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Dr. Jane Henderson

Geography 40: Race, Space, and Nature

### **Final Project Reflection Statement**

GEOG 40: Race, Space, and Nature was my most challenging and engaging class during the fall term. The diverse range of readings we were required to complete for each class taught me about the power of geography to shape the power dynamics for future generations through the interconnectedness of geography and various aspects of daily life, like policy, urban planning, environmental interactions, and pollution. My biggest takeaway, however, is not what I learned in class regarding the intersection of race, space, and nature but the metacognition this class facilitated through the readings and discussions of voices from both underrepresented/socioeconomically deprived communities and voices of traditional/affluent individuals (like Immanuel Kant) with the power to shape both social policies at their time and the course of the entire field of Geography in the upcoming years.

My first revelation through reflection prompted by the in-class reading occurred during week one. While reading *Against the Ecofascist Creep* by the Anti-Creep Climate Initiative, I saw myself going down the ecofascist rabbit hole and getting so engrossed in ecofascism. It was then that I noticed I had begun celebrating ecofascist villains in the media, like Thanos from *Avengers Infinity War* and Dr. Bertrand Zobrist from Dan Brown's *Inferno*, for their radical beliefs in solving humanity's ongoing climate crisis. By celebrating ecofascists, I was starting to believe that the only method to fix humanity's environmental issues and effectively bring down our population count was through "unorthodox" means used by Thanos and Dr. Zobrist, often involving non-consensual choices or death. From a young age, I have been passionate about sustainability and nature. Witnessing the destruction of natural environments and having to

experience the effects of climate change due to environmentally racist policies inspired me to pursue a career where I would champion green technology to reduce humanity's carbon footprint and negative impacts on the environment. In wanting to be the environmental hero, I was unaware that I was starting to become an ecofascist villain. This realization shattered me and is one of the many reasons I will continue to engage with the class material long after the class is officially over to prevent myself from going down the ecofascist rabbit hole and to help me identify ecofascist tendencies in the projects/work I would engage with.

Attending Professor Henderson's office hours was slightly therapeutic because it allowed me to understand this new aspect of myself and explore alternative solutions to combat climate change, overpopulation, and environmental damage without resorting to methods that would harm any human/flora/fauna directly or indirectly. Another reason I loved going to Professor Henderson's office hours was the opportunity to connect in-class discussions/topics to everyday life through pop culture, movies, and current events. One conversation in particular that comes to mind is the discussion of the 'Taylor Swiftscene' and Taylor Swift's carbon footprint. What initially started as a joke/fun thing in class soon became a genuine research topic because of the impact Taylor Swift and other modern celebrities can have in affecting the economics and environment around them.

One challenge I had to overcome through this class was getting comfortable with engaging in healthy debates and conversations regarding socially/conversationally uncomfortable topics such as racism. Coming into the class, I had never studied racism, even though it is a very controversial aspect of modern US society and an integral part of US history. I still remember asking Professor Henderson for advice on navigating in-class discussions around racism because I did not want to seem ignorant and accidentally offend anyone. Through in-class readings and

discussions, I was able to learn about both the effects of racism and the systems that enforce racist policies as well. I am much more confident in my ability to navigate conversations around racism now, and I have also developed a more critical mindset to understand better and analyze new policies and laws. Studying the intersections of race, space, and nature has forced me to observe and identify the power dynamics in laws and policies to see which groups of society benefit or are affected directly and indirectly.

Another change I noticed as the term progressed was my attitude as I approached the readings. The depressing tone of the readings made me lose motivation and interest in the class material at the start of the term. Why do the people we read about constantly victimize themselves? Can't they move on to make the best of what they have or even try to be grateful? These were some of the numerous questions I had after completing the required readings, accurately reflecting my negative mindset/attitude as I approached the discussions we would have in class. As the term progressed, however, I learned to question the systems in place repressing the marginalized groups that the authors were a part of. Why can laws and policies never be made with good intentions to benefit both parties? How can we modify existing laws and policies to fix problems in modern society? How can we make power dynamics more equitable for redistributing wealth and resources to all sections of society? This transition in my mindset enhanced my reading and discussion experiences by helping me learn and be receptive to many more ideas/concepts. My visions of the future also switched. Instead of dreaming of equal opportunities for all, I envision a society where opportunities are equitable to expose more people to perspectives from and hardships of underrepresented groups/communities. I believe that this ideology would reduce (and hopefully remove) the distance between historically

marginalized communities and individuals in power to prevent oppressive laws and policies from being implemented in the future.

In conclusion, I have learned about myself and the intersections of racism and nature by being pushed outside my comfort zone in this class. I have refined my analytical skills to read research papers and scholarly articles more effectively and continue to better understand them by engaging in healthy in-class discussions. I learned to be critical of existing and proposed oppressive systems and policies that will benefit a select few members. Working with Isabella helped me translate my thoughts into words efficiently, allowing me to improve the quality of my writing submissions gradually over the term. My perspective as an international student allowed me to compare and contrast material from our class syllabus and US culture/traditions with Indian ones while enriching in-class discussions and activities. This class reminds me of the quote, “Nothing good is ever easy.” I have a lot to take away from this class because of the numerous challenges I faced coming into class and the first few lectures early in the term. My struggles have taught me to engage and incorporate ideas from class into my daily life. This process helped me grow in character and allowed me to develop numerous skills I can use in my professional career, where I help make humanity more sustainable through data and policy analysis of government/corporate-led sustainability movements.



Jennifer Wolch

Former Dean of UC Berkley College of Environmental Design

Professor of Urban Planning and Geography

Founder and the former director of the Center for Sustainable Cities at the University of Southern California.



Green spaces can be added through the demolition of old buildings/factories for parks, retrofitting green space alongside formerly dilapidated canals, underneath and alongside main roads and railway lines, and mass tree planting along city streets

Fixing can lead to

Urban green spaces help combat urban ills and improve the lives of city residents - especially health(physical, mental, and emotional)

Not equitably distributed - environmental justice issue

↳ park poverty in communities of color and low income



## Parks:

- Designed to increase green space and promote active lifestyle in the city
- Recent studies looking into the correlation between park accessibility and the obesity epidemic
- Parks easily reflect use, upkeep, and quality. Hence, they could be among the first signs of urbicide.
- A bottom-up approach to introducing green spaces in urban communities can prevent gentrification

Jason Byrne

Professor at University of Tasmania for Human Geography and Planning

Praised for his research on urban and national parks and social disadvantage

On the editorial board for Local Environment and Journal of Political Ecology; Associate Editor with Landscape and Urban Planning



Urban green space, public health, and environmental justice: The challenge of making cities 'just green enough'

## How?

Design spaces 'just green enough' by having residents and planners work together on designing/building new spaces and environmental cleanup

## Key Words:

**Gentrification:** Transforming urban areas from low to high-value, displacing locals

**Environmental Justice:** Fair treatment of all people for the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws and policies

**Eco-gentrification:** Gentrification through the provision of green amenities that increase property value, a.k.a green space paradox, green gentrification, and environmental gentrification

## Ecological Gentrification

Marginalized communities live in spaces with few green spaces

Green spaces are added which increase property values

Marginalized communities are forced to move outside into less green areas

Rise in housing costs, affluent communities start moving in, further driving up rent and other prices

## Case Study: Hangzhou, China

- 6 million residents, one of China's oldest cities
- Recognized as a Garden City despite constant urban development
- 166.5 km<sup>2</sup> of green space(about 40% of the city area)
- Urban greening by reclaiming neglected land and space



## Authors' criticism:

- Parks are 'pleasure gardens' for not promoting active lifestyles among residents

## Why?

- Helps address both environmental and social justice issues
- \$\$\$ incentives for homeownership and shared equity housing projects also motivate residents to enhance their neighborhood

Joshua Newell

Professor at University of Michigan School for Environment and Sustainability

Human Geographer focusing on urban sustainability, resource consumption, and environmental and social justice

Co-director of UM-Center for Sustainable Systems

