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Wastelanding: Legacies of Uranium Mining in Navajo Country

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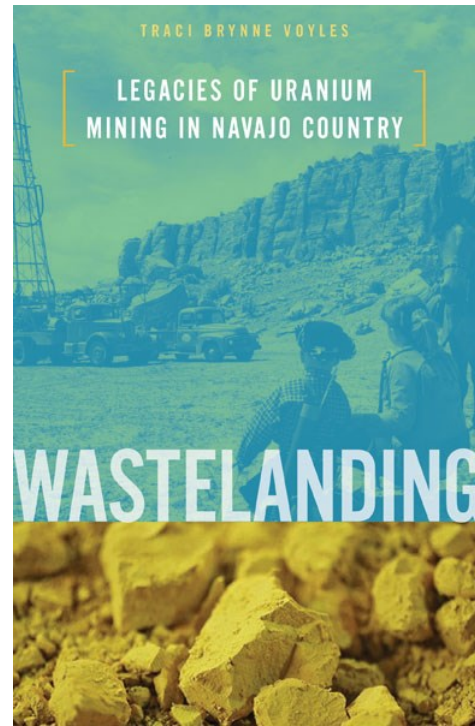
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Faculty Pub Night – Fall 2015

Date: November 17, 2015

Speaker: Traci Brynne Voyles



Introduction

The third Faculty Pub Night of Fall 2015 features Traci Brynne Voyles, Assistant Professor of Women's Studies at LMU's Bellarmine College of Liberal Arts. Professor Voyles will discuss her recent publication, *Wastelanding: Legacies of Uranium Mining in Navajo Country*.

About the Author

Traci Brynne Voyles is an assistant professor of women's studies at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, California. She is the author of *Wastelanding: Legacies of Uranium Mining in Navajo Country* (University of Minnesota Press, May 2015), which explores the history of uranium mining as a process of "wastelanding," a racial and spatial process of rendering an environment and the bodies that inhabit it pollutable. Voyles received her PhD in ethnic studies from the University of California San Diego in 2010, and was a visiting assistant professor of history at the University of California, Davis in 2011 as part of the Andrew Mellon Environments and Societies Research Initiative. Her research interests revolve around environmental justice, environmental history, race, gender, and sexuality. Her current research explores the environmental history of the Salton Sea.

For more information about Traci, please see her [CV](#).

About the Author's Work

Wastelanding: Legacies of Uranium Mining in Navajo Country tells the history of the uranium industry on Navajo land in the U.S. Southwest, asking why certain landscapes and the peoples who inhabit them come to be targeted for disproportionate exposure to environmental harm. Uranium mines and mills on the Navajo Nation land have long supplied U.S. nuclear weapons and energy programs. By 1942, mines on the reservation were the main source of uranium for the top-secret Manhattan Project. Today, the Navajo Nation is home to more than a thousand abandoned uranium sites. Radiation-related diseases are endemic, claiming the health and lives of former miners and nonminers alike.

Traci Brynne Voyles argues that the presence of uranium mining on Diné (Navajo) land constitutes a clear case of environmental racism. Looking at discursive constructions of landscapes, she explores how environmental racism develops over time. For Voyles, the “wasteland,” where toxic materials are excavated, exploited, and dumped, is both a racial and a spatial signifier that renders an environment and the bodies that inhabit it pollutable. Because environmental inequality is inherent in the way industrialism operates, the wasteland is the “other” through which modern industrialism is established.

In examining the history of wastelanding in Navajo country, Voyles provides “an environmental justice history” of uranium mining, revealing how just as “civilization” has been defined on and through “savagery,” environmental privilege is produced by portraying other landscapes as marginal, worthless, and pollutable.