

Waste, Water and the Urban Environment

E33.2036 Spring 2011
Thursday 6:45 – 8:25
SILV 514
Office hours by appointment

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Course Description

Water supply and the management of waste are two of the most important and complicated issues that every urban area confronts. Clean water must flow in and waste, either solid or liquid, must flow out. The technological systems used to control water and waste are the veins and arteries of the city, usually invisible but absolutely necessary to the operation of the city and the health of its inhabitants.

This course examines waste and water systems from a social standpoint. The readings selected for this course make visible the relationships that people have with both natural and technological systems related to waste and water. Some of the readings point out that these relationships are fraught with power. Water and waste systems have been designed in ways that often disrupt ecological relationships and create unequal benefits and disadvantages for different social groups. This course seeks to lay bare the often hidden relations of power that are a part of the management of water and waste.

Books Required for the Course

- Robert D. Bullard, *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality* (Westview Press, 3rd ed. 2000).
- Peter H. Gleik, *Bottled and Sold: The Story behind our Obsession with Bottle* (Island Press).
- Robert Glennon, *Unquenchable: America's Water Crisis and What to do about It* (Island Press).
- Martin V. Melosi, *Garbage in the Cities: Refuse, Reform, and the Environment* (University of Pittsburgh Press).
- Marc Reisner, *Cadillac Desert: The American West and its Disappearing Water* (Penguin, revised ed, 1993).
- Elizabeth Royte, *Garbage Land: On the Secret History of Trash* (Back Bay).
- Steven Solomon, *Water: The Epic Struggle for Wealth, Power and Civilization* (Harper).
- Susan Strasser, *Waste and Want: A Social History of Trash* (Holt).

Assignments and Grading

Course Readings – Read the assigned books, chapters and articles before class. Classes will be discussion of the readings and everyone needs to participate in these discussions. (20% of total grade).

Review Essay – Due March 10. Choose either Glennon, Gleik, or Strasser’s book. Find two other books that are topically related to your choice. Write a 5-6 page review essay that analyzes all three books in the context of each other. You can see the journal *Reviews in American History* for examples. (20% of total grade).

Research Paper – Due (to be discussed). Write a 15-page research paper that addresses an event or issue connected to ways people have managed water or waste. You should consider how social arrangements and power relate to technology, politics, or another aspect of water and waste systems.

Select a journal that you like and write the paper as if you would be submitting it to that publication. Your research should be based on a combination of primary and secondary sources. (40% of total grade).

Group Project, Analysis of Popular Culture – Due last two weeks of class. In a group of three or four students, you will analyze how water or waste is presented or discussed in US popular culture. Your group will select a specific media, study the representations of water in that media and then use Power Point to present your findings and conclusions to the class. Assignment due in the last two weeks of the semester. (20% of total grade).

Course Schedule

February 3. Introduction

February 10. Theoretical Underpinnings

David Harvey, *Justice Nature and the Geography of Difference* (Blackwell, 1997), 182-204. On Reserve

Lester Brown, *Plan B 4.0*, (Norton, 2009), 31-44. On Reserve

Ted Steinberg, *Down to Earth: Nature's Role in American History* (Oxford UP) Chapter 10. On Reserve

Wayne Brekhus, "A Sociology of the Unmarked: Redirecting Our Focus," *Sociological Theory* Mar 1998, Vol. 16, 34-51. Electronic Copy Available

February 17. Water and Civilization I

Steven Solomon, *Water: The Epic Struggle for Wealth, Power, and Civilization* (Harper), Part I&II (Prologue – p245).

February 24. Water and Civilization II

Steven Solomon, *Water: The Epic Struggle for Wealth, Power, and Civilization* (Harper), Part III&IV (p249-496).

March 3. Water and Wastefulness

Robert Glennon, *Unquenchable: America's Water Crisis and What to do about It* (Island Press).

March 10. The Ownership and Commodification of Water

Peter H. Gleik, *Bottled and Sold: The Story behind our obsession with bottled Water* (Island Press).

Ted Steinberg, *Slide Mountain, or, The Folly of Owning Nature* (Berkeley: University of California, 1995), Introduction & Chapter 3. On Reserve

March 17. Spring Break

March 24. Water and the American West

Marc Reisner, *Cadillac Desert: The American West and its Disappearing Water* (Penguin, revised ed, 1993).

Mike Davis, "The Case for Letting Malibu Burn" in *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster* (New York: Metropolitan, 1998) Chapter 3. On Reserve

March 31. Garbage Politics

Martin V. Melosi, *Garbage in the Cities: Refuse, Reform, and the Environment* (University of Pittsburgh Press)

April 7. Culture, Society and Household Waste

Susan Strasser, *Waste and Want: A Social History of Trash* (Holt).

Suellen Hoy, *Chasing Dirt: The American Pursuit of Cleanliness* (New York: Oxford, 1995), Chapter 6. On Reserve

April 14. Landfills

Elizabeth Royte, *Garbage Land: On the Secret History of Trash* (Back Bay).

Heather Rogers, *Gone Tomorrow: The Hidden Life of Garbage* (New York: New Press, 2005), Chapter 4 & 7. On Reserve

April 21. Environmental Justice

Robert D. Bullard, *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality* (Westview Press, 3rd ed. 2000).

David Naguib Pellow, *Garbage Wars: The Struggle for Environmental Justice in Chicago* (Cambridge: MIT, 2002), Chapter 3 & Appendix. On Reserve

April 28. Group Presentations I

May 5. Group Presentations II

**Topic that was removed from the syllabus due to the snow day on January 27.
Sewers and Society**

Joanne Abel Goldman, *Building New York's Sewers: Developing Mechanisms of Urban Management* (West Lafayette: Purdue UP, 1997), Chapter 3. On Reserve

Donald Reid, *Paris Sewers and Sewermen: Realities and Representations* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1991), Chapter 5 & 7. On Reserve

Briefly revisit the Steinberg Chapter from February 10