

Department of African American & African Studies: AFRO 1905 Course Syllabus |Fall 2025
African American Environmental Thought Ecologies| University of Minnesota

Course Modality : **Face-to-Face**

Class meeting link :

Instructional Time : **Tu/Th 02:30pm - 03:45pm**

Instructor : Dominique Hazzard

Email : Canvas

Course Assistant : TBA

Online Office Hours :

Credits : Three (3) credits

Course Assistant :

Course Description: What is the relationship between humans and nature? What are the root causes of environmental problems? How can we build sustainable societies? Black activists, artists, scholars, and folks have engaged these questions throughout American history – and shaped policy, living and labor practices, and the landscape itself in the process. This course examines how black ecological thought has both challenged and contributed to dominant environmental frameworks across the 20th and 21st centuries.

Course Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Understand and apply the framework of Black Ecologies to environmental debates.
 - Articulate the relationship between mainstream environmentalism and African American environmentalism.
 - Our exploration of African American environmental thought will also serve as a vehicle to help us practice some of the key skills that historians and Black Studies scholars use.
- Specifically, we'll learn to:
- Use primary sources to describe, contextualize, and interpret historical and contemporary events.
 - Articulate, analyze, and use arguments made by scholarly articles, secondary sources, film, and works of literature.

Course Structure:

Our class time will blend short lectures, discussion of pre- and in class readings, group viewing of films, and small group engagement with primary sources.

To prepare for this work in class, you'll complete a pre-reading assignment each day. This is a reading-intensive class; the pre-readings average 30 pages per day. All readings are available on eReserves.

Name/Pronouns:

I will do my best to address you by a name or gender pronoun that you have identified. Please advise me early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records.

CLE Requirements

AFRO 19XX is designed to meet the Council of Liberal Education's requirements of Race, Power, & Justice in the United States.

Race, Power, & Justice in the United States Theme

It is by now an established fact that marginalized populations, whether BIPOC, queer, immigrant, or low-income communities are disproportionately affected by the climate crisis, which has huge implications on human life. Indeed, multiple, subtle, and intersectional forms of oppression dictate who gets dumped on, and who gets resources to mitigate wildfires, floods, droughts, and other disasters. At the same time, racism, classism, and other forms of discrimination continue to permeate environmental justice movements, where the erasure of marginalized voices has made people of color particularly invisible. In *Confronting Environmental Racism: Voices from the Grassroots* (1993), Dr Robert Bullard, widely considered the “father of environmental justice” explains that he introduced the discipline in the early 1980s to dispel the myth or misconception that African Americans and other people of color don’t care about climate science. For Bullard, environmental racism is a symptom of a larger pathology, which consistently alienates the marginalized from their environment, from each other, and from themselves. This course considers the ways African American communities continue to face the brunt of the climate crisis, and how scholars, activists, and creative practitioners deploy various approaches to raise awareness and influence policy regarding the environmental challenges that beset them. It interrogates how environmental alienation and eco-racism transform human relations with nature and, as a result, the impact of societies on the natural environment and vice-versa. It attests to the ways people of African descent in the United States engage in the making and the remaking of other possible worlds. Course modules will focus on issues related to climate change, economic shocks and various struggles to enable social worlds to find more equitable, sustainable, and healthy ways of inhabiting their place, as well as strengthen historical self-understanding. We will discuss potential actions and priorities that will lessen the threat of ruin and begin to build a more peaceful, sane, and secure world for all.

Classroom Decorum & Course Content

We enter this course with a range of different positions on and opinions about the topics we will be discussing. We will leave this course with a range of different positions on and opinions about the topics we will have discussed. This is a good and necessary thing. What is neither good nor necessary, however, is that we disrespect each other because of these differences. Some of the material we cover may be emotionally difficult or frustrating for some students. Some of it may force students to encounter worldviews or ideas they were previously unfamiliar or uncomfortable with. As stated above, while we should feel free to express our divergent points of view, it is important that our discussions remain civil, respectful, and mindful of our various ways of being in the world.

Some of the materials in this course will include profanity, sexual situations, scenes or descriptions of racial and/or sexual violence, depictions of death, and other descriptions or representations that may be disturbing for some students. While it is not my pedagogical practice to provide “trigger warnings” in class, you should feel free to talk with me individually about any potential concerns you

might have in this regard so that I can work to better prepare you for disturbing content. Further, if you anticipate having difficulty with the course material, I encourage you to engage in appropriate self-care measures, including doing research on any films we will be watching ahead of time and logging out of class or viewing sessions that are difficult for you to view or engage with.

Grading Policies

1. Class Participation (25 %). In addition to preparing for and attending each class, we expect that you will commit to participating and learning actively. During whole class discussions and small group collaborative work, we'll be relying on each other's contributions to make class interesting, dynamic, and worthwhile. We encourage you to ask your classmates follow-up questions; collaborate generously and disagree respectfully; cite evidence to make your claims; make comparisons or connections between different texts and ideas; ask questions when you don't understand or need help; and to be willing to venture a guess or take an intellectual risk.

2. Writing Assignments (40%): You will be called upon to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the course material through writing assignments consisting of roughly 3-6 short answer questions. These assignments will be administered via Canvas and available for a 24-hour period on the specified day. These assignments will require you to write between 100 and 250 words in response to each prompt. Note that while the word count is indicative, not exact, any answer that that substantially exceeds, or falls substantially short of the above word count will not be accepted. The assignments will assess your understanding of the material covered in assigned readings, viewings, class discussions, and lectures. While the assignments are open book/open notes, meaning that you are free to use any resources from class, thorough grounding in the material before the opening of the exams on Canvas is a requisite for successful completion of the exams. Note, however, that no resources outside of the course readings/viewings may be used. Furthermore, the exams are strictly individual endeavors. Therefore, students may not share study notes or summaries of the lecture content and NO communication with any other human is allowed in any form (either real-time communication or delayed form). Note, too, that students are required to use their own words and phrasing instead of cutting and pasting from course material. To help students focus and prepare, discussion prompts will be embedded within each of the course modules. A useful way to prepare therefore will be to refer to these prompts, as well as to lecture notes and assigned readings. Late work will be penalized a one grade notch (e.g., B- to C+) if submitted within the hour immediately following the due date/time. Thereafter, your grade will drop by a letter (e.g., B to C). No work will be accepted past the closure of the Canvas course portal without a documented excuse.

3. Group Presentations (10%): During weeks eleven to thirteen of class, each group will showcase a primary source related to the history of African American environmental thought and provide a presentation that analyzes the source and connects it to the themes of the course.

4. Final Report (25%): Students will submit a 7–8-page (typed and single-spaced) essay in which they will discuss their awakening to environmental injustice, including the contribution of this class to environmental sustainability. This is a reflective essay therefore the tone will be informal yet confident and authoritative; engaging, but not colloquial; structured and consistent, yet not casual. The focus of the essay will be two-fold: (i) a reflection of your awakening to environmental consciousness. Have you been a climate denier? Have you had to sway climate deniers within your immediate environment? Do you feel that the looming of climate apocalypse is over-exaggerated? What novel insights for environmental ethics, if any, might you have gained from AFRO 19XX? As discussed in class, policy makers continually must navigate between the possibilities and constraints

of science to influence and determine policymaking. Given the reality of policy as a product of compromises between different agendas and interests, what – in your estimation – is the single most significant challenge in formulating environmentally sensitive, culturally aware, financially acceptable and community-relevant policy? Please refer to course material as applicable. Do you believe that going forward you are well equipped and adequately resourced to identify and evaluate credible information concerning the environment? Why or why not? Given the complexity of cutting through the tangles that complicate the landscape of environmental activism, what is the one issue that this course did best in helping lay bare? What is the one aspect of the course that could have better addressed? What could have improved your learning experience? Please explain your answer and provide examples where necessary. (ii) A consideration of your commitment to challenging business models that are not environmentally friendly. In other words, how will the knowledge that you have acquired in this class serve you in your future endeavors. Beyond the 7-8 pages an additional page or two may be included for photos, newspaper clippings of important events, etc. Note that course assignments will serve as scaffolding for this summative essay.

The final grade will be determined as follows:

- Class participation		25%
- In-Class Writing Exercises/Homework Assignments		40%
- Group Presentation		10%
- Final Report		25%

Your final grade will be determined by the percentage of score earned:

A (94-100%)	A- (90-93%)	B+ (87-89%)	B (83-86%)	B- (80-82%)
C+ (77-79%)	C (73-76%)	C- (70-72%)	D+ (67-69%)	D (60-66%)
S (70 % & above)				

University Policies

Student Conduct Code

The University seeks an environment that promotes academic achievement and integrity, that is protective of free inquiry, and that serves the educational mission of the University. Similarly, the University seeks a community that is free from violence, threats, and intimidation; that is respectful of the rights, opportunities, and welfare of students, faculty, staff, and guests of the University; and that does not threaten the physical or mental health or safety of members of the University community.

As a student at the University you are expected to adhere to Board of Regents Policy: Student Conduct Code. To review the Student Conduct Code, please see:

https://regents.umn.edu/sites/regents.umn.edu/files/2019-09/policy_student_conduct_code.pdf

Note that the conduct code specifically addresses disruptive classroom conduct, which means "engaging in behavior that substantially or repeatedly interrupts either the instructor's ability to teach and/or a student's ability to learn." The classroom extends to any setting where a student is engaged in work toward academic credit or satisfaction of program-based requirements or related activities.

Scholastic Dishonesty

You are expected to do your own academic work and cite sources as necessary. Failing to do so is scholastic dishonesty. Scholastic dishonesty means plagiarizing; cheating on assignments or examinations; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work; taking, acquiring, or using test materials without faculty permission; submitting false or incomplete records of academic achievement; acting alone or in cooperation with another to falsify records or to obtain dishonestly grades, honors, awards, or professional endorsement; altering, forging, or misusing a University academic record; or fabricating or falsifying data, research procedures, or data analysis.

(Student Conduct Code:

https://regents.umn.edu/sites/regents.umn.edu/files/2019-09/policy_student_conduct_code.pdf)

If it is determined that a student has cheated, the student may be given an "F" or an "N" for the course, and may face additional sanctions from the University. For additional information, please see: <https://policy.umn.edu/education/instructorresp>.

The Office for Community Standards has compiled a useful list of Frequently Asked Questions pertaining to scholastic dishonesty: <https://communitystandards.umn.edu/avoid-violations/avoiding-scholastic-dishonesty>.

If you have additional questions, please clarify with your instructor for the course. Your instructor can respond to your specific questions regarding what would constitute scholastic dishonesty in the context of a particular class, e.g., whether collaboration on assignments is permitted, requirements and methods for citing sources, if electronic aids are permitted or prohibited during an exam.

Makeup Work for Legitimate Absences

Students will not be penalized for absence during the semester due to unavoidable or legitimate circumstances. Such circumstances include verified illness, participation in intercollegiate athletic events, subpoenas, jury duty, military service, bereavement, and religious observances. Such circumstances do not include voting in local, state, or national elections. Documented absence due to illness, injury, surgery, death in the family, a family emergency should be reported to the instructor with an appropriate written excuse *immediately* following your absence. For complete information, please see: <https://policy.umn.edu/education/makeupwork>. Grades and grade-related concerns after the end of the semester will only be addressed via an official email account (umn.edu).

Appropriate Student Use of Class Notes and Course Materials

Taking notes is a means of recording information but more importantly of personally absorbing and integrating the educational experience. However, broadly disseminating class notes beyond the classroom community or accepting compensation for taking and distributing classroom notes undermines instructor interests in their intellectual work product while not substantially furthering instructor and student interests in effective learning. Such actions violate shared norms and standards of the academic community. For additional information, please see: <https://policy.umn.edu/education/studentresp>.

University Grading Scales

The University has two distinct grading scales: A-F and S-N.

A-F grading scale. The A-F grading scale allows the following grades and corresponding GPA points:

Grade	GPA	Points Definitions for undergraduate credit
A	4.000	Represents achievement that significantly exceeds expectations in the course.
A-	3.667	
B+	3.333	
B	3.000	Represents achievement that is above the minimum expectations in the course.
B-	2.667	
C+	2.333	
C	2.000	Represents achievement that meets the minimum expectations in the course.
C-	1.667	
D+	1.333	
D	1.000	Represents achievement that partially meets the minimum expectations in the course. Credit is earned but it may not fulfill major or program requirements.
F	0.000	
		Represents failure in the course and no credit is earned.

S-N grading scale.

The S-N grading scale allows for the following grades and corresponding GPA points:

Grade	GPA	Points Definitions for undergraduate credit
S	0.00	Satisfactory (equivalent to a C- or better)
N	0.00	Not Satisfactory

For additional information, please refer to: <https://policy.umn.edu/education/gradingtranscripts>.

Sexual harassment, sexual assault, stalking and relationship violence

The University prohibits sexual misconduct, and encourages anyone experiencing sexual misconduct to access resources for personal support and reporting. If you want to speak confidentially with someone about an experience of sexual misconduct, please contact your campus resources including the Aurora Center, Boynton Mental Health or Student Counseling Services (<https://eoaa.umn.edu/report-misconduct>). If you want to report sexual misconduct, or have questions about the University's policies and procedures related to sexual misconduct, please contact your campus Title IX office or relevant policy contacts.

Instructors are required to share information they learn about possible sexual misconduct with the campus Title IX office that addresses these concerns. This allows a Title IX staff member to reach out to those who have experienced sexual misconduct to provide information about personal support resources and options for investigation. You may talk to instructors about concerns related to sexual misconduct, and they will provide support and keep the information you share private to the extent possible given their University role.

https://regents.umn.edu/sites/regents.umn.edu/files/2019-09/policy_sexual_harassment_sexual_assault_stalking_and_relationship_violence.pdf

Equity, Diversity, Equal Opportunity, & Affirmative Action

The University provides equal access to and opportunity in its programs and facilities, without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national origin, gender, age, marital status, disability, public assistance status, membership or activity in a local commission created for the purpose of dealing with discrimination, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. For more information, please consult Board of Regents Policy:

[https://regents.umn.edu/sites/regents.umn.edu/files/2019-](https://regents.umn.edu/sites/regents.umn.edu/files/2019-09/policy_equity_diversity_equal_opportunity_and_affirmative_action.pdf)

[09/policy_equity_diversity_equal_opportunity_and_affirmative_action.pdf](https://regents.umn.edu/sites/regents.umn.edu/files/2019-09/policy_equity_diversity_equal_opportunity_and_affirmative_action.pdf).

Disability Accommodations

The University views disability as an important aspect of diversity, and is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students. The Disability Resource Center (DRC) is the campus office that collaborates with students who have disabilities to provide and/or arrange reasonable accommodations.

If you have, or think you have, a disability in any area such as, mental health, attention, learning, chronic health, sensory, or physical, please contact the DRC office on your campus (UM Twin Cities - 626.1333) to arrange a confidential discussion regarding equitable access and reasonable accommodations.

Students with short-term disabilities, such as a broken arm, can often work with instructors to minimize classroom barriers. In situations where additional assistance is needed, students should contact the DRC as noted above.

If you are registered with the DRC and have a disability accommodation letter dated for this semester or this year, please contact your instructor early in the semester to review how the accommodations will be applied in the course.

If you are registered with the DRC and have questions or concerns about your accommodations please contact your (access consultant/disability specialist).

Additional information: Twin Cities - <https://diversity.umn.edu/disability/>, drc@umn.edu)

Mental Health and Stress Management

As a student you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events may lead to diminished academic performance and may reduce your ability to participate in daily activities. University services are available to assist you. You can learn more about the broad range of confidential mental health services available on campus via the Student Mental Health Website: <http://www.mentalhealth.umn.edu>.

Academic Freedom and Responsibility:

Academic freedom is a cornerstone of the University. Within the scope and content of the course as defined by the instructor, it includes the freedom to discuss relevant matters in the classroom. Along

with this freedom comes responsibility. Students are encouraged to develop the capacity for critical judgment and to engage in a sustained and independent search for truth. Students are free to take reasoned exception to the views offered in any course of study and to reserve judgment about matters of opinion, but they are responsible for learning the content of any course of study for which they are enrolled.*

Reports of concerns about academic freedom are taken seriously, and there are individuals and offices available for help. Contact the instructor, the Department Chair, your adviser, the associate dean of the college, or the Vice Provost for Faculty and Academic Affairs in the Office of the Provost. [Customize with names and contact information as appropriate for the course/college/campus.]

* Language adapted from the American Association of University Professors "Joint Statement on Rights and Freedoms of Students."

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Complaints Regarding Teaching/Grading

Students with complaints about teaching or grading should first try to resolve the problem with the instructor involved. Please note that no such discussion can be held at the beginning or end of class because of time constraints. Kindly, therefore, arrange to virtually meet with the instructor during a mutually convenient time. If no satisfactory resolution is reached through these venues, students may then discuss the matter with the Department Chair on 612-624-9847, who will attempt to mediate. Failing an informal resolution, the staff in the AA&AS departmental office will facilitate the filing of a formal complaint. Official U of M information on grading can be found at: <http://www1.umn.edu/usenate/policies/gradingpolicy.html>

Viewing/Reading Schedule

Week 1

Introduction: What is "Black Ecologies"?

Week 2

"Black Ecologies" continued.

Pre-reading:

- Imani Jacqueline Brown, "[Black Ecologies: An Opening and Offering.](#)"
- "[Mapping Black Ecologies.](#)" J.T. Roane and Justine Hoseby, *Current Research in Digital History*, Vol. 2, 2019

Week 3

Foundations: Environmentalism and the American Project

Pre-reading:

- Kimberly K. Smith, *African American Environmental Thought: Foundations*, (2007), Preface and Introduction.

See Think Wonder image: Henry Thoreau's cabin.

Lecture: Environmentalisms of 19th and early 20th century America

Week 4

The Soils of Black Folk

Pre-reading:

- “Of the Meaning of Progress,” *The Souls of Black Folk*, W.E.B. DuBois (1903).
- “Black Gold,” Leah Penniman in *All We Can Save: Truth, Courage, and Solutions for the Climate Crisis*

See Think Wonder image: soil collection at the National Memorial for Peace and Justice Lecture:

Farming in Black Power Imagination and Practice

Activity: George Washington Carver agricultural bulletins

Discussion: *Farming While Black: Soul Fire Farm’s Practical Guide to Liberation on the Land*

Week 5

Black Religious Ecologies

Pre-reading:

- “Black Soil,” Kimberly Bain, *Social Text* (2023) 41 (1 (154)), p. 1–19.

See Think Wonder image: Black grave in the Santee-Cooper Basin

Lecture: N/A

Week 6

Natural Resource Management and Modernity

Pre-reading:

- “Trouble in the Water: Maroon Arrangements of an Insurgent Ecology,” Kathryn Benjamin Golden in *Blackecologies*, p. 41-45.
- “Black Ecologies, subaquatic life, and the Jim Crow enclosure of the tidewater” JT Roane, *Journal of Rural Studies*, Volume 94, August 2022, p. 227-238

See Think Wonder image: Black Crabworkers on the Eastern Shore

Lecture: Land and Power in the Lowcountry

Discussion: *Daughters of the Dust*, Julie Dash, 1991

Week 7

Black Nature Writing

Pre-reading:

- “Introduction: More to be Shaped By,” Erin Sharkey in *A Darker Wilderness: Black Nature Writing from Soil to Stars*, p. 13-26
- Chapter 2, bell hooks, *Belonging*, (2008) p. 7-24

Discussion: “Water and Stone: A Ceremony for Audre Lorde in Three Parts,” Alexis Pauline Gumbs in *A Darker Wilderness: Black Nature Writing from Soil to Stars*

Discussion:

- Claude McKay, *Joy in the Woods*
- Lucille Clifton, *The Earth is a Living Thing*
- Audre Lorde, “The Brown Menace, or Poem to the Survival of Roaches”

Week 8

Dumping in Dixie

Pre-reading:

- Nathan Hare, “Black Ecology,” *The Black Scholar*, Vol. 1 No. 6 (April 1970) 4

- “Black Trash,” Charles Mills in *Faces of Environmental Racism: Confronting Issues of Global Justice*, Eds. Laura Westra and Bill Lawson, (2001)
- See Think Wonder image: “Blacktown, Whitetown” by Danielle Purifoy Lecture: The 1970s: What is Earth Day to an Internal Colony?
- Activity: Warren County NC PCB dumping sources

Week 9

Slavery, Capitalism, and Disaster

Pre reading:

- “What Hurricane Katrina Revealed about the Social Dimensions of New Orleans, Louisiana,” Justin Hosbey in *Blackecologies*, p. 6-7.
 - Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, Chapter 2 “The Ship” (2016), p. 25-67
- SeeThinkWonder image: “After the Deluge,” Kara Walker.
- Lecture: N/A

Week 10

Pre-reading:

- “Neptune in Pisces,” Arielle Johnson, in *Blackecologies* p.11
- “The New Fight Over an Old Forest in Atlanta,” *The New Yorker*
- “Atlanta Stop Cop City activists continue push to abolish GILEE program amid the Palestinian genocide,” PRISM

Week 11

In-Class: Student Presentations

Week 12

In-Class: Student Presentations

Week 13

In-Class: Student Presentations

Week 14

In-Class: Student Presentations

Week 15

Conclusions

Updates, Changes, Modifications and/or Revisions:

The instructor reserves the right to make changes in this schedule to facilitate student learning. Any changes in the schedule will be communicated to students in advance. This syllabus is available in alternative formats upon request.