

HSS 404 Environmental Inequality and Justice in Postwar America



Semester	Fall 2025
Instructor	Prof. Neil Maher (he/him) maher@njit.edu 973-596-6348 (office); 646-325-3704 (cell)
Time	Tuesdays & Thursdays, 10:00-11:20 a.m.
Location	Kupfrian Hall, Room 209
Office Hours	Cullimore Hall, 325 Tuesdays & Thursdays, 8:30 – 9:30 a.m.; 1:30 – 2:30 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.• Email me at maher@njit.edu to schedule a meeting at another day/time.
Course Overview	This senior 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	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.

Local Research	One of the goals of NJIT's HSS senior research seminars is to encourage students to pursue research on local topics. 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.
Mapping Your Work Online	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.
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	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.
Reading	Reading assignments will average approximately 50-75 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.

Assignments

Because this is an HSS research seminar, 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 *ideas* and your *writing*.

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.

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:

- *Project Site Description:* 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 Paragraph/Due: Week 6)
- *Secondary Source Report:* 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. (1.5-2 Pages /Due: Week 8)
- *Primary Source Report:* 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. (1.5-2 Pages: Due: Week 9)
- *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 13)*

Final Report:

The assignments listed above will serve as building blocks for your final project, which will be a 12-page multi-media web-based report on your chosen environmental justice site. This length equates to approximately 3,000 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 12)*
- *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)*
- *Final Paper:* The paper will be between 10-12 pages in length. *(Due Dec 16)*

Grading

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

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|--|-----|
| • 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

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):

- *The Craft of Research*, by Booth, et. al. (University of Chicago Press, 2008). Fourth Edition (**This must be the 4th edition**)

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.**

Academic Integrity

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.

AI Policy

The use of AI software (ChatGPT, Grammarly, etc.) is not allowed in this class for the following reasons:

- AI hurts students by outsourcing critical thinking regarding reading assignments.
- AI robs students of the opportunity to improve their own writing.
- AI steals intellectual property without the consent of the authors (including mine).
- AI require an enormous amount of computing energy that contributes to climate change.

If you use it for any of the assignments, our Canvas platform will detect it when you submit the paper and you will receive no credit for the assignment.

Federated History Department

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.

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.

Course Schedule

Part I	Understanding Environmental Inequality in Post-World War II America
Week 1	
September 2	<p>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>
September 4	<p>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 (due on Canvas, 8:00 a.m. before class).</p>
Week 2	
September 11	<p>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 (due on Canvas , 8:00 a.m. before class).</p>
September 9	<p>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 (due on Canvas , 8:00 a.m. before class).</p>

	Week 3
September 16	<p>Environmental Justice – Newark, New Jersey</p> <p><u>Required Reading:</u> “The Cold War,” and “The Affluent Society,” in <i>The American Yawp</i>: 376-437.</p> <p><u>In-Class Viewing:</u> Documentary (31 minutes): <i>The Sacrifice Zone</i> (link – click at bottom of page to stream video)</p> <p><u>Assignment:</u> Reader’s Response (due on Canvas, 8:00 a.m. before class).</p>
September 18	<p>Class Trip to Newark Public Library</p> <p><u>Required Reading:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Beth Zack-Cohen, “Newark Public Library: Finding Aid,” 1-4. “The Sixties” and “The Unravelling” in <i>The American Yawp</i>: 257-313. “Additional NPL Environmental Justice Archival Sources,” 1-2. <p><u>Assignment:</u> Reader’s Response (due on Canvas, 8:00 a.m. before class).</p>
Part II	Doing History
	Week 4
September 23	<p>Class Trip to Dana Library</p> <p><u>Required Reading:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> “Triumph of the Right” and “The Recent Past” in <i>The American Yawp</i>: 314-375. Skim the Rutgers Library Finding Guide titled “Environmental Inequality in America on our Canvas page. <p><u>Assignment:</u> Reader’s Response (due on Canvas, 8:00 a.m. before class).</p>
September 25	<p>Historical Context of <i>The American Yawp</i></p> <p><u>Required Reading:</u> Finish up <i>American Yawp</i> reading.</p> <p><u>Assignment:</u> Reader’s Response on Yawp reading (due on Canvas , 8:00 a.m. before class).</p> <p><u>In-Class Quiz:</u> On <i>American Yawp</i> reading.</p>

Week 5

September 30

From Historical Questions to Research Topic

Required Reading:

Booth, *Craft of Research*, pages 33-64

In-Class Required Watching:

Three ejhistory.com video tutorials (see links on canvas page)

Assignment:

Reader's Response (due on Canvas, 8:00 a.m. before class).

[Hand Out: Site Description Instructions](#) (due next Monday, October 6).

October 2

Wellness Day – No Class

Required Reading:

None

Assignment:

Work on writing your Site Description

Week 6

October 7

Project Site Description Workshop I

Required Reading:

Classmates' "Project Site Description"

Assignments:

1. Project Site Description (post to ejhistory.com AND email to classmates as word document on Mon. Oct 6 by 8:00 am)
2. Written comments on classmates' Site Descriptions (bring hard copy to class)

October 9

Project Site Description Workshop II

Required Reading:

Classmates' "Project Site Description"

Assignments:

Written comments on classmates' Site Descriptions (bring hard copy to class)

Week 7

October 14 **Locating Secondary Sources & Taking Notes**
Required Reading:
Booth, *Craft of Research*, pages 65-104.

Assignments:
Reader's Response (due on Canvas, 8:00 a.m. before class).

Hand Out: [Secondary Source Report Instructions](#) (due Oct 21).

October 16 **How to Read Primary Sources to Make Arguments**
Required Reading:
Booth, *Craft of Research*, pages 105-172.

Assignments:
Reader's Response (due on Canvas, 8:00 a.m. before class).

Hand Out: [Primary Source Report Instructions](#) (due Oct 28)

Week 8

October 21 **Image Analysis Tutorial**
Required Reading:
Cindy Ott, "Visual Details as Clues," unpublished essay, 1-15.

Assignments:

1. Reader's Response (due on Canvas, 8:00 a.m. before class).
2. Secondary Source Report (post to ejhistory.com before class)

Hand Out: [Image Analysis Instructions](#) (due Nov. 4th)

October 23 **Scientific Data Analysis Tutorial**
Required Reading:
"EJSCREEN Users Guide," 1-74 (skim)

Required Watching:
"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)

Assignments:

Reader's Response on EJSCREEN (due on Canvas, 8:00 a.m. before class).

[Hand Out: Data Analysis Instructions](#) (due Nov. 4th)

Week 9

October 28

Mid-Semester Individual Meetings

Required Reading:

My comments on your Site Description and Secondary Source Report

Assignments:

Primary Source Report (post to ejhistory.com, Mon. Oct 27 by 8:00 a.m.)

Meeting Discussion Topics:

1. Your Site Description
2. Your Secondary Source Report
3. Your Primary Source Report
4. Your plans for Image or Data Analysis (due next week)

October 30

Mid-Semester Individual Meetings

Required Reading:

My comments on your Site Description and Secondary Source Report

Assignments:

Primary Source Report (post to ejhistory.com, Mon. Oct 27 by 8:00 a.m.)

Meeting Discussion Topics:

5. Your Site Description
6. Your Secondary Source Report
7. Your Primary Source Report
8. Your plans for Image or Data Analysis (due next week)

Week 10

November 4

Oral Interview Tutorial

Required Reading:

"Oral History Best Practices: Introduction": 1-11.
"Guideline for Social Justice Oral History": 1-20.

Assignments:

1. Reader's Response (due on Canvas, 8:00 a.m. before class).
2. Your Oral History or Video (post to ejhistory.com before class)

[Hand Out: Oral Interview Instructions](#) (this or Video Story due in 3 weeks)

November 6

Video Story Tutorial

Required Watching:

iMovie video (to be determined)

Assignments:

Reader's Response (due on Canvas, 8:00 a.m. before class).

[Hand Out: Video Story Instructions](#) (this or Oral Interview due in 3 weeks)

Week 11

November 11

The Art of Outlining

Required Reading:

Booth, *Craft of Research*, 173-186; and your own research

Assignments:

Reader's Response (due on Canvas, 8:00 a.m. before class).

[Hand Out: Outline Instructions](#) (Due next week)

November 13

How to Write Introductions and Conclusions

Required Reading:

Booth, *Craft of Research*, 232-248.

Assignment:

Reader's Response (due on Canvas, 8:00 a.m. before class)

[Hand Out: Introduction and Conclusion Instructions](#) (due Mon., Dec. 1)

	Week 12
November 18	<p>Outlining Workshop I</p> <p><u>Required Reading:</u> Classmate's outlines</p> <p><u>Assignments:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Paper Outline Draft (email to classmates by Sun. Nov. 16. by 8:00 a.m.) 2. Written comments on classmates' outlines (bring hard copy to class)
November 20	<p>Outline Workshop II</p> <p><u>Required Reading:</u> Classmates' outlines.</p> <p><u>Assignments:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Paper Outline Draft (email to classmates by Sun. Nov. 16. by 8:00 a.m.) 2. Written comments on classmates' outlines (bring hard copy to class)
	Week 13
November 25	<p>When and How to Footnote</p> <p><u>Required Reading:</u> Booth, <i>Craft of Research</i>, 187-202 & 273-276.</p> <p><u>Assignments:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reader's Response (due on Canvas, 8:00 a.m. day of class). 2. Your Video Story or Oral Interview (post to ejhistory.com by class time)
November 27	<p>Thanksgiving – No Class</p> <p><u>Required Reading:</u> Your Research Materials</p> <p><u>Assignment:</u> Write your Introduction Draft</p>
Part III	Paper Writing Workshop
	Week 14
December 2	<p>End-of-Semester Individual Meetings</p> <p><u>Meeting Discussion Topics:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Your Introduction (post to ejhistory.com by Monday, Dec 1 at 8:00 a.m.) 2. Your Video Story or Oral Interview

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Your Revised Outline 4. Your Intro Draft
<p>December 4</p>	<p>End-of-Semester Individual Meetings <u>Assignments Due for Meeting:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Your Introduction (post to ejhistory.com by Monday, Dec 1 at 8:00 a.m.) 2. Your Video Story or Oral Interview 3. Your Revised Outline <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">Week 15</p> <p>December 9</p> <p>Draft Workshop I <u>Required Reading:</u> One another's Paper Drafts</p> <p><u>Assignment:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Paper Drafts (email to class as word document on Mon., Dec. 8 by 8:00 a.m.) 2. Written Comments on classmates Paper Drafts (bring hard copy to class) <p>December 11</p> <p>Draft Workshop II <u>Required Reading:</u> One another's Paper Drafts</p> <p><u>Assignment:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Paper Drafts (email to class as word document on Wed., Dec. 10 by 8:00 a.m.) 2. Written Comments on classmates Paper Drafts (bring hard copy to class) <hr/>
<p>December 16</p>	<p>Final Papers Due (post to ejhistory.com by 9:00 a.m.)</p>