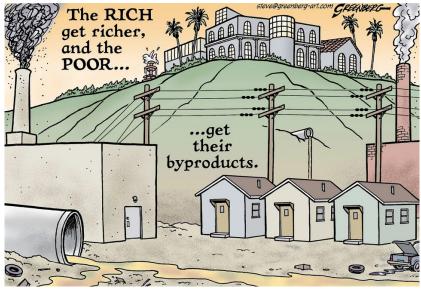
# ENVST-UA 480: Environmental Justice and Inequality

New York University - Spring 2024 T/Th 3:30-4:45pm, Bobst LL146 4 credits, no prerequisites



Cartoon by Steve Greenberg

Professor: Dean Chahim (dean.chahim@nyu.edu)

**Student Hours:** Mondays 1:30pm-3:30pm, sign up here: <a href="https://tinyurl.com/chahim-meetme">https://tinyurl.com/chahim-meetme</a> **Student Hours Location:** Department of Environmental Studies, 285 Mercer Street, Office 906 or via Zoom (by prior arrangement), using this link: <a href="https://nyu.zoom.us/i/2376810851">https://nyu.zoom.us/i/2376810851</a>

## **Course Description**

We live on a planet of staggering environmental injustice. Poor and racialized groups, particularly in the Global South, live in increasingly hazardous environments that predispose them to disproportionate injury, suffering, and death. In contrast, middle-class and wealthy (and in the Euro-American context, disproportionately white) populations live in environments that are comparatively free of environmental harms. This course asks how such extraordinary inequality has been historically produced and sustained, as well as why it appears so intractable today, despite decades of organizing by environmental justice (EJ) activists. While providing a brief overview of environmental justice frameworks, methods, and the history of the movement in the U.S., the course will put this movement in a much broader global and historical context. Students will develop a deep understanding of the ways that changing economic and technological systems have contributed to environmental injustice globally from the onset of colonialism to the present, as well as how populations have resisted such unjust systems and imagined alternatives. The course requires close readings of texts from across the social sciences and humanities, particularly history and anthropology, and will be run as a discussion-based seminar.

This course meets the Governance requirement in the Environmental Studies major, or an elective requirement in the Environmental Studies major or minor.

### Note on workload:

The average length of readings per week will be 75 pages, some of which might be quite dense. This represents a serious time commitment, but I will offer strategies and ways to make it manageable. Nevertheless, it's a lot of work, so <u>please consider carefully if you can dedicate sufficient time to this class.</u> I assure you that if you do, you'll learn a lot, with minimal busywork.

## **Course Goals and Objectives**

By the end of this course, you should be able to:

- Explain the interrelationships between environmental injustice, capitalism, colonialism, and racism.
- Describe the key obstacles to achieving environmental injustice as well as some of the ways movements have sought to overcome these challenges.
- Articulate your own vision of environmental justice, and ways that you might work towards this vision in your life and career.

## **Accessibility**

I want to make this class work for everyone. Having dealt with disabilities in my own life, I take these accommodations seriously. If you have a disability or chronic medical condition, please meet with me as soon as possible during office hours to discuss your particular learning needs and also contact the Moses Center to arrange an appointment to discuss your needs. Since accommodations require early planning, please contact the Moses Center and I as soon as possible. Their contact information is below:

Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Students with Disabilities

Telephone: 212-998-4980

Website: <a href="http://www.nyu.edu/csd">http://www.nyu.edu/csd</a>

Email: mosescsd@nyu.edu

## **Academic Resources**

• On Reading: See Edwards, Paul N. "How to Read a Book, v.5.0," n.d. pne.people.si.umich.edu/PDF/howtoread.pdf. ← I HIGHLY RECOMMEND THIS!

• On Research: Luker, Kristin. 2010. Salsa Dancing into the Social Sciences: Research in an Age of Info-Glut. First Harvard University Press paperback edition. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

- On Writing: Graff, Gerald, and Cathy Birkenstein. 2021. "They Say / I Say": The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing. Fifth edition. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.
- Access your course materials: <u>Brightspace</u> (https://brightspace.nyu.edu/d2l/home/311008)
- Databases, journal articles, and more: <u>Bobst Library</u> (library.nyu.edu)
- Assistance with strengthening your writing: <u>NYU Writing Center</u> (nyu.mywconline.com)
- Obtain 24/7 technology assistance: <u>IT Help Desk</u> (nyu.edu/it/servicedesk)
- Tutoring and academic skills workshops are offered by the University Learning Center: <a href="www.nyu.edu/cas/clc">www.nyu.edu/cas/clc</a>
- Support for personal and health-related issues at the Wellness Exchange: (212) 443-9999 (24/7 confidential calls): <a href="www.nyu.edu/999">www.nyu.edu/999</a>

## **Grading**

## Participation (15%)

This class is based primarily on close readings of texts. We will run the class as a seminar. I will open and conclude each session with some framing remarks for our discussion, but the rest of the time will generally be devoted to in-depth discussion of the readings, either as a whole class or in small groups/pairs. There are no long lectures that can be recorded, no extensive slide decks, and no textbook.

There is, in other words, no substitute for being in class. It is essential for your learning - and that of your peers - that you come to class prepared and participate actively in the ways that are comfortable to you. You will not be tested or evaluated on whether or not you "correctly" understood the texts or have the "right" opinions, but rather whether or not you have read and come up with your *own* thoughts about them.

Everyone starts with the full 15% for participation, but *regularly* missing class, coming unprepared, or remaining unengaged with class discussion and activities will result in a lower grade. I emphasize "regularly" because I understand that things happen - missing class or being a little underprepared a few times over the semester (because of illness, family emergencies, outside work obligations, etc.) is understandable and will not be counted against you. If I notice a pattern of absences, lack of preparation, or disengagement, I will let you know and give you a chance to improve before reducing your grade.

I understand that not all students feel comfortable volunteering to speak in front of large groups. For this reason, we will do many alternative forms of participation, including small-group activities and discussions. If you are still having trouble participating, we can talk about alternatives - please come see me.

## Sick Policy

Please just write to me if you are sick (you do not need to specify any details), and <u>do not come to class</u>. If you let me know at least one hour before class, I can open a zoom link for you to join (https://nyu.zoom.us/j/2376810851). Being sick will not count against you - and it is better to keep everyone safe.

## Reading Responses (40%)

Each week, you will be asked to do something to reflect on and process what you have read. These exercises demonstrate your comprehension and reflection on the readings and help seed our discussions. These will be graded <u>credit/no credit.</u>

**Reading responses are due by midnight on Mondays\*** in order to give me time to read them before class. Post them to the <u>discussion board</u> on Brightspace.

Of course, I do understand that things happen and that some weeks, you will simply be too tired to write something coherent. For this reason, you may skip <u>two</u> reading responses over the course of the semester without any deduction to your grade.

\*The only exception is the first week, in which an introduction post (details sent via email) will be due Monday and a shorter reading response will be shorter and due Wednesday at midnight.

#### **Objective**

This may initially seem tedious, but in retrospect you will likely come to realize that this helps you (a) help you understand and critique what you have read, (b) enable you to connect what you have read to other texts and to your own experience and knowledge, (c) seed our class discussions, and (d) provide you with a reference to come back to as you write your essays.

#### Format

The responses will take one of two forms (check the course schedule to confirm the format for the week):

#### (A) Discussion Post

Most weeks, you will write a *discussion post*. This will be a 1-2 paragraph writing exercise in which you do the following:

1. **Identify a key idea within one or more of the texts that stood out to you.** Refer to specific parts of the text where you see them articulate this argument. This does not, and should not, be a summary of everything the readings do, but rather one salient part you think is especially important.

### AND:

2. **Connect to other texts and/or your own life experience and knowledge:** How do these reading connect with others assigned this week or previously, or for other classes? Alternatively, you can also write about how the readings connect to your own experiences or prior knowledge. I encourage you to do both.

### OR:

3. **Questions and/or critiques:** What question(s) do the readings raise for you? What doesn't make sense? Or, what critique might you make of the authors' arguments or evidence, in light of other readings, knowledge, or experiences you have familiarity with?

## (B) Concept Map + Discussion Question

For a few weeks, with especially technical and complex readings, you will instead do a concept map, in which you - in whatever form suits you - try to visually lay out the concepts and arguments in the texts as you understand them. This can be a flowchart, table, or other kind of diagram, with significant amounts of text (try to paraphrase definitions of concepts and ideas in your own words). You will accompany the concept map with a discussion question, in which you ask about a part of the argument that you are unsure about or skeptical of.

## Final Paper (or Project) (45%)

To build on and synthesize what you have learned, you will write an 8 to 10-page (double spaced) research paper (or do a creative project\*) that addresses some theme from the class related to environmental justice focused on a particular empirical case (i.e. a specific environmental justice struggle). The goal of this paper is to integrate theory and empirical cases, demonstrating both your understanding of the material and your ability to use it to interpret a case or issue we have not read about. You do not have to do original, primary research (but are of course welcome and encouraged to do so). However, the paper must draw connections between and seriously engage at least three of the readings from our syllabus and at least four outside academic sources (peer-reviewed journal articles or books, primarily) that you find on your own. Some adjustments to these minimums may be allowed if you are doing your own original research - talk to me about this.

A more detailed prompt will be distributed in class along with a grading rubric, but for now know that the 45% weight of the grade for this paper will be distributed between:

- 1) an initial topic idea (5%, credit/no credit)
- 2) paper proposal and annotated bibliography (15%, graded)
- 3) the paper itself (25%, graded)

#### **Class Grade**

The final class grade will be assigned as follows:

A 95-100%	A- 90-94%	
B+ 87-89%	B 83-86%	B- 80-82%
C+ 77-79%	C 73-76%	C- 70-72%
D+ 67-69%	D 63-66%	
F 0-62%		

### **Late Work**

Late reading responses will receive half credit. Late assignments for the final paper will be accepted only on a case-by-case basis, given that it is essential to do these on time to get feedback.

## **Academic Integrity**

Please be familiar with NYU's Academic Integrity policy here: <a href="https://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/academic-integrity-for-students-at-nyu.html">https://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/academic-integrity-for-students-at-nyu.html</a>

Given the emphasis on personal reflection and discussion in this class, you will find generative AI and other online tools of limited utility for writing (although they can have some use for research). If you're struggling, I encourage you to come to my student hours to talk about reading and writing strategies.

<sup>\*</sup>If you would like to propose an artwork, website, video, map, or other format, please get in touch with me. In such cases, a much shorter "artist's statement" write-up would be required to accompany the creative piece.

## **Books to Purchase**

## Required

There is only one book you are required to buy for this course (it will be also available on reserve at Bobst, although likely only in physical form):

Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Edited by Robert C. Tucker. **2nd Revised & Enlarged edition**. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978.

Please note the edition: it's the one with the red cover! The old edition might work, but I cannot confirm this.

This is available in the NYU bookstore, most independent bookstores, and also relatively cheaply (\$10-15) online, see Alibris.

## Suggested

The following books are available in digital form from the NYU library for free, but we will read significant portions and you might prefer a paper copy.

\*Cepek, Michael. Life in Oil: Cofán Survival in the Petroleum Fields of Amazonia. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018.

Liboiron, Max. Pollution Is Colonialism. Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 2021.

\*Livingston, Julie. Self-Devouring Growth: A Planetary Parable as Told from Southern Africa. Durham: Duke University Press, 2019.

Voyles, Traci Brynne. Wastelanding: Legacies of Uranium Mining in Navajo Country. 1 edition. Minneapolis: Univ of Minnesota Press, 2015.

\*I'd especially recommend buying Cepek and Livingston's books, since we're reading them nearly in their entirety.

## **Course Materials List**

We will read or watch sections of the following texts and films - see the course schedule for details. All of the texts are available as PDFs on the Brightspace, except for *The Marx-Engels Reader*.

Ahmann, Chloe. Futures after Progress: Hope and Doubt in Late Industrial Baltimore. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2024.

Battistoni, Alyssa. "State, Capital, Nature: State Theory for the Capitalocene." In *Marxism and the Capitalist State: Towards a New Debate*, edited by Rob Hunter, Rafael Khachaturian,

- and Eva Nanopoulos, 31-52. Political Philosophy and Public Purpose. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2023. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-36167-8">https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-36167-8</a>.
- Bernes, Jasper. "Between the Devil and the Green New Deal." *Commune*, Summer 2019. <a href="https://communemag.com/between-the-devil-and-the-green-new-deal/">https://communemag.com/between-the-devil-and-the-green-new-deal/</a>.
- Cepek, Michael. *Life in Oil: Cofán Survival in the Petroleum Fields of Amazonia*. First edition. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018.
- Foster, John Bellamy, Brett Clark, and Richard York. "Imperialism and Ecological Metabolism." In *The Ecological Rift: Capitalism's War on the Earth*, 345-76. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2010.
- Galeano, Eduardo. "To Be Like Them." In *The Post-Development Reader*, edited by Majid Rahnema and Victoria Bawtree, 214–22. New Jersey: Zed Books, 1997.
- Harvey, David. "The 'New' Imperialism: Accumulation by Dispossession." *Socialist Register*, 2004, 63-87. <a href="https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315251196-10">https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315251196-10</a>.
- Hecht, Gabrielle. *Residual Governance: How South Africa Foretells Planetary Futures*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2023.
- Illich, Ivan. Energy and Equity. London: Marion Boyars Publishers Ltd, 2000.
- Kohei Saito: Marx in the Anthropocene Towards the Idea of Degrowth Communism, 2023. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jYAN6wliLxw.
- Koshy, Susan, Lisa Marie Cacho, Jodi A. Byrd, and Brian Jordan Jefferson. *Colonial Racial Capitalism*. Duke University Press, 2022.
- LaDuke, Winona, and Deborah Cowen. "Beyond Wiindigo Infrastructure." South Atlantic Quarterly 119, no. 2 (April 1, 2020): 243-68. https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-8177747.
- Liboiron, Max. Pollution Is Colonialism. Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 2021.
- Livingston, Julie. Self-Devouring Growth: A Planetary Parable as Told from Southern Africa. Durham: Duke University Press, 2019.
- Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Edited by Robert C. Tucker. 2nd Revised & Enlarged edition. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978.
- Mbembe, Achille. "Necropolitics." *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (January 1, 2003): 11-40. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-15-1-11">https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-15-1-11</a>.
- Molavi, Shourideh C. *Environmental Warfare in Gaza: Colonial Violence and New Landscapes of Resistance*. Pluto Press, 2024.
- Nixon, Rob. Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011.
- O'Connor, James. "Capitalism, Nature, Socialism: A Theoretical Introduction." *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 1, no. 1 (January 1988): 11–38. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/10455758809358356">https://doi.org/10.1080/10455758809358356</a>.
- Ottinger, Gwen. "Environmentally Just Technology." *Environmental Justice* 4, no. 1 (March 1, 2011): 81-85. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1089/env.2010.0039">https://doi.org/10.1089/env.2010.0039</a>.

- Pellow, David N. Resisting Global Toxics: Transnational Movements for Environmental Justice.
  Urban and Industrial Environments. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007.
  <a href="https://openlibrary.org/books/OL10237487M">https://openlibrary.org/books/OL10237487M</a>.
- Pulido, Laura. "Geographies of Race and Ethnicity II: Environmental Racism, Racial Capitalism and State-Sanctioned Violence." *Progress in Human Geography* 41, no. 4 (August 2017): 524–33. https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132516646495.
- Robinson, Cedric J. *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. Revised and updated third edition. Chapel Hill North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2020.
- Romero, Adam. Economic Poisoning: Industrial Waste and the Chemicalization of American Agriculture. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2022.
- Sachs, Wolfgang, Reinhard Loske, and Manfred Linz. "Greening the North: A Post-Industrial Blueprint for Ecology and Equity." New Perspectives Quarterly, 1998.
- Voyles, Traci Brynne. Wastelanding: Legacies of Uranium Mining in Navajo Country. 1 edition. Minneapolis: Univ of Minnesota Press, 2015.
- Wells, Christopher W., ed. *Environmental Justice in Postwar America: A Documentary Reader.*Weyerhaeuser Environmental Classics. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2018.

## **Course Schedule**

Note: the following schedule and list of texts above are subject to slight changes as we go (i.e., I may reduce or re-order materials based on our progress). I will announce any such changes in class, but also please check NYU Brightspace for the most up-to-date list before beginning your reading.

In addition to the main texts, we may consider some brief news articles related to the week's themes. You are encouraged to post such articles to the discussion board or reference them in your reading responses, as well.

<u>A brief note on the method to the madness:</u> the course is designed to *scaffold* your learning, so we will begin with a unit that introduces a number of key concepts and terms, as well as central questions and debates, that we will return to as we go. So, if you notice some repetition, this is intentional. Each unit builds on the previous units, deepening and broadening the understanding of the ideas.

We obviously cannot cover everything about this field in one class, but if you want further reading on any of the topics listed (or even those not listed), just ask!

# ENVST-UA 480: Environmental Justice and Inequality

## **Unit I: A World of Waste**

Core Idea: Environmental injustice is primarily the result of unequal exposure to waste.

Dates	Week	Topic	Guiding Questions	Primary Readings	Assignments
1/23	1A	Introduction	What is EJ? Why does it matter? What is this class about?		Introduction Post
1/25	1B	History of EJ	Where did the EJ movement come from, and how has it changed?	Wells - Environmental Justice in Postwar America, (pp. 3-21, 121-157, 226-232 - <b>60pp</b> )	Discussion Post
1/30 and 2/1	2	A Problem of Waste	How and why might we understand environmental injustice as a problem of waste? What challenges do the material, spatial, and temporal forms of waste pose to resistance?	Hecht - Residual Governance (Intro, Ch.1 - <b>47pp</b> ), Nixon - Slow Violence (pp.1-14 - <b>14pp</b> )	Discussion Post
2/6 and 2/8	3	Rendering Disposable	How is environmental injustice justified by rendering certain people and places as disposable?	Voyles - Wastelanding (Preface, Intro, Ch. 5, Conclusion - <b>77pp</b> )	Discussion Post
2/13 and 2/15	4	Modernity, Capitalism, and the State	To what extent is environmental injustice an inevitable part of capitalist modernity? To what extent can it be solved through the state?	Pellow - Resisting Global Toxics (Ch.1 - <b>37pp</b> ), Pulido - "Geographies of Race and Ethnicity II" <b>(9pp)</b> , Galeano - "To Be Like Them" <b>(9pp)</b>	Discussion Post

# **Unit II: Capitalism and Waste**

Core Idea: Capitalism depends on exponential economic growth, which in turn depends on the exponentially increasing production of waste.

3/12 and 3/14	8	Accumulation by Dispossession	How does capitalism overcome - if only partially and temporarily - limits to growth through technological, temporal, and spatial "fixes," including ongoing forms of dispossession?	Poisoning (pp. 18-49 - 31pp)  Harvey - "The 'New' Imperialism" (21pp), Cepek - Life in Oil (Ch.1,2,4,5 - 135pp)	Discussion Post
3/5 and 3/7	7	Accumulation, Growth, and Crisis	What is the initial basis for capitalist accumulation? Why is the accumulation of capital - so necessary to the capitalist system? Why does accumulation run up against limits?	Tucker - Marx-Engels Reader (Capital, Vol.1, pp.417-438 - <b>21pp</b> ), O'Connor - "Capitalism, Nature, Socialism" ( <b>27pp</b> ), Romero - Economic	Concept Map of Marx + Discussion Question (on Marx and O'Connor)
2/27 and 2/29	6	Technology, Scale, and the Exhaustion of Bodies and Soils	How does capitalist social organization enable previously unheard-of scales of production - and why is such scaling up seemingly inevitable under capitalism? What is the cost of such scaling on the body of the laborer and the non-human environment?	Tucker - Marx-Engels Reader (Capital, Vol.1, pp.376-417 - <b>41pp</b> ), Romero - Economic Poisoning (pp. xi-xv, 1-11 - <b>16pp</b> )	Concept Map of Marx + Discussion Question (on Marx and Romero)
2/20 and 2/22	5	Commodities, Value, and Extraction	Where (and from whom) does value (and hence profit) come from under capitalism? What is the effect of the capitalist "mode of production" on human populations and non-human ecologies?	Tucker - Marx-Engels Reader (Capital, Vol.1, pp.302-376 - <b>74pp</b> )	Concept Map + Discussion Question  PAPER TOPIC DUE 2/23

## **Unit III: Governing Disposability**

Core Idea: The continued production of waste, and hence the survival of capitalism, requires that some populations (human and non-human) and their lands to be considered *disposable*.

3/19 and 3/21	9	Pollution is Colonialism	What is the relationship between waste, land, and colonialism? And how has colonialism itself been justified?	Liboiron - Pollution is Colonialism (Intro, Ch.1 - 79pp), Peck - "Exterminate all the Brutes, Part 1" (film, 60min)	PAPER PROPOSAL and ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE 3/22
3/26 and 3/28	10	Colonial Racial Capitalism	How might we synthesize everything we have learned so far under a broad theoretical framing that recognizes the centrality of colonialism <i>and</i> racism to capitalism? How might such a framing - here called "colonial racial capitalism" - challenge traditional methods of EJ organizing?	Robinson - Racial Capitalism (Foreword by Robin D.G. Kelley, pp.xi-xvii; Ch. 1, pp.9- 28 - <b>25pp</b> ), Koshy et al Colonial Racial Capitalism (pp.1-12 - <b>12pp</b> ), Foster - "Imperialism and Ecological Metabolism" ( <b>31pp</b> ), Review notes for Voyles and Hecht	Concept Map + Discussion Question
4/2 and 4/4	11	The State, Domination, and Nature	What is the role of the state in producing - and potentially resolving - environmental injustice?	Mbembe - "Necropolitics" (30pp), Battistoni - "State, Capital, Nature" (16pp), Bernes - "Between the Devil and the Green New Deal" (7pp), Molavi - Environmental Warfare in Gaza (selections TBD)	Discussion Post

# **Unit IV: Interrupting Wasting**

Core Idea: To get beyond regimes of disposability, we must change our political horizons and tactics to interrupt the *production* of waste.

4/9 and 4/11	12	Beyond Growth	What would it take to imagine a world beyond endless accumulation and waste? What inspiration might we draw from?	Livingston - Self-Devouring Growth (pp.1-34, 85-128 - 77pp), Sachs - "Greening the North" (6pp), The Empire Inquirer - "Kohei Saito: Marx in the Anthropocene" (video, 12min), Re-read Galeano	Discussion Post
4/16 and 4/18	13	Justice by Design	How would we change our infrastructures, technologies, and expertise? What models - from other cultures, times, and places - might we learn from?	LaDuke & Cowen - "Beyond Wiindigo Infrastructure" ( <b>25pp</b> ), Illich - "Energy and Equity" ( <b>22pp</b> ), Ottinger - "Environmentally Just Technology" ( <b>4pp</b> )	Discussion Post
4/23 and 4/25	14	Countering Slow Violence	What kind of movements would be required to get us to these goals? How would these differ - to come full circle - from the EJ movement we learned about at the start of the course? To what extent are such movements already well on their way? What models can we learn from?	Ahmann - Futures After Progress (Ch. 5 - <b>28pp</b> ), Cepek - Life in Oil (Ch.6 - <b>30pp</b> ), re-read Pulido	Discussion Post
4/30 and 5/2	15	Countering Dispossession	What have we learned? What inspiration can we bring to this work going forward?	TBD	One page reflection on learning in lieu of discussion post.  FINAL PAPER DUE 5/3