

Geo 340: The Geography of Oil

Fall 2013

Tues/Thurs 930-1050

Maxwell Hall 110

Office Hours: Thurs 11a-1p

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Course Description

Oil is often imagined to contain incredible powers. It is the lifeblood of our economy and a magical generator of wealth and prosperity. On the other hand, it is seen as a “curse” that inhibits democracy and causes poverty, and desire for oil control is claimed to drive geopolitical conflict and war. If oil runs out, we are told industrial civilization will collapse. We understand that oil is fundamental to society, economics, and politics, but oil is also profoundly *geographical*. It only exists in particular local places, and its underground state makes knowledge about its whereabouts highly contentious. Its importance as a *global* commodity ensures that (geo)political groups situated at diverse geographical scales (local, national, global) will struggle over oil control and profit. Once it is extracted it must be transported through vast geographical networks of pipelines, ocean tankers, and refineries. Once it is refined it serves particular uses which themselves produce geographies (e.g., in the U.S., cheap gasoline is a critical basis for suburban sprawl and the reliance on auto-transport). Oil is also central to geographical concerns with the environment. Its extraction leads to water contamination. Refining consumes tremendous amounts of energy and water and produces toxic pollution. The combustion of motor fuel produces smog and air quality problems. Throughout oil’s global travels it also produces greenhouse gases that contribute to climate change.

In this course, we will use the topic of oil to explore the concerns of human geography with society, space, and the natural environment. By learning about oil we will cover themes and concepts important to environmental, political, cultural, economic and urban geography. We will also explore oil in diverse geographical contexts including Texas, Venezuela, and Nigeria.

Course Requirements

It is of paramount importance that the classroom environment be conducive to lectures, discussions, questions, and debates. This can only be the case if there is an atmosphere of inclusion, fairness, and mutual respect both between and among the students and between the professor and the students. Please contribute to the creation of such an environment by following a few simple rules.

- (1) Turn off all cell phones, beepers, buzzers, etc. prior to entering the classroom
- (2) **Laptops are not allowed during class.** Because of extensive wireless coverage, students often use open computers claiming to 'take notes' as an excuse to web-surf and instant messaging. If you need to use a laptop for a medical reason, it must be cleared with the University disability services.
- (3) Be on time! I often make critical announcements at the beginning of class.
- (4) Please do not make harmful comments about others or their opinions even if you disagree strongly with a comment – address the content of their comment only
- (5) Hand in your assignments on time
- (6) Please take responsibility for your education. If you have any questions or concerns, please see me in my office hours or make an appointment.
- (7) Attendance is necessary to succeed in this course. I will notice if you do not show up. **If you need to miss class for any reason please let me know ahead of time and explain the reason.**
- (8) Reading is critical to success in the class. Your ability to make these connections with me in class lectures and activities depends on comprehensive reading the material prior to class.

Required Texts (All other readings listed below will be posted on blackboard)

- Black, B. 2012. *Crude Reality: Petroleum in World History* (Plymouth, UK: Rowman and Littlefield)
- Bridge, G. and P. Le Billon. 2013. *Oil* (Cambridge, UK: Polity)

Course Assignments

- *General Participation* (10%) – There are two important aspects of participation. (1) Coming to class and (2) Actively participating in classroom discussion. This is a small enough class where we can expect *everyone* to offer ideas, opinions, and questions that spur wider discussion. While you will be expected to participate more formally in specific moments (discussion leader, presenter), *general* participation will be graded on how you participate in classes where you are not the center of attention.

- *Discussion Leadership* (5%) – Once in the semester, you and two or three others will be in charge of leading discussion (see reading schedule for “student led discussion” days). I will often lead off these classes with a short lecture, but the rest of the class will be led by you and your group. This requires that your group **meets prior to class** and prepares **at least three thoughtful discussion questions** to pose to the class. You must also **prepare preliminary responses** to the questions you have posed. For each question, one person in the group will pose a question and two in the group must respond with their thoughts. If people in the group disagree, all the better – debate is good as long as it is respectful (although disagreement/debate is not mandatory). After this, the question will be open for discussion to the entire class. How **you perform as a group** – display that you have read; pose critical questions; offer critical insights – will determine 10% of your overall class grade. See this as an opportunity to secure an easy 10points.
- *Found objects* (5%) – Every class day will begin with one or two of you presenting a 2-3 minute “found object” on oil and society. This could be a newspaper article, television/movie clip, or any other cultural image/media object that you can show/summarize to the class. You will be graded on the relevance of the “object” to class themes and your presentation effectiveness. This should also be an easy 7 points.
- *Take home exams/writing assignments* (60%) – There will be **four take home writing assignments**. They must be between 1,000-1,500 words (include a word count), or 3-5 pages, 12 pt Times New Roman font, 1-inch margins, and double spaced. If you don’t abide by these specifications points will be taken off. They are always handed out on the Tuesday 9 days before they are due; due dates are **September 26, October 17, November 7, and November 21**. These assignments will feature a series of essay questions where you can choose one question out of two or three options. These assignments are not meant to test the empirical details of the oil industry, but rather your ability to use concepts covered in class (e.g. property, sovereignty, Fordism, etc) and apply them to an *critical analysis* of the oil industry using evidence from class materials (no outside sources are allowed) to support that analysis. In other words, the assignments aren’t meant to test your knowledge of information, but your analytical and writing skills. By making these take home, I expect clear and well-structured essays free of the spelling and

grammatical mistakes that might surface in an in-class essay. *I also trust you to make these essay your own work. You may not reference any websites or any external sources whatsoever (and this includes outside books and articles not assigned as part of class readings). You also should not work with others.* If I suspect and confirm that your writing has made use of external sources (especially internet sources such as Wikipedia), you will automatically fail the exam.

- *Final Project (20%)* – At the end of the semester, you will hand in a final research project that investigates some aspect of the geography of oil (**due Thursday December 5th**). This could be a particular place effected by oil (e.g. the Gulf Coast refining region), a particular aspect of the oil industry (e.g. petrochemicals, offshore drilling), or some other specific topic relevant to oil (e.g. gasoline taxes, cultural representations of oil in film). This is a **research project** and will require a semester-long engagement with books, journal/newspaper articles, and other materials. You are required to orient yourself to and learn how to navigate SU's Library resources in this research project, but, feel free to ask me if you have trouble with this.

- Other Requirements

- *Method of Presentation* – You have the freedom to choose how you will present your findings. Many of you will go the mainstream route – an 8-10 page paper (*double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman Font, 1-inch margins*). But, I am open to “alternative” methods of presentation including songs, art, short stories, videos, comics, blogs, etc. The only requirement is that your chosen “method” demonstrates that you have researched and learned enough about your chosen topic in order to convey that knowledge effectively.
- *Proposal (2.5 out of 20% toward final grade)* – A project proposal is due **in class Tuesday October 8th)**
 - Which topic you have chosen and why.
 - Which “method of presentation” you will use to undertake your project.
 - A list of at least five NON-INTERNET references – books or journal/magazine/newspaper articles (any newspaper or magazine that also publishes their articles online can be used).

- *References* – Regardless of your method of presentation, you must have at least ten **non-internet** references – books or journal/magazine/newspaper articles (any newspaper or magazine that also publishes their articles online or is available through SU Library’s many useful electronic databases **can** be used). You may, however, supplement these ten sources with internet sources (Wikipedia **may not be used** as a source), but it must be clear that the bulk of your research was informed through more reliable journalistic and academic sources.
- *Citation/Bibliography* – **Any information or ideas you use from other works must be cited accordingly. When in doubt, cite!!!** You may use any citation system you like (footnotes or in-text parenthetical citation, e.g., (Huber 2009: 89)), as long as it is comprehensive and consistent. For specific information or quotes, you must provide a page number with the citation. Bibliographies must include all the required information for books (author, title, publisher, place published, and year of publication) and articles (date/year, volume, issue number, pages). Consult this website for a series of examples of the standard “MLA” styles for a variety of sources: (<http://www.cws.illinois.edu/workshop/writers/citation/mla/>)
- *In-Class Presentation(2.5 out of 20% toward final grade)* – The last two class periods everyone will give a brief 3-4 minute presentation on their chosen topic and how the findings relate to class themes/geographical concepts.

Evaluation

Overall Participation	10%	A (93-100)	C (73-76)
Discussion Leadership	5%	A- (90-92)	C- (70-72)
Found Object	5%	B+ (87-89)	D+ (67-69)
Take home Assignments (4)	60%	B (83-86)	D (63-66)
Final Project	<u>20%</u>	B- (80-82)	D- (60-62)
	100%	C+ (77-79)	F (0-59)

Academic Integrity

The Syracuse University Academic Integrity Policy holds students accountable for the integrity of the work they submit. Students should be familiar with the Policy and know that it is their responsibility to learn about instructor and general academic expectations with regard to proper citation of sources in written work. The policy also governs the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments as well as the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verifications of participation in class activities. Serious sanctions can result from academic dishonesty of any sort.

For more information and the complete policy, see <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu>

Students with Disabilities

If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services(ODS), <http://disabilityservices.syr.edu>, located in Room 309 of 804 University Avenue, or call (315) 443-4498 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. ODS is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will issue students with documented disabilities Accommodation Authorization Letters, as appropriate. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact ODS as soon as possible. You are also welcome to contact me privately to discuss your academic needs although I cannot arrange for disability-related accommodations.

Religious Holidays

SU's religious observances policy, found at http://supolicies.syr.edu/emp_ben/religious_observance.htm, recognizes the diversity of faiths represented among the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holy days according to their tradition. Under the policy, students are provided an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance provided they notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes. For fall and spring semesters, an online notification process is available through MySlice/Student Services/Enrollment/My Religious Observances from the first day of class until the end of the second week of class.

READING AND ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE

(all readings not from Black or Bridge and Le Billon will be posted on blackboard)

Tuesday August 27th

Course Introduction

Thursday August 29th – Oil’s Complex Geographies

- Bridge and Le Billon, Chapter 1, pp. 5-34
- “Dialectics,” *Dictionary of Human Geography*, 157-158

Tuesday September 3rd – The Formation of Oil and the Making of a “Resource”

- Black, Intro + Chapter 1, pp. 5-42
- “Resource” *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, 648-649

Thursday September 5th – Oil as a Commodity Chain

- Dara O’Rourke and Sarah Connolly, “Just Oil? The Distribution of Environmental and Social Impacts of Oil Production and Consumption”: 587-617
- “Commodity Chain” *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, 101-2

Tuesday September 10th – Property I: Oil and Private Property in the United States

- Zimmerman, E.W. 1957. *Conservation in the Production of Petroleum*, pp. 91-113.
- “Property” and “Scale”, *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, 593-594; 664-66

Thursday September 12th- Property II: Sovereignty, Rent and the Landlord State

- Bridge and Le Billon, Chapter 2, pp. 35-68
- “Rent” and “Sovereignty” *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, 644-645; 706-707.

Tuesday September 17th – Extractive Landscapes I: Early Oil Booms and the Sacrificial Landscape (Student Led Discussion)

TAKE HOME WRITING ASSIGNMENT #1 HANDED OUT

- Black, B. 2000. *Petrolia: The Landscape of America's First Oil Boom*, pp. 60-82.
- "Landscape" *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, 409-411

Thursday September 19th – Extractive Landscapes II: Environmental (In)justice

- Kimerling, J. 2012. "Huaorani Land Rights in Ecuador: Oil, Contact, and Conservation," pp. 236-251.
- "Environmental Justice" *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, 201-202

Tuesday September 24th – Oil – Nigeria and Sweet Crude

- Watts and Ibaba, 2011. "Turbulent Oil" pp. 1-19

Film: Sweet Crude

Thursday September 26th – Blessing or Curse? (Student Led Discussion)

TAKE HOME WRITING ASSIGNMENT #1 DUE

- Bridge and Le Billon, pp. 141-149
- Maass, Peter. 2009, *Crude World*, pp. 26-52

Tuesday October 1 – Geopolitics – The Middle East, Oil, and Empire

- Painter, David, 2012 "Oil and the American Century", pp. 24-39
- Jones, Toby, "America, Oil, and War in the Middle East", pp. 208-18
- "Geopolitics" *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, pp. 300-302

Thursday October 3rd – Geopolitics and the War in Iraq (Student led discussion)

- Muttitt, G. 2012 "Whatever Happened to Iraqi Oil?" *TomDispatch*, August 2012.

Tuesday October 8th – Big Oil and Industrial Organization

**TAKE HOME WRITING ASSIGNMENT #2 HANDED OUT
FINAL PROJECT PROPOSAL DUE**

- Juhasz, A. 2008. *The Tyranny of Oil*, pp. 18-55
- *The Economist*, “Supermajordämmerung” 3 August 2013

Thursday October 10th – Oil Disaster – The Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill (Student led discussion)

- Dickinson, T. 2010. “The Spill, the Scandal and the President” *Rolling Stone*
- Cleveland, C. 2010 “Deepwater Horizon oil spill” *The Energy Library*

Tuesday October 15th – Oil Consumption I: Automobility

- Black, pp. 97-124

Thursday October 17th – Oil Consumption II: Oil for War (Student led discussion)
TAKE HOME WRITING ASSIGNMENT #2 DUE

- Black, pp. 125-147

Tuesday October 22nd – Oil Consumption III: Oil and Mass Consumption

- Black, pp. 149-182
- “Everyday Life” and “Fordism” *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, 223-225; 260-261

Thurs October 24th – Oil Consumption IV – The 1970s Oil Crisis and the rise of Neoliberalism (Student led discussion)

- Huber, *Lifeblood*, pp. 97-127
- “Republican Party Platform: Position on Energy” and “Ronald Reagan: National Energy Policy Plan” pp. 129-133.
- “Neoliberalism” *Dictionary of Human Geography*, 497-498.

Tuesday October 29th – Oil and Finance: Commodities Trading
TAKE HOME WRITING ASSIGNMENT #3 HANDED OUT

- Juhaz, A. 2008. *The Tyranny of Oil*, pp. 126-168.
- “Money and Finance” *Dictionary of Human Geography*, 476-78

Thursday October 31st – Gas and Regulation: The Hydrofracking Debate (Student Led Discussion)

- Tarr, J. 2009, “There will be gas” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*
- Howarth, Ingraffea, & Engelder, 2011 “Should Fracking Stop?” *Nature*
- Griswold, 2011, “Situation Normal All Fracked Up” *New York Times*

Tues November 5th – Oil and Climate Change I: What Does Oil have to Do with it?

- Black, pp. 219-225

Thursday November 7th Oil and Climate Change II: The Climate Movement and The Battle Over the Keystone Pipeline

TAKE HOME WRITING ASSIGNMENT #3 DUE

- McKibben, B. 2013. “The Fossil Fuel Resistance: As the world burns, a new movement to reverse climate change is emerging - fiercely, loudly and right next door” *Rolling Stone*
- Kolbert, E. 2007. “Unconventional crude: Canada’s synthetic-fuels boom” *The New Yorker*

Special Guest Lecture, Dr. Robert Wilson (activist with and researcher of the climate movement)
Film Screening: Pipe Dreams

Tues November 12th – Oil Reckoning? Peak Oil Introduction

TAKE HOME WRITING ASSIGNMENT #4 HANDED OUT

- Hall, C.A.S. and J.W. Day Jr. 2009. “Revisiting the limits to growth after peak oil” (pp. 230-237).
- “Limits to Growth” *Dictionary of Human Geography*, 418-419.

Thursday November 14th – Oil Reckoning? Peak Oil Debate (Student led discussion)

- Nelder, C. 2013, “Peak oil isn’t dead: It just smells that way” *Smartplanet*
- Sullivan, C. 2013 “Has 'peak oil' gone the way of the Flat Earth Society?” *E&E Publishing*

Tuesday November 19th – The Future of Oil

- Bridge and Le Billon, pp. 180-205

Thurs November 21st – Discussing Alternatives (Student led discussion)

TAKE HOME WRITING ASSIGNMENT #4 DUE

- Black, pp. 225-236

TUES AND THURS NOVEMBER 26 AND 28 NO CLASS - HAPPY THANKSGIVING!

Tuesday December 3rd and Thursday December 5th – Class Presentations

FINAL PROJECT DUE DECEMBER 5th IN CLASS