

Can a Green University Serve Underrepresented Students? Reconciling Sustainability and Diversity at Humboldt State University

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If Humboldt State University is about anything, it's about social justice and environmental responsibility. At least, that's how we present ourselves in our mission, values, promotional materials, orientations, sustainability projects and hires, clubs, and even guest speakers. But whenever I see all this performance of green-ness, I feel both a sense of pride, but I also feel this big elephant move into the room.

The two goals of social and environmental responsibility are portrayed as comparable, similar, mutually reinforcing, and compatible. Connected by the hardly noticeable, innocent conjunction “and” in so much of HSU's discourse about itself, the goals of social and environmental responsibility, of sustainability and diversity—to use language from our recent Strategic Plan—seem to exist in happy harmony. It's easy to defend these goals and beat our chests about how progressive we are, but I think it's dangerously seductive to see them as inherently compatible. The very fact that both words are needed suggests that sustainability doesn't necessarily achieve diversity, and that environmental responsibility doesn't necessarily achieve social justice, and vice versa. That's fine, they don't always have to. People working for

social justice have enough on their plate, for sure, and people working for environmental protection are also climbing an uphill battle. Letting the two goals operate separately sometimes makes sense. But that's not what HSU is trying to do; we claim that combining these two things is what we're all about, it's what makes us unique in the CSU system, it's what's supposed to define our work here.

This elephant in the room that nobody seems to be talking about is the multiple ways in which these two goals are actually in *tension* with one another—how, as I hope to show in this talk—these visions are, perhaps, incompatible. What I mean to say is that mainstream environmental agendas often *imply* if not outright *require* social *injustice*. That is, mainstream environmentalism is invested in whiteness. I'm not sure how much of what I'm going to say is going to be horrifying or totally obvious to you, but I am really trying to initiate a dialogue that I am not hearing enough. Sustainability and diversity are each great performances. Together, they're our holy grail. Let me describe this elephant. In these ways, it's *like*—and, dare I say, *is*—invisible white privilege. This elephant should be making us ask, “In what ways may your efforts at sustainability be *in conflict with* our efforts to create a thriving college experience for underrepresented students?” “How does HSU perpetuate some of the exclusions of the environmental movement more broadly, in its attempt to be green?” “Are

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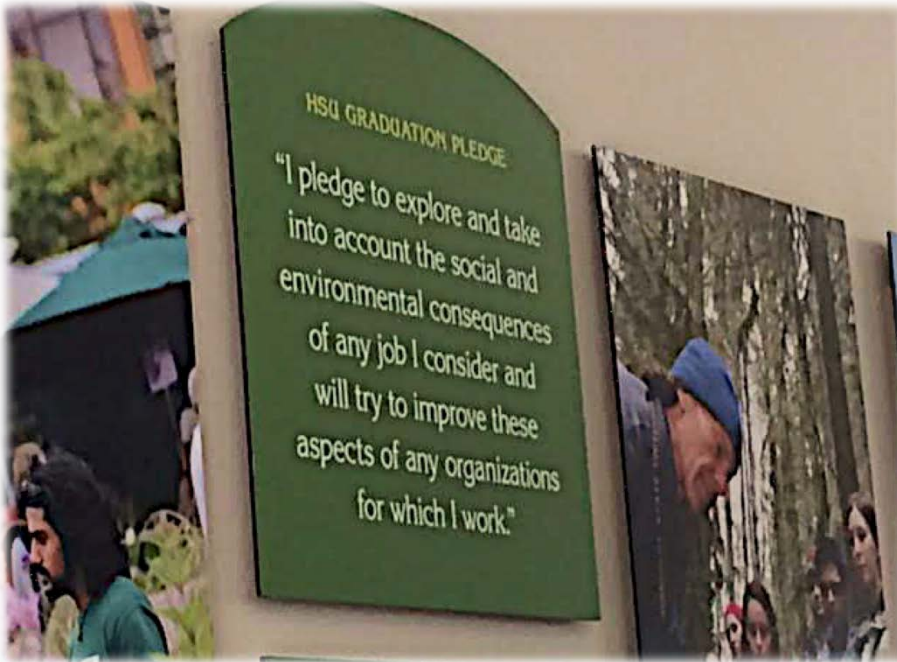


Image 1. Photo provided by Sarah Jaquette Ray

we our worst enemy, trying to achieve contradicting goals, sustainability *and* diversity?"

First, a note on terminology. I'm going to use a lot of problematic terms in this talk, and I wouldn't be an academic if I didn't say that all of the terms I'll use are profoundly contested. Green, Sustainability, Diversity, Inclusive, Underrepresented Minority (URM), Student of Color, Retain, Hispanic-Serving, the list goes on. I could spend my entire time today deconstructing these terms. But I hope you'll humor me and interpret my use of most of these as they're understood in common language.

So, let's start with HSU is "green." Of course, HSU has a long way to go to become truly green. But of course, we espouse environmental stewardship in our literature, our self-promotion, our mission, values, strategic plan, leaf-coded sustainability-focused and -related classes, and the graduation pledge. We've got sustainability coordinators, clubs, officials, units, courses, the "green scene," lots of environmentally-related degrees, a marine lab and a research vessel, and a legacy of environmental work. Oh, and we're in this beautiful place with lots of clear air and

green trees and beaches and ocean and neat creatures (yeah, yeah, you've seen it all before). I love it. I'm thrilled to be employed at this institution and privileged to be living my mainstream white life here.

Even better, HSU is increasingly a very diverse place; we recently became a Hispanic-Serving Institution or HSI, and over 44% of our incoming class this year is Latinx. We've created two Culture Centers on campus, we have the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, we have the Campus

Dialogue on Race, the Social Justice Summit, Indigenous People's Week, and really, in sum, lots of hard-working faculty, staff, and students who care deeply about liberation, and we're all here in part because diversity is an explicit agenda, though still not a reality, at HSU. I'm proud to be here when I see all this work happening.

And there are numerous ways that working toward *one* of these values will inevitably support the other, on campus and just in general, theoretically. Take food for example: rejecting industrialized food production processes—from GMOs and monoculture to labor exploitation and food security—will help us simultaneously address both ecological and social problems. Or take an environmental justice issue: avoiding toxic waste siting in a particular neighborhood translates into greater human and environmental health there. Take permaculture on campus: making our landscapes edible and ecologically sound would help our own water consumption and feed some starving students. Happy compatibilities like these examples abound. Social justice and environmental efforts

reinforcing each other's goals: great. But these moments are what I might term "shallow social and environmental responsibility." They don't



Image 2. Photo provided by Sarah Jaquette Ray

always critique the power dynamics or history at play in defining the problems and solutions. They don't interrogate how the knowledge about the problems and solutions is produced and mediated. They don't examine what I call the "cultural politics of nature," the deeper identity politics that are always at play.

Too often, despite the innocuous conjunction, "and," snuggled there cozily between those words "social" and "environmental," people who work toward sustainability and people who work toward social justice don't always work together. This happens all over the place, not just on campus. In academia, sophisticated critical race theorists and cultural studies scholars often dismiss any attention to the environment as nostalgic, not serious, and privileged. Sometimes it's hard to get the environment into those discussions; in part because there is hearty disagreement about what the environment even is to various communities. In that sense, a critical approach to environmentalism would

acknowledge multiple environmentS and multiple environmentalismS—shades of green if you will (capitalization added for emphasis). But, as I will discuss in a moment, there are even deeper, more troubling reasons that communities of color and activists and scholars working on issues of power and justice are suspicious of green ideas.

Meanwhile, as we know, many URM students feel unwelcome and don't thrive at HSU. There are many reasons for this. The Office of Diversity and Inclusion and the Institutional Research and Planning office are dedicated to understanding them. There are lots of students, faculty, staff, and administrators that are committed to working on this. The alienation has to do with being so far from home, having little connection to the community, and not seeing people around who look like you. There are national trends at work here too; PWIs struggle to retain, much less serve, URM students in college. And then of course there's a culture of racism that our keynote speaker for the Campus Dialogue on Race last week, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, discussed—microaggressions, subtle forms of alienation and othering—and course content and instructional methods that reflect if not reinforce dominant power relations. For time, I cannot outline all the research being done on this issue, and all the evidence that we hear daily of racism on college campuses. What I want to focus on is how a self-declared *green* university like HSU can make these challenges even harder.

All the happy compatibilities between green and non-white agendas at HSU notwithstanding, there are numerous ways that underrepresented



Image 3: Photo provided by Sarah Jaquette Ray

students are made to feel all the more unwelcome in this little ecotopia of HSU.

- Our non-white and/or first generation students' myriad and sundry ecological knowledges are often invalidated in their courses in favor of dominant ideas and claims about nature.
- Hot green lifestyle concepts like permaculture, the local food movement, recycling, and anti-consumerism may be perceived as privileged choices that ignore economic reasons that some students wear hand-me-down clothes or have used public transportation their whole lives.
- Carbon taxes and other economic incentives to make consumers more green often disproportionately punish the poor, and so environmental ideas that ignore these questions may make many students feel excluded from green conversations.
- The palpable anti-LA and anti-urban vibe at HSU also echoes the anti-urban attitude of many mainstream environmentalists, which is spatial code for this new racism Bonilla-Silva articulated. With over 50 percent of our student body from LA, we should

interrogate what our hostility to the city is all about, and start to make connections between environmental justice issues there—such as what LA nature writer Jenny Price calls the “social geography of air”—and this redwood retreat our LA students are escaping to.

- Sustainability may seem like a trendy new word, and when whites garden or recycle, it's cool, but as a lifestyle of the poor, it may be felt as shameful, at least by a previous generation.

- When we talk about nature only in terms of national parks, beauty, and ethics like “leaving no trace,” we ignore huge swaths of people—people who have been violently removed from so-called wilderness, people who can't afford to get to or feel uncomfortable in those ostensibly beautiful spaces, and people whose relationships with nature look very different because they are based on work, not leisure; family, not rugged individualism, etc.

The wilderness model of nature perpetuates these distinctions between spaces that are worthy of protecting from human impact, and spaces that are profane (work spaces, living spaces,



Image 4: Photo provided by Sarah Jaquette Ray

homeless spaces, dirty spaces). This is why some critical geographers call national parks “geographies of exclusion.”

If HSU is going to be as un-nuanced in its approach to the environment and sustainability as the mainstream environmental and wilderness protection movements, then HSU is going to feel as much a “geography of exclusion” as the national parks have been, and for all the same reasons (there are a lot of great books about this). Failure to recognize mainstream environmental cultural appropriations and the ways in which environmentalism often reinforces privilege, whitewashes our green hopes. I compare HSU to the wilderness movement because so many students come here for the area’s proximity to that kind of nature, and because the dominant definition of nature on campus seems to be this exclusionary one—nature should be pristine and beautiful, and humans should leave no trace.

HSU’s URM’s may feel that the green spaces on campus—the Campus Center for Appropriate Technology (CCAT), for example—are white spaces, a point that HSU English major Paradise Martinez Graff has powerfully argued to whomever will listen—to the Board of CCAT, to my classes, at a Latino/a Environmentalisms Pedagogy workshop I led at a professional conference in Moscow, Idaho this past summer, and at the Campus Dialogue on Race last week

where she and Ivan Soto, Carlrey Delcastillo (both Environmental Studies majors), Ana Molina Trejo, and Priscilla Baltezar powerfully “deconstructed” CCAT.

Students are speaking up about this all the time. At Carolyn Finney’s talk last semester, students of color told stories about being tokenized in their environmental classes. At an Institute for Student Success workshop in August, Native students told stories about not seeing their communities represented in textbooks, or how a particular natural resource management subfield began *after* the “Indian problem” ended. I hear about students’ indigenous knowledge and identity being rejected or erased. I hear young environmentally-interested young women being told they should act more like men to be taken seriously. I hear white students tell me that people of color can’t appreciate nature because they live in cities. Here, race is elided with certain spaces, and, as Teresa Baker talked about last week in her Campus Dialogue on Race workshop, the spaces most people associate with nature (i.e. wilderness, spaces empty of humans, “beautiful” landscapes to be consumed by the eye) are white spaces.

This list could go on and on, and I’m sure many of you in this audience could add your own stories to this. It’s no wonder green campuses are often white campuses, despite the liberal conceit of progressiveness implied by a quote I’ve heard so many times since I’ve arrived at HSU: “I recycle, so I can’t be a racist.” We need to start talking about these moments not as isolated instances, or even as a chronic problem with HSU being a PWI. I think we need to start talking about this being a function of HSU’s *green* identity.

The sense that environmentalism is a white thing is palpable among colleagues and students who, understandably, care about equity



Image 5. Photo provided by Sarah Jaquette Ray

and justice. To help me think about these issues for a book I'm working on called *Latin@ Environmentalisms*, two Environmental Studies students, Noemi Pacheco and Carlrey Delcastillo, won an award from the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences to conduct research about these issues on campus last spring. They talked to students, faculty, and staff about the extent to which sustainability efforts on campus address the interests of Latinx students. Their conclusions are fascinating, and you should ask them to talk to you about them. The research confirmed that the environmental ethos on campus is perceived by many Latinx students to be "only a white thing."

Do URM students have to choose between these worlds? Why might they feel they have to? These are huge questions I can't answer today, but I want to prompt an ongoing, deeper reflection about them. I try to make these questions central to what we're doing in the Environmental Studies Program here at HSU. As our PWI campus diversifies, it's important to consider the many ways that its very green-ness feels unwelcoming or insulting to many students. Many URM students come to HSU because of its strong environmental profile. That's awesome. But in an era of what Bonilla-Silva called the "new racism," in which I can disguise my racism with strategic rhetorical moves, such as "LA is just a concrete wasteland," green is the new white.

As Program Leader of Environmental Studies at HSU, I'm in the unique position to hear the other side of the problem too. I *often* hear arguments that it's imperative to protect the global environment, no matter the social costs. The planet is in such a dire condition that these social questions of equity and justice are simply not important. This rhetoric of urgency justifies all kinds of ignorance about justice and power. This logic goes, "social justice problems won't matter if we don't have a planet." Or I hear narratives like AIDS or ebola are nature's revenge on humanity. Or I hear that a natural disaster in Bangladesh or New Orleans helps with the planet's population problem. Again,

these moves are exemplary of "colorblind racism;" they hide racist ideas behind a green veneer. More subtle, though, are those who, invoking fear of imminent apocalypse, pit the "greater good" of the planet against social questions. Who cares about the pay gap, the mommy tax, the prison-industrial complex, or labor rights when we've got to address the "greater good" of climate change?

The scholarship about these tensions between environmentalism and social justice is robust. Differences between environmentalists that support social justice and the more misanthropic, xenophobic, racist brands of environmentalism have long divided the movement. In this talk today, I want to focus on the ways in which the ideas of the latter manifest in our classes and work on campus. These narratives become what Bonilla-Silva calls "racial story lines," which ignore how environmental ideas emerged alongside colonialism, and how they have historically been deployed in the name of social control in the US and globally. My argument today is that we need to reckon with how arguments to protect the environment have often justified various forms of oppression in the name of nature, and how that legacy shapes this predominantly white green institution (PWGI.)

I'm going to talk a bit about this history of what political ecologist Betsy Hartmann calls "green hate," and then provide an example of how this history manifests in contemporary cultural politics over immigration in the US. The birth of ecology as a field of study occurred alongside the beginnings of what now might be called the environmental movement in the U.S. In the latter half of the 19th century, natural history, Transcendentalism, Romanticism, and the study of ecology all converged in popular discourse to forge a budding environmental sensibility. For the first time, some people were questioning industrial progress' impacts on the environment, and began calling for outright total preservation, or at a minimum, "sustained-yield" conservation of resources. To condense a very interesting and complex history into a few

sentences, concerns about industrialization and the so-called “close of the American frontier” led to new sciences of ecological management (think Gifford Pinchot), new literary forms of environmental appreciation (think John Muir), and new forms of American identity rooted in nature (think Teddy Roosevelt). From this era, we get national parks, the science of ecology, the City Beautiful movement, sewage systems, animal welfare, and all kinds of good things that build the roots of the modern environmental movement.

That movement has, in many ways, carried these values into current politics. We witness here on campus how passion for wilderness, animals, natural beauty, and the sciences of natural resource management shape so much of what HSU is all about.

In my 2013 book, *The Ecological Other: Environmental Exclusion in American Culture*, I argue that despite environmentalism’s important criticism of various forms of domination—namely, capitalism—it is, and has historically been, invested in a variety of forms of social control. In other words, early environmentalism was a politics of the elite, and was wielded to preserve pristine “nature,” meaning both land and resources, for those in power. My book explains how ideas of nature, nation, and social control developed in tandem. In it, I argue that this history helps explain why communities of color have remained outside of mainstream environmentalism in general, and suggest that the tensions make it difficult to achieve *both* sustainability and social justice, without dealing with these legacies.

Many historians have showed that colonialism has long used “nature” as a way to oppress people; appropriating lands in the name of protecting nature continues to occur through the export of the American national park model (think Green Imperialism, the Nature Conservancy, *Gorillas in the Mist*, *Avatar*). This has led to ideas such as “green” or “eco-imperialism,” “conservation refuges,” and green colonialism, whereby people challenge the

ways that Western notions of nature and conservation disrupt sovereignty, criminalize subsistence practices, and create other kinds of injustices.

Yet this phenomenon has been no different in the American context. Ecocritic David Mazel actually argues that “what we today call environmentalism is generally understood to have had its beginnings in [...] a time and a region that place it directly upon the heels of imperial conquest” (144). The emergence of an environmental movement “on the heels of imperial conquest” suggests a relationship between these projects. For instance, those who advocated for wilderness preservation in the mid-late 19th century used the idea of pristine nature to authorize dispossessing indigenous people from their land.

As many of you in this room already know, the construction of wilderness parks went hand in hand with U.S. imperial expansion across the Western frontier. Indeed, the latter half of the nineteenth century not only saw the first national parks; it also witnessed unprecedented appropriation of tribal lands, as well as the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 and the Gadsden Purchase in 1853, which appropriated land from Mexico, and dramatically shifted the western American landscape and Americans’ image of “their” country. Histories about the environmental movement in the US are often told completely outside of the US’s frontier and racial histories, but some really helpful texts weave these together. It’s really helpful to think about frontier mythology alongside the history of urbanization and immigration, as these previous examples show. When we understand America’s so-called public lands as having a long history of human habitation and use, it’s hard to uncritically accept ideas about “protecting nature.”

But there was an important nationalist narrative at work here in the frontier myth, which extended Manifest Destiny. In this myth, the settlers’ encounter with raw nature forged a unique American character. Land became a “safety valve” for diffusing social tensions, an

idea that Frederick Jackson Turner coined in 1893, when he also famously proclaimed the “close of the frontier.” When Turner declared the frontier “closed,” the independent American spirit was under threat. With the settlement of the land once considered “frontier,” the qualities that made Americans unique would have to be artificially produced in a new conception of the frontier—the wilderness. The creation of wilderness became an essential means of preserving American character, which was also at this time becoming understood as racially “white.”

Only in the context of colonial displacement of Native Americans could the idea of wilderness first begin to take shape. Environmental historians have argued that the wilderness model’s insistence that nature be “pristine” created an image of wilderness as a place “where man himself is a visitor who does not remain,” and rendered wilderness accessible only to the privileged. That was the whole point. Wilderness was a space for elite leisure, where what Teddy Roosevelt called “race suicide” could be staved off through the challenges of encountering wild nature, or what he called “the strenuous life,” which conditioned an ideal white, fit, self-reliant, rugged individualist American.

Concurrently with the birth of this national park wilderness model, Social Darwinism was increasingly deployed to legitimize xenophobic, nativist ideas. “Nature”—both the material environment itself and also the idea of how nature works, as in the “survival of the fittest”—became a seemingly innocent justification for social control. This was Herbert Spencer’s interpretation of Darwinian theory, and it naturalized the Anglo-American race’s superiority in a so-called survival of the fittest as “inevitable.” The idea of nature as “wilderness” then became what the Nazis would later call “*lebensraum*,” or “living space”—for the pressures fomenting in society. Immigration policies between the 1880s and 1920s increasingly fortified borders and legalized ethnic exclusions, first against the Chinese, but

then against other groups, with the explicit intention of preserving the genetic and cultural purity of the Anglo population. “Nature” was living room, resources, and wilderness, but it was also a discourse about how a great American civilization would thrive, achieving its “natural,” inevitable, and evolutionary climax.

Given this context, it is not surprising that many of the same figures who were developing the science of ecology and promoting the wilderness movement were the earliest proponents of eugenics. It may seem paradoxical that the early tradition of the American ecology wilderness movements, promulgated by Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman, should share views of “nature” with Ernst Haeckel, George Perkins Marsh, and Roosevelt, all strident advocates of racial and genetic purity. Yet these grandfathers of the environmental movement shared ecological and eugenic philosophies. Indeed, the Nazis looked to the work of these American Social Darwinist conservationists to articulate their “blood-and-soil” basis for genocide and eugenics. If you want to know more about the eugenicist views of these so-called grandfathers of the environmental movement figures, check out some of these disturbingly brilliant books (Bederman, Haraway, Kosek, Ray, *Eco-Fascism*).

Conservationism’s historical ties to empire-building and eugenics become, in the 1960s and 70s, anti-populationism and anti-immigrationism. Although an abundance of activists and scholars have rejected environmentalism’s focus on human population growth as the root problem of “our” environmental crisis, the idea that population is a central crisis has created great animosity between third world feminists and the mainstream environmental movement. Andrea Smith, in her fantastic book, *Conquest*, describes how environmentalism has underwritten the forced sterilization of women of color in the US. Invoking Thomas Malthus’s late 18th century *Essay on the Principle of Population*, neo-Malthusian environmentalists entertain

discussions about who gets to be rescued in the “sinking ark” or lifeboat of the planet.

Connections between environmentalism, discourses of fear about “others,” and policies of social control continue to influence so-called “sustainability” today. Chicano studies scholar Priscilla Solis Ybarra argues that the wilderness model that emerged from the Progressive Era continues to deter people of color from participating in the environmental movement, as it “erases the ongoing relationship with nature that people of color maintained [with the so-called wilderness] for centuries before the establishment of the United States and westward expansion”. It also erases the legacy of conquest that creating wilderness spaces helped achieve, as well as the ways that nature as an idea has been repeatedly deployed against Mexican, indigenous, and black communities since Europeans “discovered” the new garden of America.

Similarly, geographer Laura Pulido argues that environmentalism is “a form of racism that both underlies and is distinct from institutional and overt racism” (2000:17). This assessment helps explain what seems to be a paradox: that environmentalism espouses social and ecological harmony, yet it reinforces many social hierarchies. Because environmentalism promotes several “goods,” including resistance to the devastation of the environment in the names of growth and development, it is easily exonerated of its “bads.” Pulido suggests that it actually works in tandem with white privilege: “[m]ost white people do not see themselves as having malicious intentions,” she writes, and therefore can “exonerate themselves of all racist tendencies” (2000:15). This non-malicious form of privilege is similar to what Bonilla-Silva last week called “colorblind racism”. In general, environmentalism continues to draw on and perpetuate ideas of nature that reinforce racial and social hierarchies, and continues to ignore the myriad ways in which various disenfranchised groups define their own environmentalisms all the time. But I’m

suggesting something even worse here; environmentalism can also become a way to invest in whiteness in ways that feel morally righteous, even colorblind, all in response to urgent calls to “save” “biodiversity” and reinstate planetary harmony.

Environmental justice (EJ) is another key scholarly and activist approach that helps clarify these legacies of environmental exclusion. EJ is concerned with the interconnections between human justice and environmental degradation, and the “places we live, work, pray, and play” as opposed to the “empty,” “pristine” spaces of wilderness. Privileging wilderness protection over social justice explains why environmentalism often fails to build coalitions across lines of class, race, gender, sexuality, religion, nation, and ability. Mainstream environmental thought ignores certain communities and environments, but it also goes further by treating certain communities as threats to nature and nation. It expresses these fears as what I call in my book, “environmentalist disgust.” Mainstream environmentalism often views ecological others as unenlightened or ecologically “illegitimate” (to use Laura Pulido’s word). Whether breaching expected myths of ecological identity or behaving in ecologically toxic ways, ecological others undermine nature.

Beginning in the 1990s, environmental studies began calling for greater diversity and recognized that the study of nature had been overwhelmingly dominated by whites and white perspectives. Since then, greater attention has been paid to non-white relationships with nature, which has not simply increased the amount of nonwhite perspectives, but redefined what counts as an “environmental” concern in the first place. Creating more places at the proverbial table for diverse voices simply hasn’t been enough. Nonwhite perspectives and approaches to the environment do not always resonate with the genres, aesthetics, and politics of traditional environmentalism. To cite a well-known example, indigenous perspectives on wilderness parks show that the no-trace dictum of “where

man shall not remain,” which was codified in the Wilderness Act of 1964, belies a genocidal history of dispossession, and that Yosemite is a pristine, beautiful place only to people who are unaware of this. Or, if we take seriously the experiences of agricultural migrants in California, then our primary environmental concerns may become labor laws and immigration reform, instead of sustainable local food production. In other words, asking a variety of people to get on board with dominant environmental ideas ignores the ways in which other communities may define their *own* environmental priorities.

For example, Sylvia Mayer notes that the fact that American environmentalism is “preoccupied with notions of wilderness and wildlife preservation explains the mistrust black people have harbored toward long-established environmental organizations”. Getting more people of color into wilderness spaces, as Teresa Baker was calling for last week at her CDR workshop, is certainly one way to address these issues. But, as Carolyn Finney elaborates in her fantastic book, *Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African-Americans to the Great Outdoors*, another way to address this is to start recognizing the myriad ways that people of color have historically and are still doing environmental things. Their stories are simply not told because they don’t “look” like environmentalists, she argues. Priscilla Ybarra confirms that this lack of representation exists in Chicano/a studies as well, so that “Chicano/a studies do not yet relate the natural environment to their priorities in social justice and cultural heritage.” I don’t mean to suggest with these examples that these are the only non-white groups articulating environmental concerns, I just want to put them out there as examples to show how important it is to give these efforts a lot more air time in our narratives about what it means to be an environmentalist.

In this next section, I want to talk a bit about how mainstream environmental ideas have been in conflict with Latinx rights in recent history by

focusing on research I did on a wilderness area along the Arizona-Mexico border between 2005 and 2007 and wrote much more about in chapter 3 of my book. In that research, I analyzed anxieties about immigration that framed the presence of undocumented migrants in the borderland in environmental terms—that is, as a kind of litter on the land, as an invasive species, as a disease or epidemic, or as a natural disaster. With so much of the land along the Arizona-Mexico border designated as public, anti-immigration groups like the Minutemen and a group called Desert Invasion readily made use of “environmental protection” to bolster their claims that immigration was destroying the nation and that it was doing so by threatening its natural beauty and integrity.

The way that immigrants were described in environmental discourse illustrates the problem. In my book, I argue that trash stood in for the immigration problem on the US-Mexico border. The rhetoric about immigrants’ trash provoked alarmism about immigration by framing it as dirty, ecologically irresponsible, and unnatural. It dehumanized, even animalized, immigrants and ignored the broader, perhaps less viscerally disturbing, sources of the crisis occurring along the border. Trash is not only ecologically damaging, it is aesthetically and hygienically troubling; hence, its affective power to evince visceral disgust. The sheer amount of trash disposed along one person’s migration journey is indeed alarming: adventure writer Tim Cahill estimated the amount is eight pounds per person. (That he thought this was an important detail reinforces my point here). Putting aside for the moment how this number contrasts to the poundage of trash I myself produce in just one day, the ecological impact of so much trash is visible to visitors everywhere in the borderlands. An article in *The Sierra Times* typified this environmentalist disgust: “the flow of these illegal ‘invaders’ will continue, and the trash will never cease”. In depicting immigration as a “flow” and immigrants as simultaneously illegal, invasive, and dirty, this statement renders

immigrants ecologically, legally, and hygienically threatening.

In this statement, the author also deliberately employs the ecological analogy of “invasive species,” indicated by her own use of quote marks around invasive. This language suggests that immigrants, like a weed non-native flora or fauna, are out of control and out of place. They are like the trash they leave behind, metonymically becoming trash—unworthy and impure. The language of “invasive species” is equated here with impurity and dirt, heightening the sense that undocumented activity is dirty because it is, above all, unnatural. Historian Peter Coates traces the use of this immigration-as-invasion metaphor through the past century in America, revealing that it is a common trope in environmental discourse, what Coates calls “the eco-racism of American nativism.” It suggests that the solution is both a military posture of defensiveness against invasion, and also that those immigrating are not natural. They are out of place, they are dirty.

Drawing on metaphors of natural disaster, invasions, and deluge, this language depicts the environment, not the immigrant, as the victim. The desert ecosystem is being “trampled to death” by a “tidal wave” of “illegal aliens” evading the law. One article captured the image: “Tide of Humanity Tramples on Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument”. Such rhetoric metaphorically likens immigrants to pollution, contamination, natural disaster, flood, tide, plague, or a “swarm” of overly fertile people of color rupturing “fortress” America. Meanwhile, these discourses of nature ignore the many political, economic, and legal forces that put immigrants in the delicate wilderness of the border in the first place. A different reading of the landscape might posit different victims—women, children, economic migrants, climate refugees, the shadow labor on which US economy is built, and the land itself.

Green anti-immigrant sentiment has its roots in the Progressive Era that I discussed above. As geographer Jake Kosek writes, “Fears of

contagion were expressed by environmental leaders from Muir to Roosevelt to Pinchot and others,” who “all saw immigration restriction as vital to the protection of nature’s purity”. Even environmentalist patriarch and beloved writer Edward Abbey, whose book *The Monkey-Wrench Gang* inspired various environmentalist movements from Earth Liberation Front to Earth First!, argued against immigration on the grounds that “we still hope for an open, spacious, uncrowded, and beautiful—yes beautiful!—society.” Abbey went on to say that “the alternative, in the squalor, cruelty and corruption of Latin America, is plain for all to see”. This revulsion about immigration among environmentalists is not new, and discourses of purity and pollution about immigrants, as Kosek says, “reflect a long-standing conception of a pure nature threatened by various forms of racial difference.”

I could go on and on about how social justice and mainstream environmentalism are at odds with one another. In the name of protecting America’s “nature,” all kinds of atrocities have occurred, and not just to African-Americans, Latinx, and Native Americans. I have tried to outline how mainstream environmentalism has long been invested in creating a particular kind of society, forging a particular kind of American, and purifying a particular concept of nature. I also tried to show how environmental ideas and language can naturalize white environmental behaviors while demonizing non-white behaviors as “invasive” or dirty—in other words, bad for nature; hence my use of this term “ecological other” as the title of my book. These are just two ideas I wanted to share with you today that help us think more critically about what we’re all doing at a green university.

So, what does acknowledging the social injustices associated with environmentalism mean for us? It would be a horrible misunderstanding of my arguments to decide that what we have to do now is reject environmentalism. I want us to think more critically about how HSU delineates between

people who are good for nature and people who are not, and how this might undermine our efforts to serve URM. The point has been to strengthen the case for greater *collaborations* between social justice and environmental movements by reckoning with these tensions rather than denying them. A great example of this has been Black Lives Matter, which is bringing to the fore connections between police brutality, mass incarceration, health, and environmental racism; not being able to breathe is simultaneously both about being strangled and about being disproportionately exposed to poor air quality. The first step for us is for environmental entities—degree programs, faculty, staff, narratives, and the physical spaces of campus itself—to begin acknowledging this elephant in the room.

How? In this last part of my talk, I want to outline some ideas and draw attention to some of the work already being done.

One tool is an exercise you all can use. I use it in my Environmental Studies 295: Power, Privilege, and Environment class. It sets the tone for the rest of the class, if not the entire degree. The exercise I do draws on Peggy McIntosh's knapsack of white privilege. It's an environmental privilege knapsack exercise. It reveals to students how race and class privilege shape environmental values.

This exercise shows the ways that environmental practices, values, and even aesthetics of what counts as "beautiful nature" can alienate communities of color. It opens dialogue in (mostly) really productive ways.

Things We Need To Do

1. Recognizing and making central, not just token, the environmental work being done by people of color is one step. What concerns are communities of color articulating? Here, Carolyn Finney is a great example. Her entire book is about drawing attention to African-American environmental practices. She's not using a measure of white environmentalism; she's looking to black leaders doing work that we might want to rethink of as environmentalist. Environmental Justice (EJ), indigenous sovereignty, and immigrants' rights movements in the US are exemplary, but so are transnational EJ and anti-toxics movements, Idle No More, etc.
2. KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION. This one's a bit more difficult to describe, and it suggests a fundamental critique of how we do business in our classrooms. As HSU's values state, we want to be the center for interdisciplinary study of the environment. This has EVERYTHING to do with reconciling social justice and environmental concerns. Understanding approaches to the environment from a variety of disciplines also teaches about different forms of knowledge production and ways of knowing, or epistemologies, as philosophers call them. At the root of interdisciplinarity is a fundamental humility about what counts as "truth." Chicana writer Chela Sandoval goes as far as to argue that interdisciplinarity is a kind of decolonizing of higher education. That is, if we interrogate the power structures behind various accepted ideas about what counts as environmental expertise, we find that multiple approaches to any particular problem exist. Interdisciplinarity opens the door to explore a variety of fields—from natural sciences to the arts—but also to value the environmental knowledges garnered from feminist, Third World, subaltern, postcolonial, neocolonial, indigenous, anti-ablest, more-than-human, and migrant experiences. Interdisciplinary approaches are not just about using lots of tools to solve problems, the parameters of which are already taken for granted. Rather, interdisciplinarity is always about questioning claims about nature. When we study "the environment," we rarely ask what "counts" as an environmental problem and who gets to define it?; whose way of knowing is privileged in defining that problem?; who

benefits from potential solutions?; whose definition of nature is assumed? Claims about nature are charged with all of these power relations. Different forms of knowing—or “epistemologies”—shape how we each come to know nature, and a socially-just, inclusive environmental institution must prioritize interdisciplinary approaches for this reason. As Carolyn Finney argues, “it is imperative to engage cultural work—be it popular culture, art, or music, in all its myriad forms—because it is in these spaces that people who are ‘different’ are able to produce work about themselves without the boundaries and rules that can inhibit their voices, that more traditional ways of knowing are unable to accommodate.” We need all kinds of knowledge—street science, oral histories, performance, graffiti, lyrics, poetry, soundscapes, queer phenomenology, traditional ecological knowledge, *and*, lest you think I’d forget, scientific empiricism, to list just a few examples—to figure out how to work for environmental responsibility and social justice for our students.

3. Pedagogically, what can faculty do? We can decolonize our classroom by centering work by non-white environmental thinkers (of which there are many). But if faculty feel they’re out of their comfort zone teaching content like this, they can learn liberatory instructional methods. These techniques can help non-white students feel more welcome in classes led by white faculty. For example, we can all create assessment tools that empower students and reward a variety of kinds of knowledge. In Bonilla-Silva’s terms, white faculty can be anti-racist racists. And yes, more visible URM faculty and mentors on campus would be ideal, and there are best practices for recruiting and retaining those faculty and staff, which we as an institution must learn about and implement better. But that doesn’t let white faculty off the hook in the meantime. There’s a lot I can still do to improve my pedagogy.
4. And we need to weave a narrative about and become aware of the work we’re already doing on campus.
 - a. I have described some examples already happening on campus.
 - b. I’m editing an anthology on *Latin@ Environmentalisms* with Priscilla Ybarra and other colleagues, with Duke University Press, as well as a volume on *Disability Studies and the Environmental Humanities*, with University of Nebraska Press. My own research is always trying to mend the sustainability/diversity divide. Great work exists on sexuality and the environment, gender and the environment, EJ, postcolonial environmental concerns, political ecology, etc, and we teach classes at HSU that address these intersections. I think in many ways, HSU is unique in this; by deliberately putting power and privilege in dialogue with sustainability all the time, we are well-poised to do this work well, and better than we have yet. We could do better collaborating in our research.
 - c. Professor Marisol Ruiz in Education and Professor Cesar Abarca in Social Work ran an environmental justice workshop in April 2014, and this workshop provided a critical opportunity to open these discussions.
 - d. Campus Dialogue on Race and the Social Justice Summit both offer opportunities for students and staff/faculty to raise these issues. Jennifer Maguire in Social Work is doing a huge project on food security. The California Center for Rural Policy does this kind of important work too. Lots of nonprofits in town are doing intersectional environmental work. There are models in academia, in the community, and in the students’ work.
 - e. The focus of Indigenous Peoples’ Week was on Sustainability this year.
 - f. The Environment and Community Master’s degree program promotes much of this dialogue on campus, and grad

students held a fantastic Klamath Symposium in late October.

- g. Multiple colleges are working toward a place-based learning community model to help incoming students build cohorts and become invested in Humboldt County.
 - h. Klamath Theatre Project and Theresa May's *Salmon is Everything*—a common reading book this year—is an example of how difficult social justice and environmental responsibility is to achieve, but also an effort to do some deep work on that.
 - i. An ecofeminist vegan student interested in issues of intersectionality approached the vegan club here about its pins that say 'eat pussy not meat;' a student showed a faculty member teaching about human population growth a critique of populationism from another class, and that professor vowed to "change his curriculum." Students are working on homelessness, and the Fruit Tree Alliance and Oh SNAP! are working on food security on campus. I was part of an Institute for Student Success (ISS) workshop on sustainability and diversity, the Environmental Studies club worked with others on campus to combine Earth Day with environmental justice day, and they're connecting across disciplines in geographic information systems (GIS) day by leading an event on spatializing environmental racism. I love these kids. They inspire me.... The list I'm sure goes on and on. I'm certainly not being comprehensive here. I collect these stories, so if you have some, please send them.
5. We don't have to wait around for administration to change; our micro-adjustments can counteract many a microaggression. We will die of hopelessness waiting our lifetimes to see our desires implemented as institutional policy and for the non-choir to listen to us preach. Meanwhile, we can dismantle the master

narratives with counter-narratives, one micro-action and micro-thought at a time.

To conclude, our ostensibly green university fails to account for the ways in which its very green-ness works against social justice, and how this in turn may make it hard for underrepresented students to thrive here. Environmentalism and its various managerial, technological, scientific, and extracurricular extensions here at HSU may be repeating what the green movement in the US has been doing for more than 150 years, articulating anti-capitalist whiteness as a love of nature. If we want to be a green campus, full of environmentalist responsibility, we've got to reckon with how these values support whiteness. Can we do both?

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