

(Re)considering Race and Heat: How Confronting Climate Change Reveals Anti-Racist Futures

Spring Quarter 2022

Student Instructors: Edna Tovar (she/her) and Sean Sugai (he/him/his)

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Bharat Venkat, PhD (he/him/his)

Email: ednakarinatovar@g.ucla.edu & seansugai23@g.ucla.edu

Meeting days/times: Monday 10am-10:50am

Location: Renee and David Kaplan Hall A32

Office Hours:

Sean: Wednesdays 10am-12pm via Zoom or in-person at Kerckhoff Patio

Edna: Mondays, 11:15am-12pm via Zoom or in-person at Joe N' Go in the UCLA Store

Course Unit: 1

Course Type: P/NP

Zoom Link for Lecture & OH: <https://ucla.zoom.us/j/98094252812>



Demonstrators march in Sunset Park, Brooklyn in 2019 in support of community-led climate justice initiatives. Photographed by Erik McGregor.

Course Description:

What does climate change have to do with racism? How do extreme heat environments produce and sustain racial inequalities? And what does it mean to confront climate change from an anti-racist approach? In this seminar, we will bring the environment from the background into the foreground to explore the ways in which environmental justice not only relates to racial justice, but also has vested interests in the fight against climate change.

Approximately 500,000-1,000,000 deaths globally are related to heat, and California is projected to experience higher than average temperatures and more severe heat waves over the coming decades due to the current climate crisis. As such, heat will be the focus of this seminar. But how has heat remained a phenomenon so invisible yet devastating? In this course, we will explore the historical, cultural, epistemological, and racial context of heat to understand how it is differentially experienced, embodied, ignored, or bypassed by different communities. As California gets hotter, who is left to deal with the realities of heat? Throughout the course, we will take a case study approach to consider how heat interfaces with human biology, public health, policy, education, fashion and popular media, (in)accessible infrastructure, and other topics to uphold racism and sustain racial injustice. Students will critically examine how their natural and built environment shape everyday life to produce an interdisciplinary approach to reconsider heat and racism and reimagine anti-racism in environmental justice.

Each week, students will apply their knowledge and develop their understanding through in-class discussions and five different projects. Historically, heat has been researched and documented through a scholarly approach that values publications and essays over the complex histories and narratives from the communities they claim to represent. In this course, students will be encouraged to think through environmental and racial justice beyond writing essays and to instead, produce materials that can be better communicated and accessible to broader audiences. Using poetry, scrapbooking, storytelling, podcasts, and photoethnography, students will learn anti-racist methods of producing knowledge of the climate crisis.

By paying closer attention to heat and how it shapes everyday life, this course will challenge students to not only utilize an interdisciplinary approach to (re)consider heat and race, but to also think creatively about anti-racism and environmental justice.

Learning Objectives

1. To develop an understanding of how climate change disproportionately impacts communities of color in California and abroad
2. To define the relationship between anti-racism, climate change, and racial and environmental justice
3. To utilize an interdisciplinary approach (e.g. climate science, anthropology, media studies, public health, etc.) to strengthen anti-racist strategies and methodologies
4. To think critically and creatively about how to best practice and communicate anti-racism and environmental justice on the UCLA campus and broader Los Angeles community

Grading and Percentage Distribution:

There will be **four** major projects throughout the quarter that will require you to apply your knowledge creatively beyond papers and written assignments. **To engage in anti-racist work related to environmental justice means to also rethink the ways in which we generate knowledge of race and climate and how we communicate it to others in meaningful ways.** As such, the projects in this course will encourage you to engage with literature, art, photography, and other mediums to communicate your understanding and worldviews.

A breakdown of the grading and percentage distribution are provided below and specific instructions are included in the “Weekly Seminar Topics” section. These assignments have also been **highlighted** in the weeks they appear.

1. Poetry Presentation (10%)
2. “Burn Book” Project (10 %)
3. Children’s Book (10 %)
- ~~4. Health Podcast (10%)~~
5. Photoethnography Project (15%)
6. Weekly Attendance & Participation (55%)

To respect that this is a 1-unit Pass/No Pass course, a large percentage of your final grade will come from weekly attendance and classroom participation through discussions and reflection activities. We hope that this format will encourage you to both come to class prepared and to creatively interpret the assignments without the pressure of grades.

Late Assignment Policy: This seminar is designed to foster a **community of accountability**, where we hope you will not only learn from the reading and lecture material, but also from each other and your lived experiences. Five of the four assignments above will be presented in class during the designated weeks below, so it is important that you come to class prepared with these assignments so that your peers can learn from you and engage deeper with the content. Extensions may be given due to extenuating circumstances, but please know that all students are expected to present their work to the class during the designated weeks below.

Class Policies and Procedures:

Academic Integrity: Academic dishonesty (e.g. cheating, plagiarism, academic misconduct, etc.) will not be tolerated. Please see [this website](#) for more information about academic integrity and the student code of conduct.

Remote learning policies and expectations: This seminar will be offered synchronously in dual modality (both in-person and online via Zoom). The Zoom link for class can be found here and on Page 1: <https://ucla.zoom.us/j/98094252812>

Student Accommodations: This class is explicitly designed to be as accommodating for students as possible. Please notify the instructors if there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your learning or participation. If you require accommodations, please contact the Center for Accessible Education (CAE) at (310) 825-1501. To ensure accommodations, students are encouraged to contact the CAE within the first two weeks of the quarter when possible. For more information visit the [Center for Accessible Education's webpage](#).

Classroom drop deadlines: For information on the drop deadlines and fees, please see [this website](#).

Community respect: In this class, we will be discussing potentially triggering and controversial topics related to racial and environmental injustices within specific communities and cultural contexts. As such, we ask that all students recognize the impact of their language by avoiding generalizing phrases and speaking from their experiences and not on behalf of communities. At the beginning of this course, we will draft community guidelines as a foundation for our subsequent meetings, and we encourage students to bring up additional ideas to make this course as tailored to your learning style as possible.

How to Do Well in this Course

Read *before* you come to class: Each week is divided into specific topics related to racism and heat and contains scholarly articles, news articles, and short videos. In-class discussions will be on the readings included in that specific week (i.e in Week 3, we will be discussing Eric Klinenberg’s reading; in Week 4, we will be covering the three articles listed by Frazier, Opillard, and Shome; and so forth). It is required that you come to class with the readings annotated and with any questions for discussion. While we will provide guiding questions about the readings, our in-class discussions will be an open-forum for you to share your thoughts, reflections, and appreciations/critiques of the readings.

Annotate, annotate, annotate! We know the classic speech that annotating will help you engage better with the readings and make connections to the “big picture.” Rather than reinvent the wheel, we encourage students to annotate the text and take notes in a way that works for you. Whether that is taking notes in the margins, summarizing each paragraph, highlighting key words, or underlining important phrases, we urge you to choose the methods that work for you. Some questions to consider while reading:

- Who are the authors? What is their connection to their writing? What position/stance do they take?
- What are the author’s central argument or main points and what evidence do they present to support their argument?
- How does the author’s argument relate to anti-racist approaches to climate change?
- Do you find the author’s argument convincing? Why or why not?
- What did you find most interesting about the article?
- What did you learn?
- What other ideas/concepts are related to the reading?
- What experiences in your life resonate with the reading?

Consider Impact vs. Intention: This is an interdisciplinary seminar that provides you with the creative freedom to express your understanding beyond papers and essays. Students are expected to submit the five projects in this seminar as materials for curation and/or general campus use, which means that folks outside of the classroom can access your work. It is crucial for all of us to consider the impact vs. the intention of our projects, meaning that we must always critically reflect on the message being portrayed and ask ourselves who is represented and misrepresented. We encourage you to think deeply about your own positionality, as well as your peers’, and how each of us have a role to play in anti-racist work in environmental justice. We kindly ask that you remain open to new and conflicting perspectives, to take criticism as an opportunity for growth, and to accept praise humbly.

Be transparent. Please contact **BOTH** student facilitators (seansugai23@g.ucla.edu & ednakarinator@g.ucla.edu) as soon as possible if any serious issues arise that make it difficult to submit an assignment on time or attend class. We will try our best to accommodate any extenuating circumstances, but please contact both of us as soon as possible to allow us enough time to consult with our Faculty Mentor and any other personnel.

Weekly Seminar Topics

Week 1: “The Climate Crisis–A Race We Can Win”: Toward a Vocabulary of Race and Heat

- Introduction to student facilitators and faculty mentor
- Overview of syllabus
- Create community guidelines and expectations
- Introduction to Week 1 discussion
 - What is anti-racism? What is climate change? And how can both approaches demonstrate the intersection of environmental and racial justice?
 - Developing a vocabulary of race and heat
- Introduce Slam Poetry assignment
 - This is the first assignment of the class and it is not meant to be stressful or intimidating. Instead, we hope this will be a fun icebreaker to not only begin our discussion of race and heat, but to draw out the language we currently use to express these terms. By providing an open forum for varying interpretations, perceptions, and experiences with heat and racism, we hope that it will spark conversations about how we can begin to unlearn preconceived ideas and generate new ways of thinking. For this assignment, we ask that you write a **30 second-2 minute spoken word poem** that will be shared with your peers during our next class. This poem can be about your upbringing, such as any salient memories of heat at home, in school, or in your community or how you perceive your race/ethnicity growing up; a topic you learned in another class; a lesson you’ll never forget; a trip you took recently or in the past; and so forth. It can be serious, lighthearted, or a blend of both–our hope is that you start critically reflecting on your experiences and how they translate into words that you feel comfortable sharing.

Optional Video (To help with Slam Poetry Assignment):

- Champion Slam Poet slams Greed, Capitalism, and Apathy as a cause of Climate Change <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gDA50VW-mdQ>

- Terisa Siagatonu - "Meauli" | All Def Poetry x Da Poetry Lounge | All Def Poetry
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5kjDSJHk4i4>

Assignment:

- **Slam Poetry Presentation due by next class**
- Week 2 readings (see below)

Week 2: "In the Hot Seat": Discussing Heat, Centering Race and Racism

- Present poems

Week 3: "In the Hot Seat": Discussing Heat, Centering Race and Racism

- Build on Week 1 topics of race and heat with a discussion about Klinenberg's chapter

Reading:

- Klinenberg, E. (2002). *Heat Wave: A Social Autopsy of Disaster in Chicago*. University of Chicago Press. Please read **xxii-xxv, xxx-xxxv, 11-13, and 30-32**

Assignment:

- Week 4 Readings (see below)

Week 4: "Overheating": Heat Inequalities and Modern Imperialism in Tech Industries

- Discussion about how the expansion of the tech industry promotes heat inequalities both abroad and in California's Bay Area

Readings:

- Frazier, C. (2019). "Urban Heat: Rising Temperatures as Critique in India's Air-Conditioned City." *City & Society*. **PAGES: 448-455**
- Shome, R. (2006). "Thinking through the Diaspora: Call Centers, India, and a New Politics of Hybridity." *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 9(1), 105-124. **PAGES: 108-111** <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877906061167>
- Wikipedia Gentrification of San Francisco. **PAGES 2-3**

Assignment:

- Week 5 readings (see below)

Week 5: "Too Hot to Handle": Fast Fashion and Racial Inequality in Popular Media

- Discussion about fast fashion, environmental injustice, labor inequality, racial capitalism, and hot workplace conditions
- Introduce Scrapbook ("Burn Book") Assignment

- “Check it out, Cady. This is our Burn Book. We cut out [...] pictures in the yearbook and we wrote comments.” These words from Gretchen Wieners in the 2004 film *Mean Girls* summarizes this assignment. As we discuss how fast fashion contributes to environmental injustice, labor inequality, racial capitalism, and inequitable workplace conditions, this assignment will ask you to choose a clothing brand that uses fast fashion and research its environmental and racial consequences. Findings should be presented using cut-outs from magazines produced by the clothing brand to produce a **mix media visual collage on an 8.5 x 11 inch paper**. We urge you to research brands that UCLA partners with, such as Nike’s Jordan Brand and Under Armour, to situate this discussion within the larger context of institutional complicity in environmental injustice and racism. Words may be used, but we encourage you to think deeply about how pictures and images create unspoken ways of recognition and reflection. An example for this assignment can be found [here](#), but please note that we would like you to choose a clothing brand to focus on. Your “Burn Book” will be presented during next week’s class, and we ask that you provide a very brief description of the piece and how it relates to themes of fast fashion, environmental injustice, labor exploitation, and racism. These discussions will inform our concluding questions: what are the intersections of anti-racism and environmental justice, is sustainable fashion the future, and how can conversations about anti-racism contribute to our understanding of the ongoing climate crisis?

Readings:

- “Is fast fashion destroying our environment”
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YOA0D0i5-fA>)
- <https://innovation.luskin.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Adapting-to-Extreme-Heat-in-California.pdf> (Pages 23-26)

Assignment:

- **Scrapbook (“Burn Book”) Project due by next class**
- Week 6 readings (see below)

Week 6-7: “The Heat is On”: Exploring (In)accessible Infrastructure

- Present “Burn Book”

Readings:

- None

Assignment:

- None



'Shade in the Skid Row neighborhood, Downtown Los Angeles' taken by Monica Mouwens for Places Journal

Week 8: "Cool as a Cucumber": (Re)considering Heat in Education

- Discussion about racism in education and thermal inequalities
- Discussion about the concept of "at-risk students" and if this is a useful or harmful way to frame anti-racist educational interventions
- Introduce Children's Book assignment
 - Schools are microcosms of the communities they serve and reflect the political, social, and economic dynamics that shape everyday life. However, where does the environment fit in? As we begin to explore how the natural and built environment relate to and sustain racial inequality, we must also ask which populations are explicitly and implicitly affected. Building on our discussion of the concept of "at-risk students," this assignment asks you to consider how to best communicate issues of heat and race to children. Potential themes include preventative care, disaster preparedness, sustainability, racism and learning, and so forth. We encourage you to draw on concepts presented in this class and other ones to produce a simple, yet effective, children's book narrative that is communicable and follows a clear narrative. The use of Canva or other software is encouraged to put together the book. During next week's class, you will present your book to the class.

Readings:

- Bloch, S. (2019). "Shade." *Places Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.22269/190423>

Assignment:

- **Children's Book due by next class**

Week 9: "As Easy as ABC": Teaching Heat and Anti-Racism

- Present Children's Book
- Post-reading Reflection Discussion: Which populations are the most vulnerable to both educational inequities and greater thermal exposure? What role does education, especially K-12 education, play in our discussion of anti-racism and the climate crisis?
- Introduction to abolitionist theory and praxis of climate change with a specific focus on mass incarceration and the carceral state
- Discussion about community resilience and collective power to institutional inequality related to heat and incarceration
- Introduction to the methods and practice of photoethnography with examples
- Discuss Photoethnography Project
 - Heat is invisible to the eye, but the suffering is real. It is a visceral, everyday phenomenon that is differentially felt—or ignored—by various populations. For ethnographers, there is an ethical duty to document these experiences in all of their complexity; however, it is incredibly challenging to fully capture these moments, from the intimate to the structural. This assignment challenges you to think critically about your positionality while capturing how heat is expressed, embodied, and experienced. Examples of photoethnographies will be provided, but we encourage you to think outside of the box about how thermal inequalities manifest and present themselves in everyday life. Your photograph—or series of photographs—will be presented to the class next week, and we encourage you contextualize these moments with your own experiences as a photoethnographer. We encourage you to ask yourself: what is the historical, social, and cultural context that you are entering? What do these photos capture and what do they not? How is heat and racism represented here and how might it be misrepresented? And last, how can photography be used as a tool for anti-racist research and media practices? How has it been weaponized historically and contemporarily, and how can acknowledging its—and your—limitations generate insight into how it can be used to further anti-racism in media and in the institution? Please also include a title for your work, your name, and a brief summary (5 sentences minimum) explaining the context and connecting it to this seminar.

Video/Podcast:

- Podcast: "Photography Through An Ethnographer's Lens: Image Making with Jason De León"

(<https://thefamiliarstrange.com/2021/11/29/ep-85-photography-through-an-ethnographers-lens/>)

- “Beyond Borders: Hostile Terrain 94 Virtual Exhibition Opening”
(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4-pE_y8YiA0&t=8s) (Watch 22:15-31:30)

Assignment:

- **Photoethnography Project due by Week 10 Tuesday (May 31, 2022 11:59PM) to the BruinLearn Discussion Forum**

Week 10: NO CLASS HOLIDAY

Finals Week: “In the Heat of the Moment”: Bearing Witness to Thermal Inequality

- Present Photoethnography Project in Discussion Forum on BruinLearn
- Overall seminar reflection and open discussion (refer back to learning objectives)
 - How has this class deepened your understanding of the complexities of heat injustice and racism?
 - What anti-racist strategies have you learned that can be used to further racial and environmental justice?
 - What other fields can benefit from the interdisciplinary social justice approaches presented in this class?

Readings:

- NONE

Assignment:

- NONE