

Assignment 2: Toxicity Narrative, Rural/Urban Environments, and Environmental Justice

Due: Wednesday, 10 May 2023, 11:59pm

Length: 850 -1,000 words

How: BruinLearn website under "Assignments"; .doc. or .docx format (no PDF, please)

Option 1: Chavez and Shulevitz

For this assignment, review your readings and lecture as well as section notes from 4/20, 4/21, 4/27, 4/28, and 5/2. As we discussed in class, César Chavez' 1989 speech, "Perils of Pesticides" builds on but significantly changes elements of the storytelling about environmental toxicity that started with Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962). Building on this discussion, analyze Judith Shulevitz' essay "[The Toxicity Panic](#)" from 2011. Your goal in your paper will be to explore how Shulevitz' narrative about toxicity overlaps with and/or differs from Chavez'. You may want to consider:

- The setting of Shulevitz' discussion of toxicity: What places and objects are her fears focused on?
- In what way are her fears similar to or different from Chavez', and why?
- What familiar elements of toxicity narrative, based on our class discussion, does she use, and which ones not? Does she introduce new elements, and to what effect?

Option 2: Chavez, Stand-L.A., and the Exide Battery Recycling Plant Crisis

For this assignment, review your readings and lecture as well as section notes from 4/20, 4/21, 4/27, 4/28, and 5/2. As we discussed in class, César Chavez' 1989 speech, "Perils of Pesticides" builds on but significantly changes elements of the storytelling about environmental toxicity that started with Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), as does Stand-L.A.'s website about neighborhood oil drilling in Los Angeles. Building on this discussion, analyze [Brian Osgood's newspaper report on the Exide battery recycling plant crisis in the newspaper The Guardian](#) from 2021. Your goal in your paper will be to explore how Osgood's toxicity narrative overlaps with and/or differs from Chavez' and/or that of Stand-LA. You may want to consider:

- The setting of Osgood's reporting on toxicity: What places and problems is his report focused on, compared to Chavez' speech and/or Stand-L.A.'s website?
- In what ways does Osgood's article engage with issues of urban environmental justice?
- What familiar elements of toxicity narrative, based on our class discussion, does he use, and which ones not? Does he introduce new elements, and to what effect?
- What is the effect of the photographs that accompany the article?

Option 3: Carson and Matheson

For this assignment, review your readings and lecture as well as section notes from 4/20, 4/21, 4/25, 4/27, and 5/2. Watch Matheson's 26-minute film *Apple Grown in Wind Tunnel: Wind Speed 85m Per Hour* (2000), which is accessible on our website under "Files/Uploaded Media." Matheson's film is clearly inspired by *Silent Spring* and reflects on the book with a distance of almost forty years. Building on our discussion of Carson's narrative strategy and toxicity narrative more generally, analyze the story Matheson tells in his film. You may want to consider:

- How does Matheson use and change elements of Carson's stories about environmental toxins?
- *Apple Grown in Wind Tunnel* engages in some detail with ideas of medical care and the pharmaceutical industry. What is the film's argument in this respect?
- Consider between one and three specific features of storytelling in the film – voice-over narrative, black-and-white cinematography, the kinds of places that are represented, the function of radio, close-up images of particular items, for example – and discuss what effect they are meant to achieve and how they compare to Carson's narrative strategies as we discussed them in class.

What your paper will be graded on:

- A clear thesis statement that articulates the point of your argument
- An argument that is structured step by step (in successive paragraphs), with each step supported by evidence
- An argument that shows that you've grasped the central points of our in-class discussions of toxicity narrative, urban environmental problems, environmental racism, and environmental justice
- An argument that shows that you know how to apply the insights from these discussions to texts, films, or situations that you haven't encountered before
- Correct use of syntax, grammar, and spelling

Technical Tips:

- Footnotes are not needed for any materials on the syllabus; simply reference ideas or quotations parenthetically at the end of your sentence. For example: (Chavez 1989); (Carson 1962: 95); (Stand-L.A.: <http://www.stand.la/health-and-safety.html>). If you use materials that are not on the syllabus (which is not required for this paper), please provide a complete citation at the end of your paper.
- The guideline of approximately 1,000 words is meant to help you in framing and focusing your argument; it is not a straitjacket. Whether you run a little over or a little under ("little" meaning 100-200 words) matters less to us than the coherence and clarity of your argument. Don't add sentences simply for the sake of adding words; don't cut yourself short if you have an additional point to make that makes you run over a bit.
- The same goes for the guiding questions: These are meant to help you frame an argument. A focused argument is more important than "checking off" answers to questions in the prompt (for example, if you have a clear

argument about Osgood's *Guardian* article that does not touch on the photographs, that's ok).