



## Ecology and Society

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## Ecology and society

- Ecology and economy
- Ecological imaginaries
- Cultural politics of urban pollution

## Ecology and economy

- general ecology
  - geology: tectonic plates, (volcanic) mountain ranges, coral reefs
  - soils: volcanic, fertile
  - climate: tropical, hot and damp, trade winds
  - weather: hurricanes, rainy seasons
- economic activities and natural resources
  - fertile soils, tropical climates, minerals, beaches
  - agriculture: "plot vs. plantation"
  - mining (oil, gas, bauxite, gold)
  - tourism

## Ecological imaginaries

- Caribbean region imagined as a "natural" zone
  - paradise (islands) or Eldorado (Guyanas)
- Nature and "othering"
  - social production of nature and of racialized difference
  - colonial contrast Europe/US ↔ Caribbean
  - culture/civilization/modernity ↔ nature/backwards/pre-modern
- Indigenous and Afro-Caribbean population represented as:
  - closer to nature, incapable of productive management of nature, less civilized
- European colonizers represented as:
  - more capable of rendering both nature and people productive, civilized city-builders

## Different phases of ecological imaginaries

- Early colonialism (15th-17th century)
  - Garden of Eden, tropical paradise, untouched wilderness, fertility, Cornucopia, effortless natural bounty, natural resources as commodities
- Plantation colonies (18th century)
  - unhealthy "torrid zone", landscape and power: plantations
- After the plantations? (19th century)
  - renaturalization, romantic focus on wilderness
- Post-independence? (20th-21st century)
  - (eco)tourism, nature conservation, biodiversity, endemic species

## Urban pollution and the politics of difference

- Environmental injustice
  - environmental racism and classism
- "Urban naturalism" → naturalization of environmental injustice
  - conflation of specific population/bodies with specific (cultural) traits and specific places
  - explanatory frames for environmental causality and blame
- Responses to environmental injustice
  - self-provision through informal governance
  - protesting injustice
- Negotiating urban naturalisms
  - reproduction, rejection, inversion, deflection, resignification

## Environmental racism and classism

- not always resulting from individual actions and malicious intent
- less overt, less evident structures of ideology and political economy (e.g. "minority move-in")
- part of historical development of urban landscapes saturated with classed and racialized meaning
- Willemstad: role of Shell in urban development
- Kingston: political violence and informal settlements

## Urban naturalisms

- naturalized conflation of urban people, place and culture
  - works as a culturalist "blame-the-victim" explanatory framework for environmental causality and responsibility
  - elides political-economic factors in explaining uneven distribution of pollution
- conflation of biophysical and cultural pollution
  - colonially constructed classification of lower-class, Afro-Caribbean people as dirty, dangerous and uncivilized
  - justifies socio-ecological discrimination