

ENVS 607: GRADUATE SEMINAR IN POLITICAL ECOLOGY

Fall 2007

TuTh 10:00-11:50, 475 McKenzie

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Political ecology examines the politics—in the broadest sense of the word—of the environment. Political ecology examines the historical role of economic systems, science, language and discourse, ideology, gender, property systems, and the everyday politics and culture of the community and the household in shaping human relationships with nature. While most political ecology literature has traditionally focused on Third World countries, this year's seminar compares traditional Third World political ecology with the political ecology of industrialized societies, in particular the United States. We begin by examining deforestation in equatorial Africa and environmental degradation in Nigeria's oil-producing Niger Delta region, and other less developed areas. We then consider how processes of commodification of nature play out in parts of the United States with comparable histories of resource extraction, including the timber-producing Pacific Northwest. We will extend the analytical tools of political ecology to topics including the globalized production of land use policy in an industrialized society, and to the petroleum-based culture and political ecology of the suburban American lawn. Are the underlying political, economic, and social forces that shape deforestation in equatorial Africa different from the timber economy of the Pacific Northwest? Is the petroleum-soaked landscape of the Niger Delta linked to the petrochemical-soaked lawns of suburban America? How, and in what ways?

The course is open only to graduate students. Graduate students who took the undergraduate 450/550 version of this course may re-enroll for credit (most of the readings are new in 607).

Course requirements: We will read one book per week. Graduates will take turns leading discussions on assigned readings, and all students will submit a 1-page reading response for each class. Students will also write a 12-page term paper or an equivalent project that applies concepts from political ecology to a specific, real-world environmental problem. Weeks 1-4 will focus on Third World cases; weeks 5-8 will focus on US case studies. Weeks 9 & 10 will be devoted to student paper/project presentations and discussions. There are no exams. Grades will be assigned according to the following weights: synopses—33%; term paper/project & presentation—33%; class attendance and participation—33%.



COURSE OUTLINE

Week 1: What is political ecology? Case: the political ecology of deforestation in central Africa

Sept. 25: Introduction

Sept. 27: Paul Robbins 2004. *Political Ecology*. Ch1. **and** Marcus Colchester 1993. Slave and enclave: towards a political ecology of equatorial Africa. *The Ecologist* 23 (5):166-73.

Week 2: Political ecology of petroleum extraction in Africa

Oct. 2: Watts, M. 2005. Watts, Michael J. 2004. Resource curse? governmentality, oil and power in the Niger Delta, Nigeria. *Geopolitics* 9 (1):50-80.

Oct. 4: Michael Watts. 2006. Empire of oil - Capitalist dispossession and the scramble for Africa. *Monthly Review-An Independent Socialist Magazine* 58 (4):1-17.

Week 3: Overview of political ecology across scales

Oct. 9: Paulson, Susan, and Lisa L. Gezon. 2005. *Political ecology across spaces, scales, and social groups*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press. Ch. 1-7

Oct. 11: ———. Ch. 8-14

Week 4: Political ecology of conservation & social justice

Oct. 16: Brechin, Steven R. 2003. *Contested nature: promoting international biodiversity with social justice in the twenty-first century*. Albany: State Univ. of New York Press. Ch. 1-8

Oct. 18: ———. Ch. 9-15

Week 5: Political ecology of development and deforestation in the Pacific Northwest, Part I

Oct. 23: Robbins, William G. 2004. *Landscapes of conflict: the Oregon story, 1940-2000*. Seattle: University of Washington Press. Chapters 1-5.

Oct. 25: ———. Chapters 6-Epilogue.

Week 6: Political ecology of development and deforestation in the Pacific Northwest, Part II

Oct. 30: Prudham, W. Scott. 2005. *Knock on wood: nature as commodity in Douglas fir country*. New York: Routledge. Ch. 1-5

Nov. 1: ———. Ch. 6-Epilogue

Week 7: The political ecology of sprawl in the American West

Nov. 6: Travis, William R. 2007. *New geographies of the American West: land use and the changing patterns of place*. Washington, DC: Island Press. Ch. 1-5

Nov. 8: ———. Ch. 6-9

Week 8: The petroleum economy comes home: Nigeria in suburban American lawns

Nov. 13: Robbins, Paul. 2007. *Lawn people: how grasses, weeds, and chemicals make us who we are*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. Introduction-Ch. 4

Nov. 15: ———. Ch. 5-8

Week 9: Student research presentations (Tuesday only; Thursday is Thanksgiving)

Week 10: Student research presentations