

# SOC 190: NATURE, SOCIETY, AND OUR WORLD BEYOND HUMANS

Fall 2023

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University of California, Berkeley  
Department of Sociology

Time: Wednesday 2-4 pm

Location: Wheeler 106

Office Hours: Wednesday 10:30am-12:30pm (location TBD) or by appointment  
(Signup: <https://www.wejoinin.com/sheets/cppdt>)

## Course Description

The distinction between ‘nature’ and ‘society’ lies at the heart of many of our everyday assumptions about our world and how to study it as sociologists. Where does this distinction come from? How do we decide, and who gets to decide, what belongs to the realm of ‘nature’ and what belongs to the realm of ‘society’? How do these decisions affect the ways we understand, interact with, and treat the non/more-than-human kin — the animals, plants and trees, rivers and mountains, spirits, etc. — that we share our world with? We will examine these questions and consider their implications for understanding ecological degradation and restoration, climate justice, suffering, etc. We will draw on materials from environmental sociology, history, and humanities, the interdisciplinary literature on non/more-than-human life, and various case studies (particularly on Indigenous sovereignty in California).

## Course Requirements

As a capstone seminar, this course likely is different than any you’ve taken so far. It is designed to emphasize group discussion of the assigned readings. There will be no lectures. Nor will there be exams. Each week we will talk through the key points of the readings, discuss what we appreciated and did not about their arguments and foci, and make connections with previously read work. For this reason, it is imperative that you read the week’s selections carefully, take notes, ask yourself questions, and bring those questions and comments with you to class. Learning to engage in these sorts of group discussions is a key learning objective in this course, and it counts for 20% of your final grade. If you need to miss class for whatever reason, please let me know *before* the class meeting you’ll miss.

Additionally, you’ll write seven short (~250 word) responses to the weekly assigned readings. These are meant to spark your critical thinking and allow you to focus your thoughts before we meet as a group. They should include a discussion question that we could explore during the seminar. They are due by 5pm the Tuesday before each class and will be graded on a satisfactory/unsatisfactory basis. As well, each student will sign up to present on one of the weeks’ readings. (Depending on enrollment numbers, some weeks may have two students co-presenting.) The presentations should be 12-15 minutes long, and are meant to kick-off our group discussion for the week. The presentations are a great way to share and reflect on the readings with your classmates. They are

designed to be low-stress and styles may vary depending on the individual. What is most important is that you engage, think through the main argument, and identify important ideas that you find especially interesting or inspiring. Please note you cannot do a reading response for the same week you present. Meaning, in total, you will submit seven written reading responses for seven different weeks, and you will do a presentation on a separate week. The seven reading responses plus the presentation will account for 25% of your final grade.

Your major assignment for this course will be a research paper, which will be worth 55% of your final grade. We'll talk more about the expectations of the paper as the semester progresses, and we'll work through the paper in two preliminary stages. You will first propose a research question and suggest potential sources for answering your question from scholarly and other secondary sources (5-7 sources total). This will account for 10% of your final grade. The second stage will be a draft of your paper in the form of an outline/bullet points. This will account for 15% of your final grade. The final paper itself will be a 4000-5000 word essay (or 15-20 double spaced pages). This will account for 30% of your final grade and will be due on Wednesday, December 13<sup>th</sup>, 2023, by 5pm.

### **Special Accommodations**

If you have been issued a letter of accommodation from the Disabled Students' Program, please see me as soon as possible to work out the necessary arrangements. If you need an accommodation and have not yet seen a Disability Specialist at the Disabled Students' Program, please do so as soon as possible. More information can be found at the Disabled Students' Program website: <https://dsp.berkeley.edu/home>. Or call the DSP office directly at: (510) 642-0518.

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**COURSE SCHEDULE\*** All required readings will be provided online through bCourses.

### **Aug. 23 – Introduction and overview**

#### **Aug. 30 – Living earth**

- Kimmerer, Robin Wall. 2014. "Returning the Gift." *Minding Nature* 7(2): 18-24.
- Nhat Hanh, Thich. 2013. "We are the Earth." Pp. 8-31 in *Love Letter to the Earth*. Berkeley: Parallax Press.
- Walker, Alice. 1989 [1973]. "Everything is a Human Being." Pp. 659-670 in *Living by the Word: Selected Writings, 1973-1987*. Harvest Books.
- Abram, David. 2001. "Reciprocity: Water-borne reflections from the Northwest Coast." *Tikkun* 16(3): 21-56.

### **Sept. 6 – What is a sociology of nature, environment, nonhuman?**

- Norgaard, Kari Marie. 2018. "The sociological imagination in a time of climate change." *Global and Planetary Change* 163: 171-76.
- Jerolmack, Colin, and Hillary Angelo. 2011. "Nature's looking-glass." *Contexts* 11(1): 24-29.
- Kunkel, Benjamin. 2017. "The Capitalocene." *London Review of Books* 39(5): 22-28.

- Longo, Stefano B., Rebecca Clausen, and Brett Clark. 2015. "Social Theory and Ecological Tragedy." Pp. 15-38 in *The tragedy of the commodity: oceans, fisheries, and aquaculture*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

### Sept. 13 – Roots of the nature/society divide

- Abram, David. 1997. "Animism and the Alphabet." Pp. 63-84 in *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-than-Human World*. New York: Random House.
- Cronon, William. 1996. "The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature." *Environmental History* 1(1): 7-28.

### Sept. 20 – What to do about the nature/society divide?

- Murdoch, Jonathan. 2001. "Ecologising Sociology: Actor-Network Theory, Co-construction and the Problem of Human Exemptionalism." *Sociology* 35(1): 111-133.
- Malm, Andreas. 2018. "On Combined Development: Against Hybridism." In *The progress of this storm: nature and society in a warming world*. London: Verso.

### Sept. 27 – The making of 'natural' disaster

- O'Connor, James. "Some Observations on "Ecological Crisis"". Pp. 135-143 in *Natural Causes: Essays in Ecological Marxism*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Oliver-Smith, Anthony. 2020. "Peru's Five-Hundred-Year Earthquake: Vulnerability in Historical Context." Pp. 83-97 in *The Angry Earth: Disaster in Anthropological Perspective*, edited by Anthony Oliver-Smith and Susanna M. Hoffman (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). New York: Routledge.
- Goodman, J. David. "In Texas Oil Country, an Unfamiliar Threat: Earthquakes." *The New York Times*, Jan. 28, 2023. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/28/us/texas-earthquakes-fracking.html>

### Oct. 4 – The making of 'environmental action'

- Maniates, Michael F. 2001. "Individualization: Plant a Tree, Buy a Bike, Save the World?" *Global Environmental Politics* 1(3):31-52.
- Jaeger, Andrew. 2018. "Forging Hegemony: How Recycling Became a Popular but Inadequate Response to Accumulating Waste." *Social Problems* 65:395-415.

### Oct. 11 – Animism and ecology

- Abram, David. 1997. "The ecology of magic." Pp. 13-26 in *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-than-Human World*. New York: Random House.
- Bell, Michael. 1997. "The ghosts of place." *Theory and Society* 26:813-36.
- Cajete, Gregory. 2000. "Animals in Native Myth and Reality." Pp. 150-175 in *Native Science: Natural Laws of Independence*. Santa Fe, NM: Clear Light Publishers.

**\*\*First assignment due by 11:59pm on Oct. 12\*\***

### **Oct. 18 – Settler-colonialism and ecological crisis**

- Shadaan, Reena, and Michelle Murphy. 2020. “Endocrine-Disrupting Chemicals (EDCs) as industrial and settler colonial structures: Towards a decolonial feminist approach.” *Catalyst: Feminism, Theory, Technoscience* 6(1): 1-36.
- TallBear, Kim. 2019. “Caretaking Relations, not American Dreaming.” *Kalfou* 6(1): 24-41.

### **Oct. 25 – Nature and Indigenous removal**

- Spence, Mark David. 1999. “First Wilderness: America’s Wonderland and Indian Removal from Yellowstone National Park.” Pp. 55-70 in *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Romero, Ezra David. 2020. “The Racist Removal Of Native Americans In California Is Often Missing From Wildfire Discussions, Experts Say.” *Cal Public Radio* Sept. 16, 2020 <https://www.cpradio.org/articles/2020/09/16/the-racist-removal-of-native-americans-in-california-is-often-missing-from-wildfire-discussions-experts-say/>
- Treuer, David. 2021. “Return the National Parks to the Tribes.” *The Atlantic* April 12, 2021 <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2021/05/return-the-national-parks-to-the-tribes/618395/>

### **Nov. 1 – Indigenous environmental science**

- Cajete, Gregory. “Introduction.” Pp. 1-10 in *Native Science: Natural Laws of Independence*. Santa Fe, NM: Clear Light Publishers.
- Watts, Vanessa. 2013. “Indigenous Place-Thought and Agency Amongst Humans and Non-Humans (First Woman and Sky Woman Go on a European World Tour!).” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 2(1), 20–34.
- Whyte, Kyle. 2018. “Critical Investigations of Resilience: A Brief Introduction to Indigenous Environmental Studies & Sciences.” *Dadalus* 147(2): 136-147.

### **Nov. 8 – Indigenous stewardship case study: basketry**

- Smith, Carolyn et al. 2023. “Getting back to that point of balance: Indigenous environmental justice and the California Indian Basketweavers’ Association.” *Ecology and Society* 28(1).
- Film: “Pomo Basketry,” Craft in America series, PBS, 2018 (13 min).
- Film: “Cultural Burning,” Tending the Wild, KCET Season 1, Ep. 1, 2016 (20 min).

### **Nov. 15 – Indigenous stewardship case study: land back and sacred sites**

- Middleton Manning, B et al. 2023. “A place to belong: creating an urban, Indian, women-led land trust in the San Francisco Bay Area.” *Ecology and Society* 28(1).
- History and Overview of West Berkeley Shellmound: <https://shellmound.org/learn-more/>
- Video: “My Ancestors’ Home” (3 mins), Corrina Gould, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KYWCqFOxhh8&t=133s>

- Interview: “Returning to What Was Lost and Stolen” (26 mins), Corrina Gould, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y7bc\\_1zRu6E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y7bc_1zRu6E)

**\*\*Second assignment due by 11:59pm on Nov. 16\*\***

Nov. 22 – No class, Thanksgiving holiday

Nov. 29 – Film: *All That Breathes*. Directed by Shaunak Sen. 97 minutes.

Dec. 6 – RRR week

Dec. 13 – Final research paper due by 5pm. Please upload to bCourses and drop one hard copy in my mailbox in the Sociology front office (410 Social Sciences Building).

**\*This may be subject to some change.**