

Who we are

We are a mix of people from both 'inside' (incarcerated) and 'outside' (campus) willing to challenge stereotypes about what it means to be a college student and what it means to be incarcerated.

- Alia
- Ali
- Anna
- Is
- Jason
- JD
- Julia
- Kara
- Keely
- Myke
- Mike
- Sergio

Special thanks

Thanks to staff of the Southeastern Correctional Institution (SCI) and the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, specifically Warden Robinson for growing educational opportunities for people incarcerated at SCI; Mr. Niceswanger for ensuring we could learn together each week; and Mr. Roundtree, Mr. Hill, and the other corrections officers for ushering us in and out each week with dignity and professionalism.

At Ohio State University, thanks to Dr. Tiyi Morris and Dr. Mary Thomas for their whole-hearted and visionary leadership of OPEEP; Babette Cieskowski for gracefully translating pedagogical needs into prison realities; Nicole Edgerton for recruiting students to take the course; Dr. Sharp for approving the instructor to teach this course; and the staff of the Office of Admissions and Registrar's Office who ensured that inside students were enrolled in a credit-bearing course.

Finally, we sincerely appreciate the guests who joined us on our learning journey this semester: thank you Jeffrey, Jessica, Callia, Clair, Gabe, Steve, Sally, Matt, Jo, and Marijke. You kept an open heart and mind, and we feel honored that you engaged with us in this inaugural class!



Community Playlist: A musical interpretation of what we learned

ENR 2300
Society and Natural Resources
Spring 2023

Course Description

In this course, we examine, discuss, and apply learning about how society interacts with the environment and natural resources in what are called complex social-ecological systems. The main organizing features are habitats (land, water), resources (air, wildlife, vegetation/trees, soil), and processes (e.g., restoration, protected areas), and the course focuses on how humans interact with each organizing feature at different social levels:

- Individuals – are 'actors', such as people, who each constitute a unique composition of worldviews, emotions, identities, values, attitudes, knowledge, beliefs, biases, memories, experiences, skillsets, behavioral tendencies, etc.
- Communities – are the ways in which 'actors' organize themselves into social collectives, which can include groups focused on recreational interests, employment, volunteer organizations, non-governmental entities, and more.
- Politics – are typically a specialized (regulatory) collective, that holds and wields power to manage or govern other individuals and collectives within a particular context (such as natural resources).

Three key questions guide this course: 1) why humans do what we do, 2) why we don't do what we 'should', and 3) how we decide (and enforce) what that 'should' is in the context of our planet.

We investigate topics of justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Discussing these topics requires us to recognize and honor our different backgrounds and commit to share our experiences in ways that allow for new understanding through dialogue that may be uncomfortable yet transformative.

This course is part of the Ohio Prison Education Exchange Project (OPEEP) at Ohio State University. For more information, see <https://opeep.osu.edu/>.

We Believe:

- Healthy communities do not need prisons. Education is a cornerstone of healthy communities.
- Blackness, poverty, migration status, gender non-conformity, queerness, disability, and addiction are NOT crimes.
- The routes to higher education should be forged through compassion, collective practice, and community engagement.

Higher education is a practice of personal transformation and civic responsibility.



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Weekly Content

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This Assignment



The Social and Environmental Inequality Playlist assignment invites us to creatively interpret (through music) what we learned this semester. Music reminds us to be curious, to feel a range of emotions, and to listen to what's really being said despite the tone of how it's shared. Here, we demonstrate through a selection of songs what we seek to remember. Side A focuses on songs related to the first half of the semester where we learned about complex systems thinking and the key habitats we share with all lifeforms and resources that sustain us. The sound frequencies of these songs radiate the frustration and destruction to the only home we have ever known, the Earth. Side B invites us to question the harm of others and to better engage in individual, collective, and polity level actions that can lead to improved outcomes for all beings.

*“Mother trees, burglar bears, and rivers having rights?
This class underscored how to think about our role in
creating an equitable future for all.” - Anonymous*

Why we appreciate this opportunity

So often, well-meaning instructors design final exams that test our knowledge, yet such assignments rarely offer the chance to (re)examine what we learned and how that knowledge underscores or challenges our lived experiences. With this assignment, we made creative connections to multiple concepts, and were able to work together to deepen our understanding and better communicate with others. Additionally, creating this assignment together provides a unique way for us to revisit course concepts, and to remember the impact of our work after we part ways.

Bonus Track




Rock the Nation Michael Franti & Spearhead (Alia)

*...are we part of the solution or are we part of the
pollution
Sittin' by and wonderin' why,
Things ain't the way we like to find them to be, to be
For you and for me
the people over there and the ones in between
Check our habitation
are we a peace lovin' nation
Peace lovin' nation...*

...

Every piece of the puzzle has its place...

Despite the numerous inequalities we learned about or have personally experienced, every story has an element of hope, redemption, resilience, and more. If we truly seek to have a holistic, equitable future for all, then we must understand these difficult truths while uplifting these positive stories *and* work with those most impacted by our actions to reduce and prevent such harms.



8. Wake Up Everybody

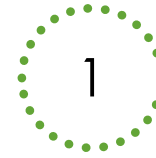
Harold Melvin & The Blue Notes
(Is)

*"The world won't get no better
if we let it be".*

The songwriter encourages the audience to Wake Up!, starting with the teachers. bell hooks (2003) states, "When teachers teach with love, combining care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect, and trust, we are often able to enter the classroom and go straight to the heart of the matter, which is knowing what to do on any given day to create the best climate for learning." This care and support from teachers can help keep students in the classroom and focused on learning despite the messiness of life. Past eras of discrimination have left legacies of hatred, war, poverty, drug use, and lost opportunity. Therefore, Harold Melvin & The Blue Notes, in addition to calling on teachers, also ask the doctors to heal the elderly who have suffered so much and for the builders to rebuild that which is broke. This song calls upon people, not by how they look, but by what they can do. This inspirational song declares, Wake Up Everybody, meaning everybody!



Side A



Born in the U.S.A.
Bruce Springsteen
(Anna)

This rock anthem at first appears to be a patriotic song about life in the United States, yet the song speaks to much hardship as well:

*"Born down in a dead man's town
The first kick I took was when I hit the ground
You end up like a dog that's been beat too much
'Til you spend half your life just coverin' up"*

The song underscores the harshness of American society, and that childhood trauma can follow us throughout our whole life. We are 'coverin' up' personal *and* societal traumas, such as the Vietnam War and the prison system. This class, having brought together insiders and outsiders, explored social-environmental inequalities, including those associated with life behind bars.



2

So Much Trouble in the World Bob Marley (Ali)

There is a great deal of trouble within this planet we call home, yet Marley also notes "Your Sun is on the rise once again". He sings of the mysticalness of our world, including the natural order of things and how the sun provides light, life, and sustenance to our dear planet.



*"The way things are going,
anything could happen"*

Despite the potential for such brightness, Marley sings of the capitalistic and destructive nature of our society, describing the industrial complex, the world's agenda of competing for outer space, and technological advancements that benefit a "dominator" approach to the world (hooks, 2008). Such an approach has negative reciprocal effects and feedback loops, which can leave unintended legacy effects (e.g., depleted resources) that negatively impact future generations (Liu et al., 2007). This approach is as unhealthy as a person believing that they are superman when they are flesh and blood - if you neglect your body and do things that are unhealthy for it sooner or later you will reap the effects of the seeds you have sown. Marley suggests that, instead of taking our planet for granted, we should "Dig a little" and "Give a little" to help balance the negative effects of our way of living. These lyrics also suggest we as a society must do more to incorporate nature within our lives.



7. Magic Xiuhtezcatl Martinez (X) (Keely)

This Indigenous activist and singer songwriter uses music to bring attention to contemporary socio-environmental issues (Hartshorn, 2018). His music is a call to action, asking "[us] to overcome the limitations and boundaries our broken world has placed on us. Calling on our communities to break free from the oppression and injustice that we face" (Hartshorn, 2018). The song reminds us of the power of community:

*"Magic in the motherland
I been havin' fun with them,
Elevating with my friends: Legacy"*

Community can be both a safe place and a powerful tool for change. In this class, we have worked to create a community that is centered on learning, teaching, and growing. We have all taken the time to get to know one another and to learn more about our place within a web of complex systems; it should not be forgotten that these actions - the formation of community and the creation of care and knowledge both inside and out - are powerful forms of activism.



6. Modern Jesus

Portugal. The Man
(Keely)

The words 'our thoughts and prayers go out to the community' flood media channels after major tragedies, yet the government we are supposed to rely on and trust often does little to respond. Instead, people who lived through the tragedy must fight for necessary change. This song brings such 'forced activism' to light:

*"Don't pray for us
we don't need no modern Jesus // to roll with us //
the only rule we need is never// giving up //
the only faith we have is faith in us".*

This activism and faith in community are symbolized through the elements like water and fire. For example, fire represents anger and frustration, which may flare up ("they can't help but shine") or burn out (when survival is at stake). Fire can also symbolize community and hope. Buono (2013) discusses how Indigenous led movements to reclaim cultural burning are meaningful for environments and Indigenous peoples: "[The elders] wanted us to come together to care for those trees, to not fear fire but to revere and respect it, and to fulfill our responsibility... It was a form of justice, after so long of that forest not having fire". Here, fire represented intergenerational healing, a future of hope, and a valuing of Indigenous ways of knowing and life. Community-based activism is a critical part of social and environmental resilience.



3 Paradise

John Prine
(Anna)

This song focuses on a section of the Green River in Muhlenberg County, Kentucky that was largely destroyed by big coal companies dumping toxic waste into the river.

*"Then the coal company came with the world's largest shovel
And they tortured the timber and stripped all the land
Well, they dug for their coal till the land was forsaken
Then they wrote it all down as the progress of man"*

The lyrics show the degradation of Kentucky landscape in the hopes of finding coal. Prine, similar to bell hooks (2008), shows that digging for coal has affected the people of Appalachia. As bell hooks (2008) wrote in her chapter, *Moved by Mountains*, "the wealth that is in our natural world when measured in dollars is not ever abundant, yet it could be so if humans were not abusing and wasting this precious resource" (pg. 26).



A piece of coal from WV brought into the facility by one of our students.

4

Let the River In

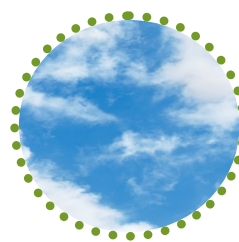
Dotan
(Kara)

This singer-songwriter first acknowledges a turning point for mankind and nature in the chorus:



*"Oh, let the river in,
burst the dams, and start again
Oh, let the river in, the will of men can't hold it in
Oh, let the river in, as the blood beneath my skin
Let the river in, nature plays, nature wins"*

These lyrics underscore the resiliency of nature that will outlast mankind. Despite people imposing legal control over nature, the environment does not know the difference. Benohr and Lynch (2018) in "Should Rivers Have Rights?" note how Chilean advocates are pushing for the Biobio, Chile's second-longest river, to have legal personhood. The dams in the river have flooded homes, displaced Indigenous Mapuche people, wrecked nesting habitats for birds, and disrupted the water's natural rhythm. By adopting the view of a river as a living entity, people would realize its actual value and ability to forge its own path. The song concludes with the chorus again, leaving the listeners to ponder the power of nature. The line, "Oh, let the river in, as the blood beneath my skin", is especially jarring: just as our blood is a life source, the river flows and nourishes our planet.



5. Breathing

Kate Bush
(Julia)

The first lines of this song, "Outside gets inside/Through her skin", immediately focuses the narrative on that of a fetus. The following lines describe the flash of nuclear explosion both the fetus and their mother are now experiencing. The chorus centers breathing:

*"Breathing / Out, in, out, in, out, in / Breathing,
breathing my mother in / Breathing my beloved in /
Breathing, breathing her nicotine / Breathing, the
fallout in / Out, in, out, in, out, in, out, in"*

Nuclear warfare represents the "dominator culture" (hooks, 2008, pg. 29) that pervades our politics and results in destructive events that impacts numerous individuals, including the fetus and other 'canary in the coal mine' individuals. For example, Sanderfoot and Holloway (2017) found that air pollution increases stress in birds, and results in weight loss and decreased reproductive success. Bush uses lyrical language so we understand the sensorial experience of struggling to breathe, while Sanderfoot and Holloway (2017) bring data on how struggling to breathe can impact many facets of life – even the lives of those not yet born. Perhaps we can learn from the trees how to better help each other during times of stress by sharing resources (Schiffman, 2021).



4. Self-Destruction

The Stop the Violence Movement (Jason)

Many songs tell listeners to ignore societal rules, while some songs go further: be a street commando, or a gangster. The youngest people in these neighborhoods admired the destroyers of the neighborhoods, but the destroyers of the neighborhoods admire the glorification of performing artists that made music about the neighborhoods! The Stop the Violence Movement was a group of the most popular hip-hop artists of the time that understood a need for changing people's minds. This song changed the trajectory of many people that were blindly creating a culture of glorified negativity and broke a destructive societal feedback loop. Despite the political degradation of the poor and less fortunate citizens of our nation (i.e., those in power choosing to stigmatize those who need financial help), urban leaders became empowered with consciousness and hope for all – a 'surprise' in this complex system (Liu et al., 2007). Brandon Keim (2017) in his article "Changing behaviors vs. changing values", notes that humans' care of nature is like that of mainstream society and government officials and lower income neighborhoods; basically, how we treat nature is similar to how we treat ourselves and other humans. "Self-Destruction" is in line with the work of Transformative Justice (Leaving Evidence) (Mingus, M. 2019), a peaceful response to combat a growing legacy of violence against the poor - except the violence this time is being perpetuated by our own acts.



5

I Can't Breathe

H.E.R.
(Myke P.)

The metaphor "I Can't Breathe", is speaking literally and figuratively to the many injustices and brutal treatment that people of color, particularly Black people, have endured through slavery, Jim Crow, and still in modern times. As an illustration, a Resistance podcast titled, *Get Back In The Water*, describes Jessa as a person who uses surfing as a way to get away from life stressors and just breathe, to listen to the waves and feel the sun on her face (Sejan-Thomas, 2021). Because of the color of her skin, however, she is treated as less-than (e.g., called derogatory names) by some other white surfers. When being disparaged, Jessa's breath has been figuratively taken away as well as her right to enjoy public spaces and the benefits of nature-based recreation. H.E.R. challenges listeners, as well as those in power, by asking the question:



*"Who will stand up for
the marginalized people?"*

H.E.R. also wants the ones who inflict the most damage to not judge people based on skin color. "When you see us, **see us.**"

6

Mercy, Mercy Me

Marvin Gaye
(Myke P.)



Due to our abuse and neglect of the environment, we have created a "time lag effect" (Liu et al., 2007). Factories and cars have created so much carbon monoxide that the smog in some places prevents you from seeing the sun (Bogert, 2021) and we have a hole in our ozone layer from the atmospheric pollutants, including ground level ozone, particulates, carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide, and sulfur dioxide (Hassan, 2011). Because of these pollutants and our actions, people now have more respiratory and heart problems than they've ever had. Marvin Gaye sings of pollutants in our oceans and seas, and the impacts on fish and marine life. Pollution and radiation are harming all of us. This song was a plea for us to recognize the damage we are doing to the Earth, and implore us to love, care for, and give back to the land (restoration) as it has given to us before we come to a point of no return.

*"Mercy, mercy me
things ain't what they used to be...
Radiation underground and in the sky
Animals and birds who live nearby
are dying"*

3. Feels Like Summer

Childish Gambino
(Kara)

This catchy pop song might be heard poolside during a relaxed summer afternoon. But, upon closer examination of the lyrics, you will find this song is full of references to climate change, overpopulation, and politics. Gambino sings of power:



*"Men who made machines that want what
they decide..."*

Oh, I know you know that pain

I'm hopin' that this world will change."

Oppressed individuals are the 'machines', and authority figures are the 'men' in power. Similarly, the Resistance podcast, *Get Back in the Water*, discusses how Kavon Ward (a Black woman) experiences the effect of such power when she was denied admittance to work on a task force related to Manhattan Beach, a site previously owned by a Black family before the local municipality used political processes to acquire the property unfairly (Sejan-Thomas, 2021). Kavon Ward was extremely qualified, as she was a former lobbyist and set the task force in motion. But the people in power seemingly didn't want change and did not pick her.

2. American Terrorist

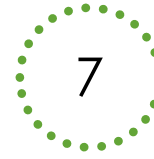
Lupe Fiasco
(JD)

This hip-hop song acknowledged the methods of the American Government to oppress minorities and the poor, and how the rich get richer and the poor stay that way. The tempo and rhythm is sort of upbeat and has a storytelling vibe to it.



"The more money that they make, the better and better they live. Whatever they want to take, whatever, whatever it is!"

This sentiment of greed is related to the podcast by Rebecca Nagle (2019) who spoke to members of the Cherokee tribe about how the American government used many different methods, including murder, to steal Indian land. The musician asks all to "close their minds and their eyes and see with their hearts." He also asks, "How do you forgive the murderer of your father?" But, Lupe Fiasco also notes the ink of a scholar is worth a thousand times more than the blood of a martyr. This sentiment suggests that words have power and education can change minds. Therefore, it is important for each of us to overcome fears associated with the educational system (e.g., imposter syndrome, repeated rejection, burnout) that may hold us back from being a force for good (Jaremka et al, 2020).



Earthquake

B.o.B.
(Mike)

This song touches on a wide range of issues we face as Americans, including the false narrative that most Native Americans died from the innocent, unintended exchanges with settlers. As these lives and lands were taken, Indigenous cultures were replaced, causing the ecosystems that were managed by these people to suffer. Robin Wall Kimmerer and Frank Kanawha Lake (2001) suggest traditional knowledge of Indigenous peoples represents a long history of experiments with fire application to the land. Soon after colonization, fire suppression was implemented and followed the plow westward across the frontier. Anthropogenic fire all but disappeared from Eastern forests by early 1700s and from the West by 1899 (Kimmerer & Lake, 2001). When the death rates in the California missions were reaching their peak, B.O.B. sarcastically acknowledges a common response:

"Well, let's just move on because America's great!"



Indigenous burning is an important cultural practice that brings renewal to the Earth and its peoples.

8

I See Fire

Ed Sheeran
(JD)

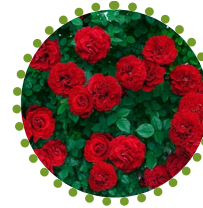
This song from the soundtrack for the popular movie, *The Hobbit*, paints a picture of destruction that could be similar across many landscapes of America. For example, bell hooks (2008) wrote about the impacts of mountaintop removal on Appalachian peoples akin to the lyrics "*the flames burn all around the mountainside*". The eerie/melancholy tone, which gives the feeling of sadness and heartache almost has you feeling what the Appalachian people have experienced. Throughout this semester, we discussed numerous ways in which humans harshly treat one another and additional inhabitants of this planet. Yet, we also focused on ways we can better help our people and planet, knowing that social-ecological systems are complex and resilient like so many of us.

*"Now I see fire
Inside the mountain
And I see fire
Burning the trees
And I see fire
Hollowing souls
And I see fire
Blood in the breeze*



And I hope that you remember me..."

Side B



1. Where is the Love? Black Eyed Peas (Sergio)

This song captivates its audiences with catchy lyrics about the importance of love, and what happens to us when we lack love and empathy for one another.

*"But if you only have love for your own race
Then you only leave space to discriminate
And to discriminate only generates hate"*

The lack of respect and understanding for nature, as well as the resources that nature provides us, is the root cause of climate change today. These changes can be seen with the global warming crisis, air pollution, and some territorial disputes between groups of people over natural resources. Humans' interactions with these different natural systems negatively affects landscape patterns, wildlife habitats, and biodiversity simultaneously. For example, local residents in Wolong use forests as fuelwood for cooking and heating; as the forests near households were depleted due to fuelwood collection, local residents had to collect fuelwood from areas far away (Liu et al., 2007). This example underscores reciprocity between humans and nature, and that social and environmental justice is entwined. How we treat the planet mimics how we treat ourselves.