GOV 94MK: The Politics of Land, Resources, and Colonialism in North America

Harvard University
Government Department
Spring 2021

Instructor: Dr. Katie Mazer
Email: kmazer@fas.harvard.edu
Class format: Virtual simultaneous seminar
Class time: TBD (tentatively Wednesday, 9:45-11:45am)
Office hours: TBD and by appointment

**QUESTIONS ABOUT THE COURSE?**
While I am not offering an information session for this course during the registration period, students are encouraged to email me with any questions. I am very happy to set up one-on-one meetings to discuss the course.

COURSE DESCRIPTION
This course examines the colonial basis of the continental political economy of the United States and Canada, which has long been understood as the United States’ main resource hinterland. It offers students a range of analytical tools through which to understand contemporary contestation over land and resources in both countries. Drawing on writings by political scientists, geographers, anthropologists, and historians, the course moves between theories of nature and settler colonialism; Indigenous perspectives that transcend and exceed Canada and the United States; and specific historical geographies of colonialism, extraction, and contestation. While the course is centered on the structures of power that reproduce the extractive economy, students will also engage with themes of resistance and resurgence throughout.

COURSE FORMAT
This is a discussion-based seminar. Students are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the assigned readings.

OBJECTIVES
Students will develop a broad understanding of the ways colonial histories and presents shape the politics of land and natural resources in Canada and the United States. They will consider: (a) theories of settler colonialism and related debates; (b) historical context for colonialism and land and resource conflicts in Canada and the United States; (c) structures of power that enable ongoing land dispossession; (d) Indigenous perspectives that challenge and transcend colonial histories and structures; and (e) specific case studies examining resource conflicts and Indigenous resistance. The course places an emphasis on understanding colonialism, extraction, and contestation in historical perspective. By the end of the course, students will be able to use
the concepts, analyses, and histories studied in class to explain the colonial present in Canada and the United States.

COMMENT ON CURRENT CONTEXT
We are living through a very stressful, difficult, and unpredictable time. I am very aware that your lives have been impacted and will continue to be throughout the semester. For this reason, I aim to be flexible, understanding, and supportive in my approach to running this course. In concrete terms this means that I am open to granting extensions, modifying requirements, and making other exceptions if you speak with me about your challenges and your needs. I can support you much more effectively if you reach out to me early. Please do your best to be open with me about your needs and, in turn, I will do my best to support you.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS
Participation (20%): This is a discussion-based seminar and students are expected to (a) come to class prepared and (b) actively and thoughtfully participate in each class. I encourage critical deliberation and welcome disagreement but will not tolerate oppressive or aggressive behavior. Please be mindful that students are approaching course content from a variety of positions and life experiences and that everyone comes to class with different perspectives, backgrounds, and bases of knowledge. This is an interdisciplinary seminar and I encourage students to make links to other areas of study and outside sources, but I ask that you do so only if you are prepared to explain them to your classmates and instructor.

Reading reflections (20%): By noon each Tuesday, students should post a short reflection (300-500 words) on the readings to the course website. This is your opportunity to think through what you have read in advance of our meeting. Your reflection should respond to the reading, rather than summarize it. I encourage you to make connections to other course themes and current events. In your reflection, please include two questions, one of which can (but need not) be a clarification question. I and the class facilitators will use these questions to help guide our discussion. You must submit ten of these reflections throughout the term. Please do not post a reflection for the week you facilitate class.

Seminar facilitation (15%): Each student will be responsible for facilitating one class meeting throughout the semester. This will involve preparing a short (10-15 minute) presentation that outlines key themes in the readings, connections to course content, and questions for the class. After your presentation, you will facilitate a class discussion of the readings, using your questions and the questions submitted through the reading reflections. You are welcome to be creative in your approach to this. I encourage you to meet with me in advance to discuss your plans for your class meeting. Your role as facilitator will last for the first 90 minutes of class. We will discuss which classes will have student facilitators once course enrollment is finalized. Depending on the number of students enrolled in the class, facilitators may work in pairs.

Paper proposal (15%): Each student will submit a 4-5 page proposal for their final paper by March 10. This is two weeks after our in-class workshop, during which you will discuss your ideas with your classmates and receive their feedback. The written proposal you submit to me will incorporate this feedback. Your proposal should (1) explain and provide background information about your topic, (2) introduce your research question(s), (3) explain which
frameworks, concepts, or lessons from the class you think will be useful in analyzing your case, and (4) identify and explain key sources you will draw on. Students must meet with me to discuss their potential topics before beginning their proposals.

Final project (30%): This final research project builds on the feedback you received in our in-class workshop and your proposal. For this project, you will choose a contemporary resource conflict and analyze it using conceptual and methodological tools you learned throughout the semester. The most obvious way to do this is by writing a paper, but I am open to a variety of formats, including unconventional ones (e.g., film, artwork, public intervention, pamphlet, etc.). These papers should not be long: your challenge is to offer a clear explanation of the case and a concise analysis in 10-12 pages. If you would like to do something other than a traditional paper you must discuss it with me prior to our workshop on February 24. Final papers are tentatively due via email on May 5.

LATE ASSIGNMENTS
Assignments submitted after the deadline will be subject to a 5% penalty per day (weekends count as one day) and will not be accepted more than one week past the deadline (for a total penalty of 30%).

COLLABORATION & ACADEMIC INTEGRITY
While this class is designed to facilitate discussion and deliberation through a variety of means (class meetings, sharing reading reflections, in-class workshopping), the work you submit for this course must be your own. These exchanges will of course influence your thinking but, outside of this, all ideas, information, and facts derived from other sources must be properly cited. I am open to students formally collaborating on their final projects, but you must seek approval from me in the early stages of the course if this is something you are interested in. Otherwise, collaboration is not permitted on course assignments.

More generally, students are expected to adhere to Harvard’s policies on Academic Integrity and Academic Dishonesty. Students should always take great care to distinguish their own ideas and knowledge from information derived from sources. The term “sources” includes not only primary and secondary material published in print or online, but also information and opinions gained directly from other people. Quotations must be placed properly within quotation marks and must be cited fully. In addition, all paraphrased material must be acknowledged completely. Whenever ideas or facts are derived from a student’s reading and research or from a student’s own writings, the sources must be indicated. It is the expectation of every course that all work submitted for a course or for any other academic purpose will have been done solely for that course or for that purpose.

It is ultimately your responsibility to understand and avoid plagiarism. Please review the Harvard Guide to Using Sources: https://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu/. If you have specific questions about referencing please come talk to me.
TEXTBOOKS
We will read the majority or the entirety of the following books, so you may want to acquire them in hard copy. They are available from various online book sellers (including bookshop.org and their respective press websites). They are also available in digital format on HOLLIS.


READINGS
The remaining readings will be available digitally through HOLLIS or will be posted to the course website.

COURSE SCHEDULE

**Week 1 (January 27) Introduction to the course**

***There are no required readings for this week but feel free to look at any of the following:***


**PART I. FOUNDATIONS**

**Week 2 (February 3) Approaching settler colonialism: Introduction**


**Week 3 (February 10) Discovery and the Native New World**


Further reading:
• Additional chapters in Miller about the legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery in The US and Canada

**Week 4 (February 17)**  
**Approaching accumulation: Land, labor and dispossession**

**Week 5 (February 24)**  
**Land and labor II / In-class workshop: Research paper ideas**

Further reading:

**PART II. GEOGRAPHIES OF DISPOSSESSION AND REFUSAL**

**Week 6 (March 3)**  
**How (and where) does colonialism dispossess?**

**Week 7 (March 10)**  
**The body and gender violence**

Further reading:

Week 8 (March 17) Infrastructure, finance, and risk

PART III: CASE STUDIES

Week 9 (March 24) Case: The McKenzie Valley Pipeline and the politics of recognition
• Coulthard, Glen. Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014 (Chapters 1, 2, 4, and Conclusion, 25-49, 51-78, 105-129, 151-179)

Week 10 (March 31) NO CLASS (University holiday)

Week 11 (April 7) Case: The Algonquins of Barrière Lake

Week 12 (April 14) Case: The Algonquins of Barrière Lake
Week 13 (April 21)  
**Case: The Dakota Access Pipeline**

Week 14 (April 28)  
**Case: The Dakota Access Pipeline / Course conclusion**
- Simpson, Leanne Betasamosake. “As We Have Always Done.” University of Toronto, Toronto, ON, December 6, 2018. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5P5l0vcGqKE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5P5l0vcGqKE).