law, and Policy for Sustainable Development (Kauffman)

Week 8. Policy Briefs Week

Session 13 (2/28)

Session 14 (3/3)