Core 1: Weekly Response Week #

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Due in hard copy and/or on turnitin.com the first discussion section class following lecture.

Name: Majok Ring Date:4/19/15

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Lecturer: Peggy O’Day

Lecture Title: “California Mining and Environmental Legacies”

Lecture’s Central Argument: Water, being an essential part of our lives and infrastructure leads to many diverse views and discussions about how we should spend it, where, when, and who owns the rights to that water. Essentially, this led to great conflict and a general lack of concern for our environment and the negative effects that we have on it due to our diminishing resources. The ambiguity of the law in regards to ownership rights of water allowed corporations to use their vast wealth and connections to buy increasing amounts of land for usage such as mines.

Lecture’s Supporting Evidence/Examples:

O’Day mentioned the impact that finding gold within California in the 1850’s had on our environment and how we gather most of our materials from the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Focusing on questions such as why is there gold in the Sierra Nevada, How was it mined and how did mining impact the environment, she described how the Batholith occurred and the differences between Mother lode gold mines, quartz, primary vein deposits, and placer deposits. Placer deposits were the main cause for concern as it relies on the accumulation of materials and gravel. This means that they would be able to switch to more water based techniques which would use more resources and negatively affect the environment such as the increasing sediments in rivers which adversely affected local salmon populations.

Three questions you have with respect to this lecture:

How have mining techniques advanced since then?

Should we limit lobbying potential in the case of environmental concerns?

How do we go about increasing concern for the environment and educating more on our impact?

Other Core 1 subjects to which the lecture might be related: Mooney, “The Truth About Fracking” since it relies on the same criticism of a lack of ownership rights and responsibility to the environment since single entities can adversely affect the environment and harm local populations.

Within this week’s lecture, “California Mining and Environmental Legacies” by Peggy O’Day, we primarily focused upon the controversial topic of water rights and debate the inefficiencies and waste that occurs with certain environmental abuses within mining and fracking. We have seen through California’s gold boom in the 1850s as its discovery boosted its economy and also honed in on the idea of the American dream as it emphasized the fact that anyone could travel there and have an equal chance of gaining success through gold. This of course compiled with a lack of environmental protections led to the deterioration of the environment and increased abuses by big businesses and corporations. This was allowed to occur since it would encourage more settlers to travel and live in the west which was slowly establishing itself. The overuse of resources in the 1900s was primarily attributed to mining in which switched to water based methods such as hydraulic water in which they could deteriorate hillsides and dump millions of gallons of sediment into rivers and lakes, leaving both the fish and local inhabitants without clean and drinkable water. Now this abuse of resources has simply switched over to newer industrialized methods such as agriculture in which we use more water and pesticides which can lead to groundwater contamination/runoff from pesticides and landfills. This is demonstrated within Wes Jackson’s “Tackling the Oldest Environmental Problem: Agriculture and Its Impact on Soil” as he states “Around 1948 we started using incredible amounts of nitrogen, phosphorus, and water; by the 1960s it was really taking off “ (Jackson, 1). Here he describes the chemicals that go into our agricultural products and how we are increasing our dependence on these water intensive methods and have begun to implement it throughout the nation as a result. As consumers, we are generally less concerned with the process of how our products are made and how it affects the environment unless it specifically affects us in the case of the mining practice which polluted local rivers used for drinking water. The issue at hand remains the lack of regulation and interest in the increasing our protections for the environment as it does not fit with the views of big businesses which can lobby against more protections and safeguards for our water usage, water rights, and limiting our impact on local environments.