

HIST 490 Research Seminar: Environmental Inequality and Justice in Postwar America



Semester	Spring 2025
Instructor	Prof. Neil Maher (he/him) maher@njit.edu 973-596-6348 (office) 646-325-3704 (cell)
Time	Mondays & Wednesdays, 10:00-11:20 a.m.
Location	307 Cullimore Hall
Office Hours	325 Cullimore Hall Mondays 1:30–3:00 p.m.; Wednesday, 2:30–4:00 p.m.; and by appointment. You can attend these office hours as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stop by my office during these times.• Sign up for a specific time slot during these hours on our canvas page link.• If these times are not possible for you, email me with another day and time and we can schedule a meeting.
Course Overview	This research seminar allows students to apply the skills they learn as a history major to specific topics that vary from semester-to-semester. This particular seminar allows students to explore topics related to environmental inequality in the United States from 1945 to the present. Such inequalities regarding the natural environment can stem from obvious differences involving race, class, and gender, but are often also based on more subtle distinctions involving age, physical disability, sexual orientation, political affiliation, and cultural practice. For the final project, students will identify a site where environmental discrimination took place, conduct research on the historical actors affected at the site and their actions for environmental justice, and write a final research paper on their chosen topic (see below for more details).

Semester Schedule	<p>The schedule for the semester is divided into three parts. We will spend the first three weeks learning about the overall history of the United States since 1945. Beginning in week 4, we will shift our attention to understanding how one does historical research. This will include reading assignments and in-class discussions that will help students choose a research topic, locate archival sources, and organize their research data. Finally, the last 2 weeks of the semester will be dedicated to a “Paper Writing Workshop,” during which the entire class will critique outlines for your papers as well as the rough draft of your final paper project.</p>
Local Research	<p>One of the goals of the Federated History Department’s senior research seminar is to familiarize students with both local history and its archival opportunities. To foster this, during the early part of the semester we will take 2 “field trips” to local archives located at Rutgers University’s Dana Library and the Newark Public Library. Both of these trips to nearby archives will be undertaken during our normal class hours.</p>
Mapping Your Work Online	<p>Throughout the semester students will upload their course assignments to an Environmental Justice Mapping Website that I have created for this course (link here: ejhistory.com). The website will include a shared map that locates each of your chosen sites in geographic relation to one another, as well as links to your own “personal project webpage” that has been created for each student. The goal of this website and digital archive is to provide an open-source, interactive, geographic database of environmental justice sites, and their history, in the Newark region and beyond.</p>
Course Goals	<p>There are four major goals for this course.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students will understand the history of environmental inequality in the post-World War II United States. • Students will locate both primary and secondary source materials relevant to the history of their chosen environmental justice site. • Students will use those primary and secondary sources to analyze, organize, and write a final historical research paper on their chosen site. • Students will share their research with the public by uploading all of their historical data to the course’s web-based environmental justice database and digital archive.
Attendance and Class Participation	<p>This is an important component of your final grade. Because this is a seminar-style course, class participation should involve active listening and engagement (more than just showing up and sitting in class). It is essential that reading be done on time, each day before we meet, and that everyone come to class ready to raise questions and participate actively. Absence from class means you won’t be able to participate, and doing so will therefore affect your grade. If you do miss a class meeting, you are responsible for finding out what was missed and making up any assignments. Attendance will be taken during each class session.</p>

Reading	<p>Reading assignments will average approximately 75-100 pages per week and will consist of three types of materials. During the initial 3 weeks of the semester, we will read articles on the history the United States and environmental inequality since 1945. Next, during the middle of the semester, we will read a book that explains how historians “do” historical research — this book will help you choose a research topic, locate source materials for that topic, organize your research, and also help you outline and write your final assignments. Finally, during the last several weeks of the course, you will be reading your own research materials — the secondary and primary sources that you have collected for your project — as well as your classmates’ written work.</p>
Assignments	<p>Because this is a senior research seminar for history majors, this class will be a writing-intensive course. However, you will also have opportunities to express your research in non-written form. For each assignment, I will provide detailed directions beforehand. You will be graded on both your <i>ideas</i> and your <i>writing</i>.</p> <p>On-Line Reader’s Responses: Before many of our class meetings you will be asked to post to Canvas a “Reader’s Response” to the assigned reading. Directions for each “Reader’s Response” can be found on our Canvas page under each week’s assignment. To locate these directions, log into our course Canvas webpage, go to the week for which you are submitting a response, and click on the “Post Reader’s Response Here” tab. The tab will then open in another window, and you will see my directions for that particular Reader’s Response assignment.</p> <p>Historical Data Collection: For your final research project, you will first choose a specific site where environmental injustice occurred during the post-World War II period. This place can be many things – a public park, a toxic waste site, even a golf course. It can also come in a wide variety of sizes: it can be as small as an individual building or a street corner or as large or larger than an entire neighborhood. After choosing your site, you will complete the following 5 assignments, all of which will become components to your final written project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Project Site Description:</i> This short assignment entails describing the environmental inequality that took place at your chosen site, and explaining its importance. For this assignment you will also “pin” your site location on our course webpage’s interactive map. (1 Page/Due: Week 6) • <i>Secondary Source Report:</i> For this assignment you will locate books and articles, written by other scholars, that will provide historical context for your chosen site. You will then explain how these sources will help with your own project, and also how your project will be distinct (i.e. original or different) from these same sources. (2-3 Pages /Due: Week 7) • <i>Primary Source Report:</i> For this assignment you will locate several primary sources related to your chosen site. You will then choose one of these sources, undertake a close reading of it for evidence, and write a short report that makes an argument about the meaning of the source for your environmental justice site. (2-3 Pages: Due: Week 7)

- *Image Analysis or Scientific Data Analysis:* You will have two options for this assignment. For the Image Analysis you will locate an historical image or images of your chosen site, and undertake a close analytical “reading” of the image(s). Such images can include maps, photographs, film clips, and even artist’s renderings. Alternatively, for the Scientific Data Analysis you will analyze a set of data that is relevant to your chosen site. This data can be from a government report, an independent study of your site, or data gathered from the Environmental Protection Agency’s “EJ Screen.” We will have tutorials during the semester about both of these assignments. (2-3 Pages /Due: Week 10)
- *Oral Interview or Video Story:* This assignment also allows two options. First, you may conduct an oral interview with someone who was involved in the history of your chosen site (20-30 minutes long). This can be a local resident living nearby, an activist who raised public attention, a worker who labored at the site, or anyone with a personal relationship to your site. Or you may instead create a short video story about your site (less than 5 minutes long). This can involve you visiting the site, explaining one of your sources, or telling the story of environmental discrimination that took place at your site. We will have tutorials during the semester about both of these assignments. (Due: Week 14)

Final Report:

The assignments listed above will serve as building blocks for your final project, which will be a 14-16 page multi-media web-based report on your chosen environmental justice site. This length equates to between 3,500 and 4,000 words, and the count should NOT include footnotes. Please make sure your final submission is the appropriate length. The assignments below will help you with this final report:

- *Paper Outline:* This will be a detailed outline that you will rely on while writing your final paper. (Due: Week 13)
- *Paper Draft:* The last two weeks of the course will be devoted to discussion of paper drafts. Students will provide copies of their papers (or as much of the paper as possible) so that we may discuss them in class. (Due: Week 15 & 16)
- *Final Paper:* The paper will be between 14-16 pages in length. (Due: May 6)

Grading

Consistent effort and improvement will be weighted heavily in grading, which will be apportioned as follows:

- | | |
|--|-----|
| • In-Class Participation and On-Line Reader’s Responses: | 25% |
| • Historical Data Collection Assignments: | 25% |
| • Final Research Paper | 50% |

Late Submissions: Written Assignments (other than reading responses) will lose one grade for every day late (A to A-, A- to B+, etc.). Assignments will not be accepted more than 1 week late.

Required Texts	<p>The majority of the readings for this class will be available for download on our Canvas site. You will, however, be required to purchase a hard copy of the following book (available for purchase online or at the NJIT bookstore):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Craft of Research</i>, by Booth, et. al. (University of Chicago Press, 2008). Fourth Edition (This must be the 4th edition) <p>Note: Please remember to bring a hard copy of the articles and book to class when we are reading them (no electronic copies). We will constantly refer to these readings during in-class discussions. Make sure you purchase a hard copy of the book.</p>
Academic Integrity	<p>The Federated History Department takes the NJIT honor code seriously and enforces it strictly (link here: NJIT code). If you plagiarize our writing assignments, I will be forced to report you to the Dean of Students. If you are unsure whether or not you are plagiarizing while completing these writing assignments, please contact me before handing the assignment in to discuss.</p>
AI Policy	<p>The use of AI software (ChatGPT, Garmmarly, etc.) is not allowed in this class. If you use it for any of the assignments, our Canvas platform will detect it and you will not receive credit for the assignment.</p>
Federated History Department	<p>The history department at NJIT has seven full-time faculty members, and is part of the Federated History Department at NJIT—Rutgers University, Newark. There are approximately 24 faculty members across the street in the Rutgers, Newark history department. Because these two departments are Federated, NJIT and Rutgers students can take history courses offered at either institution. The NJIT History Department also offers a pre-law major called Law, Technology and Culture or LTC (link here: LTC), and a minor in history.</p> <p>On the graduate level, the Federated Department of History also administers a joint Rutgers—NJIT master’s program in history, which offers two joint degrees (link here: MA program): the Master of Arts (MA) and the Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT). Fields of concentration are available in American History, World History, and the History of Technology, Environment and Medicine/Health. Application is made to the program at Rutgers-Newark.</p>

Course Schedule

Part I	Understanding the History of Post-1945 America
	<p style="text-align: center;">Week 1</p> <p>January 22 The Syllabus <u>Required Reading:</u> The syllabus (in class)</p> <p><u>In-Class Discussion:</u> The course website and your potential research project</p> <p><u>In-Class Assignment:</u> Brainstorming Our Classroom “Community Agreement”</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;">Week 2</p> <p>January 27 Defining Environmental Inequality <u>Required Reading:</u> Cole & Foster, <i>From the Ground Up: Environmental Racism and the Rise of the Environmental Justice Movement</i>, pps. 1-33.</p> <p><u>Assignment:</u> Reader’s Response on reading (due on Canvas, 8:00 a.m. day of class).</p> <p>January 29 Race vs. Class – Los Angeles, California <u>Required Reading:</u> Mike Davis, “The Case for Letting Malibu Burn,” <i>Environmental History Review</i> 19, no. 2 (Summer, 1995), pp. 1-36.</p> <p><u>Assignment:</u> Reader’s Response on reading (due on Canvas, 8:00 a.m. day of class).</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;">Week 3</p> <p>February 3 Grassroots Activism– San Antonio, Texas <u>Required Reading:</u> Char Miller, “Streetscape Environmentalism: Floods, Social Justice, and Political Power in San Antonio, 1921–1974,” <i>Southwestern Historical Quarterly</i> CXVIII, no. 2 (October 2014): 159-177.</p> <p><u>Assignment:</u> Reader’s Response on reading (due on Canvas, 8:00 a.m. day of class).</p>

February 5	Environmental Justice – Newark, New Jersey <u>Required Reading:</u> “The Cold War,” and “The Affluent Society,” in <i>The American Yawp</i> : 376-437. <u>In-Class Viewing:</u> Documentary (31 minutes): <i>The Sacrifice Zone</i> (link – click at bottom of page to stream video) <u>Assignment:</u> Reader’s Response on reading (due on Canvas, 8:00 a.m. day of class).
<hr/>	
February 10	<p style="text-align: center;">Week 4</p> Class Trip to Dana Library <u>Required Reading:</u> “The Sixties” and “The Unravelling” in <i>The American Yawp</i> : 257-313. <u>Assignment:</u> Reader’s Response on reading (due on Canvas, 8:00 a.m. day of class).
February 12	Class Trip to Newark Public Library <u>Required Reading:</u> “Triumph of the Right” and “The Recent Past” in <i>The American Yawp</i> : 314-375. Beth Zack-Cohen, “Newark Public Library: Finding Aid,” 1-4. “Additional NPL Environmental Justice Archival Sources,” 1-2. <u>Assignment:</u> Reader’s Response on reading (due on Canvas, 8:00 a.m. day of class).
<hr/>	
Part II	Doing History
<hr/>	
February 17	<p style="text-align: center;">Week 5</p> From Historical Questions to Research Topic <u>Required Reading:</u> Booth, <i>Craft of Research</i> , pages 33-64 <u>In-Class Required Watching:</u> 3 videos on our course website and digital archive (see links on canvas page) <u>Assignment:</u> Reader’s Response on reading (due on Canvas, 8:00 a.m. day of class). Hand Out: Site Description Instructions

February 19	<p>Locating and Using Source Materials</p> <p><u>Required Reading:</u> Booth, <i>Craft of Research</i>, pages 65-104.</p> <p><u>Assignment:</u> Reader's Response on reading (due on Canvas, 8:00 a.m. day of class).</p> <p>Hand Out: Secondary Source Report Instructions</p>
February 24	<p style="text-align: right;">Week 6</p> <p>Project Site Description Workshop</p> <p><u>Required Reading:</u> Classmates' "Project Site Description"</p> <p><u>Assignments:</u> 1. Project Site Description (due on course website, Sat, Feb. 22 by midnight) 2. Written comments on your classmates' proposals (due in class)</p>
February 26	<p>How to Read Primary Sources to Make Arguments</p> <p><u>Required Reading:</u> Booth, <i>Craft of Research</i>, pages 105-172.</p> <p><u>Assignment:</u> Reader's Response on reading (due on Canvas, 8:00 a.m. day of class).</p> <p>Hand Out: Primary Source Report Instructions</p>
March 3	<p style="text-align: right;">Week 7</p> <p>Secondary Source Workshop</p> <p><u>Required Reading:</u> Classmates' "Secondary Source Report"</p> <p><u>Assignment:</u> 1. Secondary Source Report (due on course website, Sat, March 1 by midnight) 2. Written comments on your classmate's Secondary Source Report (due in class)</p>
March 5	<p>Image Analysis Tutorial</p> <p><u>Required Reading:</u> Cindy Ott, "Visual Details as Clues," unpublished essay, 1-15.</p> <p><u>Assignment:</u> Reader's Response on reading (due on Canvas, 8:00 a.m. day of class).</p> <p>Hand Out: Image Analysis Instructions</p>

<hr/>	
	Week 8
March 10	Primary Source Workshop <u>Required Reading:</u> Classmates' Primary Source Report <u>Assignment:</u> 1. Primary Source Report (due on course website, Sat., March 8, by 5:00 pm) 2. Written comments on your classmate's Primary Source Report (due in class)
March 12	Scientific Data Analysis Tutorial <u>Required Reading:</u> "EJSCREEN Users Guide," 1-74 (skim) <u>Required Watching:</u> "EJSCREEN Tutorial: Basic Features," available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=22&v=N1ntgL93cgY (6 minutes long) "EJSCREEN Tutorial: Generating Reports," available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=249&v=pCjFo30qRBE (8 minutes on DATA) "How to Interpret an EJSCREEN Standard Report, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=47&v=eZ8-9Mx8UgI (5 minutes long on DATA) "EJSCREEN Tutorial: Basic Add Maps Feature," available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=111&v=N1ntgL93cgY (4 minutes long on MAPPING) "EJSCREEN Tutorial: Advanced "Add Map" Features, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=24&v=4RSJ0nI0moc (4 minutes on MAPPING) <u>Assignment:</u> Reader's Response in which you pull scientific data from EJSCREEN (due on Canvas, 8:00 a.m. day of class). Hand Out: Data Analysis Instructions
<hr/>	
	Week 9: Spring Break – No Class
March 17 & 19	Write Your Image or Data Reports <u>Required Reading:</u> None.

	Week 10
March 24	Image and Data Analysis Workshop <u>Required Reading:</u> Classmates' Image or Data Analysis Reports <u>Assignment:</u> 1. Image or Scientific Data Analysis Report (due on course website, Saturday, March 22, by midnight). 2. Written comments on your classmate's Primary Source Report (due in class)
March 26	The Art of Outlining <u>Required Reading:</u> Booth, <i>Craft of Research</i> , 173-186; and your own research <u>Assignment:</u> Reader's Response on reading (due on Canvas, 8:00 a.m. day of class). Hand Out: Outline Instructions
	Week 11
March 31	Oral Interview Tutorial <u>Required Reading:</u> "Oral History Best Practices: Introduction": 1-11. <u>Assignment:</u> Reader's Response on reading (due on Canvas, 8:00 a.m. day of class). Hand Out: Oral Interview Instructions (due in 3 weeks)
April 2	Video Story Tutorial <u>Required Watching:</u> iMovie video (to be determined) <u>Assignment:</u> Reader's Response on reading (due on Canvas, 8:00 a.m. day of class). Hand Out: Video Story Instructions (due in 3 weeks)

<hr/>	
	Week 12
April 7	Individual Meetings — Discussing Your Outlines <u>Required Reading:</u> None <u>Assignment:</u> Outline Drafts (due to me Sat, April 5 at midnight)
April 9	When and How to Footnote <u>Required Reading:</u> Booth, <i>Craft of Research</i> , 187-202 & 273-276. <u>Assignment:</u> Reader's Response on reading (due on Canvas, 8:00 a.m. day of class).
<hr/>	
	Week 13
April 14	Outline Workshop I <u>Required Reading:</u> Classmates' outlines. <u>Assignment:</u> 1. Draft of paper outline (due by email to everyone, Sat. April 12, by midnight) 2. Written comments on your classmates' outlines (due in class)
April 16	Outlining Workshop II <u>Required Reading:</u> Classmate's outlines <u>Assignment:</u> 1. Draft of paper outline (due by email to everyone by Sat. April 14, by midnight) 2. Written comments on your classmates' outlines (due in class)
<hr/>	
	Week 14
April 21	Oral Interview and Video Story Workshop <u>Required Watching/Listening:</u> Classmates' interviews or video essays <u>Assignment:</u> 1. Oral Interview or Video Essay (due on course website Sat. April 19, midnight) 2. Written Comments on your classmates' interviews/video stories (due in class)

April 23	How to Write Introductions and Conclusions <u>Required Reading:</u> Booth, <i>Craft of Research</i> , 232-248. <u>Assignment:</u> Reader's Response on reading (due on Canvas, 8:00 a.m. day of class)
Part III	Paper Writing Workshop
	Week 15
April 28	Individual Meetings — Your Introductions <u>Required Writing:</u> Draft of your paper Introduction (email to me on Sat., April 26, by midnight)
April 30	Draft Workshop I <u>Required Reading:</u> One another's Paper Drafts <u>Assignment:</u> 1. Paper Drafts (due on Canvas, Monday, April 28, 5:00 p.m.) 2. Written Comments on your classmates Paper Drafts (due in class)
	Week 16
May 5	Draft Workshop II <u>Required Reading:</u> One another's Paper Drafts <u>Assignment:</u> 1. Paper Drafts (due on Canvas, Saturday, May 3, by 5:00 p.m.) 2. Written Comments on your classmates Paper Drafts (due in class)
May 7	Final Reports Due (on course website by 9:00 am)