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Spring 2021: Remote Asynchronous Course

3 credits

Office Hours: by appointment

01:070:203: Climate Change, Disaster, and Reconstruction

“This is a tough thing to say, but let me be really honest. I think the best thing that happened to the education system in New Orleans was Hurricane Katrina. That education system was a disaster, and it took hurricane Katrina to wake up the community to say that “we have to do better.” And the progress that they’ve made in four years since the hurricane is unbelievable. They have a chance to create a phenomenal school district. Long way to go, but that – that city was not serious about its education. Those children were being desperately underserved prior, and the amount of progress and the amount of reform we’ve seen in a short amount of time has been absolutely amazing.”

-Arne Duncan, Secretary of Education under President Obama

Course Description and Goals

What is the relationship between nature, culture, and politics? It is widely recognized that climate change is not merely a problem of biochemical processes in the atmosphere but a “problem space” which poses fundamental political and epistemological challenges to humanity. The changing climate has created a context in which these questions are increasingly contested in anticipation of, during, and in the aftermath and reconstruction following “natural disasters”. These events, like 2005’s Hurricane Katrina have been framed and mobilized as a means to pose places like New Orleans as a blank slate for reconstruction, using nature as a cover for ambitious political projects to create new models of society and politics. For example, after 2017’s Hurricane Maria, the Post-Katrina privatization of New Orleans schools has been cited as both a model and warning for the island. In light of the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic, these questions have only become more urgent.

This course asks students to interrogate how it is that Post-Katrina New Orleans could become a *model* for reconstruction for Puerto Rico, how it is that the idea of comparing and translating between New Orleans and Puerto Rico could make sense. Rather than only account for specific techniques of reform and rebuilding in New Orleans and how they might be transported to Puerto Rico, the class will consider the conceptual work needed to appreciate reconstruction as a *model* and an ideological object and the ways that models work to transform political possibilities through the lens of experimentation, flexibility, and crisis. By using New Orleans and Puerto Rico as case studies, this course challenges students to resist the naturalization of climate change, disaster, and reconstruction and to articulate the political and epistemological stakes in these interrelated phenomena. At its conclusion, students will be asked to think about how these dilemmas apply to the recent global pandemic.

Learning Goals

Anthropology Department

- Demonstrate understanding of climate change as a cultural and political phenomenon (CA #1)
- Demonstrate understanding of disaster and reconstruction as contested concepts (CA #2)
- Use multimedia research skills (CA #3)
- Write critical analysis papers on the class topic (CA #4)
- Present and facilitate class discussion on a weekly topic (CA #5)

Core

- Students will analyze climate change and disaster from a multidisciplinary perspective (CC)

Catalog Description

Politics of climate change, disaster as social phenomenon, intersectional analysis of the political economy of reconstruction, New Orleans, Puerto Rico, USA, philosophy of neoliberalism, epistemology of crisis, translation of political models,

Course Website

A Canvas website (<https://tlt.rutgers.edu/canvas>) accompanies this course; there you will find announcements and discussion boards. If you have trouble accessing the site, please email your professor.

All students are responsible for timely attention to email and Canvas postings for this course and therefore should check the Canvas site and their Rutgers email accounts regularly. Dates and assignments may change; all changes will be announced in class or posted on Canvas or both.

E-mail communication with professor

In the subject line of your email message, begin with "CCDR"—e.g., a subject line might read: "CCDR/reading question" or "CCDR/exam question." (Specifying "CCDR" in your email subject line will help to ensure timely responses.)

Course Requirements and Grading

Multimedia Critical Analysis Papers (55%):

You will be tasked with writing two critical analysis papers throughout the semester. Each paper will be required to include analysis of both texts from the course and relevant media objects not assigned on the syllabus. This will be explained in further detail when the topics are given out.

You will write a 1500 – 2000-word (Times New Roman, 12pt.) analysis paper on a topic that I will assign on the following date:

Midterm - Paper 1: Assigned Week 5, Due Week 7

This paper will count for 20% of your overall grade. This paper will require you to critically assess the concept of “natural disaster” in conversation with readings on the syllabus and media artifacts concerning a recent so-called “natural disaster”. (See attachments for details on prompt and assessment).

You will write a longer, 3000 – 3500 word (Times New Roman, 12pt.) analysis paper during the final weeks of class.

Final - Paper 2: Assigned Week 10, due Finals Week

This paper will count for 35% of your overall grade. This paper will require you choose two competing visions of reconstruction after a recent disaster. You will compare and contrast the practical and political implications of these visions and analyze the limits of them in conversation with readings from the syllabus and media artifacts.

Weekly Annotations (15%)

Rather than weekly individual discussion board posts, we will use the web app Perusall to make shared annotations of the week’s texts. You will be required to make at least 5 annotations of the weekly reading in the app. At least 2 annotations should be short comments (2-3 sentences or more) on a particular section or passage and at least 2 annotations should be questions about specific passages. At least one annotation should be a big question about the broader themes of the reading. Annotations can be in response to other students’ or the professor’s annotations.

While there will be no late penalties in this course, to keep a collective discussion going, I’m asking that you post your annotations by Friday of the week noted for the reading.

These annotations will count for 15% of your grade. You will receive one point for each annotation per class. You will only fail to receive points if you do not post the required number of responses, or if a response is clearly not based on a deep engagement with the reading.

Reading Guide (15%)

You will each be responsible for facilitating (perhaps with a partner, depending on course enrollment) an in-depth discussion of the readings for one class session in the form of a written and audio or video recorded reading guide. You will have ten minutes to present key ideas and tensions from the readings. You will then have ten minutes to pose critical reading and discussion questions to the class based on the reading. Presentations are to be analytical, not summarizations, and your ability to explain why your questions are important for the reading and the broader themes of the course are important. Finally, you are required to post a one-page handout of key points and questions from your presentation on the course website.

Your reading guide assignment will be worth 15% of your grade. Points will be based on your preparation, relevant examples, and presentation.

Accessibility Services

Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are

officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines>. If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus's disability services office will provide you with a Letter of Accommodations. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. To begin this process, please complete the Registration form on the ODS web site at: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/registration-form>.

Course Materials

Class readings will be posted on the Canvas website.

Course Schedule

I will post notes and a reading guide on each week's readings by the Tuesday before the date listed below. Where books are listed, you will be required to read selected chapters posted as PDF files on Canvas

Week 1: Introduction to the Course 01-22

David Wallace Wells: *The Uninhabitable Earth: Life After Warming*

Week 2: What Kind of Problem is Climate Change? 01-29

Amitav Ghosh: *The Great Derangement*

Week 3: What Is the Anthropocene? 02-05

Andrew S. Matthews: "Anthropology and the Anthropocene: Criticisms, Experiments, and Collaborations"

Week 4: How Does Crisis Change Our Thinking? 02-12

Joseph Masco: *The Theater of Operations*

Bedour Alagraa, Zoe Samudzi, SA Smythe, and Robin D. G. Kelley, "Notes from the Twilight: Meditations on Crisis, Catastrophe and Genocide"

Week 5: How Do We Conceptualize "Disaster" and What is "Disaster Capitalism"? 02-19

Naomi Klein: *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*

Week 6: How Does Race Shape the Landscape? 02-26

Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods: *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*

Week 7: Why Was the Mississippi Delta Vulnerable to Disaster? 03-05

Clyde Woods: *Development Arrested: The Blues and Plantation Power*

Clyde Woods: *Development Drowned and Reborn: The Blues and Bourbon Restorations in Post-Katrina New Orleans*

Week 8: What is Neoliberalism and How Does It Affect Disaster Response? 03-12

Vincanne Adams: *Markets of Faith, Labors of Sorrow*

Week 9: How is New Orleans Both a City and an Experiment? 03-26

Christien Tompkins: “Reconstructing Race: Design Thinking and the Future of Schools in Post Katrina New Orleans”

Spike Lee: *When the Levees Broke* and *If God Is Willing and da Creek Don't Rise*

Week 10: How Did New Orleanians Resist “Disaster Capitalism”? 04-02

Cedric Johnson: *Neoliberal Deluge: Hurricane Katrina, Late Capitalism, and the Remaking of New Orleans*

Week 11: Why Was Puerto Rico Vulnerable to Disaster? 04-09

Yarimar Bonilla and Marisol Lebron, *Aftershocks of Disaster: Puerto Rico Before and After the Storm*

Week 12: How is Debt a “Disaster”? 04-16

David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5000 Years*

Natasha Lycia Ora Bannan, “Puerto Rico’s Odious Debt: The Economic Crisis of Colonialism”

Week 13: What Kinds of Opportunities Do People See in Hurricane Maria? 04-23

Naomi Klein: *The Battle for Paradise*

Yarimar Bonilla: “Why would anyone in Puerto Rico want a hurricane? Because someone will get rich.”

Week 14: What Kind of Disaster is the Covid-19 Pandemic? 04-30

Mike Davis: *The Monster at our Door: The Global Threat of Avian Flu*

Olufemi O Taiwo: “Our coronavirus failure will become our climate failure”