Forms of Working-Class / Peasant Environmental Resistance
Articulated by the students and faculty of “SENV 3452A: Environmentalism and the Poor”
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What is the “environmentalism of the poor”?
This document suggests one possible answer. Below is a taxonomy we created of the various forms of resistance available to poor people—both historically and in the present; not just in the United States but all over the world. We collected these forms of resistance from various readings, films, lectures, and class discussions over the course of the semester.

Our table of contents is presented in the axes below. In our work we identified thirteen major categories of forms of resistance. We then plotted these categories along two axes: from individual to collective action; from non-violent to violent action. The thirteen bubbles correspond to the thirteen categories. Within each category are more specific examples.

Readers with questions may contact the instructor at rosenthal.gregory@gmail.com

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1) VIOLENCE
   a. beatings
   b. kidnapping / hostage
   c. assassination
   d. rebellion

2) ARTISTIC EXPRESSION
   a. art
   b. poetry
   c. music
   d. film
   e. literature
   f. photography

3) MEDIA
   a. marches
   b. blockades (to get arrested)
   c. journalism
   d. using media to create pressure
   e. media exposure
   f. celebrity endorsements

4) WORKERS

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2 We define “violence” as the use of force against people. “Violence” against other living things or against property are not included in this category.


4 The example we thought of was when Love Canal residents held EPA officials hostage in 1980. Guha, Environmentalism, 87-88.


6 We define “rebellion” as a mass movement using force with the intent to overthrow the government. ex. the Boxer Rebellion in China in c. 1900. Davis, Late Victorian Holocausts, 177-88.

7 ex. Black Kold Madina's rap music, as well as the role of music in street protest, in Trouble the Water, directed by Tia Lessin and Carl Deal (New York: Zeitgeist Films, 2008); also, the rap music of Rezz Dawgz in Land of Oil and Water; directed by Neil McArthur and Warren Cariou (Winnipeg, Canada: Winnipeg Film Group, 2009).

8 We noted that it is expensive to make film, but that Kimberly Rivers Roberts's camcorder footage of Hurricane Katrina tells a crucial story that cannot be conveyed otherwise. Trouble the Water.


10 We define “marches” as a form of media if and when the purpose of the march is to be seen and be reported on. This is different, for ex., than Gandhi's salt march (1930) where the purpose of the march was to reclaim the means of production by reconnecting people with the salt of the sea.

11 The example we discussed were the sit-ins by climate activists in front of the White House in the past several years. We define this type of blockade as a form of media in contradistinction to a blockade that is meant to obstruct or halt production.

12 ex. inviting media to witness pollution and/or witness confrontations between villagers and officials. The Warriors of Qiugang.

13 Ibid. Another example is when Wu Lihong invited media to come see the pollution in Lake Tai. Kahn, “In China, A Lake's Champion Imperils Himself.”

14 ex. Sting's wife joins the struggle of indigenous Ecuadorian people against the oil company Chevron. Crude, directed by Joe Berlinger (New York: First Run Features, 2009).
a. strike\textsuperscript{15}  
b. sit-down strike\textsuperscript{16}  
c. general strike\textsuperscript{17}  
d. labor unions / unionization\textsuperscript{18}  
e. collective bargaining  
f. refusal to do forced labor / work camps\textsuperscript{19}  

5) POLITICS  
a. participatory budgeting\textsuperscript{20}  
b. new political parties\textsuperscript{21}  
c. petitions\textsuperscript{22}  
d. class-action lawsuit\textsuperscript{23}  
e. general assemblies\textsuperscript{24}  
f. tax evasion / tax resistance\textsuperscript{25}  

6) D.I.Y.  
a. Community-based production\textsuperscript{26}  
b. pot hunting / hunting for food\textsuperscript{27}  
c. living off the grid\textsuperscript{28}  
d. growing your own food  
e. commune\textsuperscript{29}  
f. urban gardening\textsuperscript{30}  
g. education / secret schools


\textsuperscript{16} Guha, \textit{Environmentalism}, 106. Of course, an important U.S. example is that of the United Auto Workers' sit-down strike against General Motors in Michigan in 1936-37.


\textsuperscript{18} We noted the importance of unions and unionization for rural migrant workers in Guangdong Province, China. Pai, \textit{Scattered Sand}, ch. 6.

\textsuperscript{19} ex. Indian famine refugees' "relief strike" in 1877. Davis, \textit{Late Victorian Holocausts}, 41-44.


\textsuperscript{21} ex. the German Green Party. Guha, \textit{Environmentalism}, 89-97. Anti-colonial / home rule political parties also fit in this category.

\textsuperscript{22} ex. the ubiquitous use of petitions by rural Chinese villagers. \textit{The Warriors of Qiugang}.

\textsuperscript{23} ex. 30,000 indigenous Ecuadorians versus the Chevron corporation. \textit{Crude}.

\textsuperscript{24} ex. Occupy Sandy. Glück, “Race, Class, and Disaster Gentrification.”

\textsuperscript{25} ex. tax resistance in British India. Davis, \textit{Late Victorian Holocausts}. Of course, a famous U.S. example is that of Henry David Thoreau's failure to pay his taxes in the 1840s. Thoreau's essay “On Civil Disobedience” was hugely influential upon Gandhi, King, and others.

\textsuperscript{26} We mean here anytime when a community makes a thing for itself rather than relying on an external commodity market. ex. Gandhian homespun in British India. Guha, \textit{Environmentalism}, 19-24.


\textsuperscript{28} We discussed Thoreau's removal to Walden Pond (individual) and Gandhi's reconstruction of village life (collective) as examples of this. Guha, \textit{Environmentalism}, ch. 1.

\textsuperscript{29} Again, the Gandhian example is a good one. Guha, \textit{Environmentalism}, 19-24.

\textsuperscript{30} We define this as the legal use of urban land or space to grow food for oneself or for one's community (in contradistinction to doing the same thing illegally upon private or public property, which is discussed later).
7) SELF-SACRIFICE
   a. hunger strike
   b. suicide
   c. threatened suicide
   d. self-immolation

8) CONSUMER ACTION
   a. boycott
   b. secondary boycott
   c. purchasing practices

9) COALITIONS
   a. solidarity between groups
   b. religious communism
   c. millenarian / messianic revival movements
   d. grassroots community organizations
   e. working with outside activists / NGOs

10) RECLAMATION
    a. seed bombing

31 ex. First Nations-led water testing around oil sands development in Canada. Land of Oil and Water. For more examples, also see Michelle Murphy, “Chemical Regimes of Living,” Environmental History 13 (October 2008): 695-703.

32 Guha, Environmentalism, 100, 106.

33 ex. rural migrant workers in Guangdong Province, China, killing themselves in protest of factory work conditions. Pai, Scattered Sand, ch. 6.

34 We noted that simply the threat of mass suicide among rural migrant workers in Guangdong sometimes pressured factory owners to improve conditions. Pai, Scattered Sand, ch. 6.

35 We discussed numerous examples including Vietnamese Buddhist monks in the 1960s and Tibetan Buddhist monks in the 2010s. The Arab Spring revolutions were set off by the self-immolation of a young Tunisian man in December 2010.

36 ex. Gandhian boycott of British-made goods.


38 We define “purchasing practices” as the opposite of a boycott: the active consumption of goods that are produced sustainably and ethically.

39 ex. Native Americans and African-Americans giving aid to famine victims in British India in the 1890s. Davis, Late Victorian Holocauats, 165.

40 ex. the self-sufficient millenarian community of Canudos, Brazil, in the 1890s. Davis, Late Victorian Holocauats, 188-195.

41 ex. the many late-nineteenth-century anti-colonial movements founded upon millenarian or messianic religious upheaval. Davis, Late Victorian Holocauats, chs. 3 and 6.

42 We discussed, for ex., the global Transition Towns movement.

43 ex. the role of the NGO Green Anhui in The Warriors of Qiugang. Another example is the role of outside activists and lawyers in the indigenous Ecuadorian struggle against Chevron in Crude. Yet another example would be the role of Occupy Sandy activists after Hurricane Sandy hit New York City. Glück, “Race, Class, and Disaster Gentrification.”

44 By which we mean taking back the land or reclaiming a historic commons.

b. squatting

c. stealing / theft

d. guerilla gardening

e. keeping animals in the city

f. planting trees

11) OBSTRUCTION

a. blockade (to stop production)

b. tree hugging

c. picketing

d. filling jails

e. occupations

12) REDISTRIBUTION

a. food riots

b. looting

c. social banditry

d. gleaning

13) DESTROYING RESOURCES

a. arson

b. sabotage

c. anti-technology / destroying machines


48 ex. Occupy the Farm in Berkeley, California.


51 ex. road blockades on First Nations lands to halt oil sands production. *Land of Oil and Water*. Also see Guha, *Environmentalism*, 100-106. Blockading company grounds is another example, as in Pai, *Scattered Sand*, 183.


53 A signature Gandhian tactic, also employed to great effect in the U.S. civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. Guha, *Environmentalism*, 106.

54 Examples include Tahrir Square and Zuccotti Park (the Arab Spring revolutions and Occupy Wall Street). Also see Guha's descriptions in *Environmentalism*, 100, 106.

55 ex. bread riots; grain riots; etc. Examples include famine victims in British India in the late nineteenth century seizing and redistributing the grain hoarded by officials and/or merchants. Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts*, chs. 1 and 5.

56 Ibid. But also includes those who, in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, seized goods from abandoned businesses to distribute to those in need. *Trouble the Water*.

57 Davis’ term for the “Robin Hood”-esque taking from the rich and giving to the poor. Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts*.

58 Historically, gleaning is when dispossessed poor people were invited onto farms to harvest excess produce. In July 2014 we engaged in a gleaning service learning activity on a farm in Rutland County, Vermont. We harvested over one hundred pounds of produce that would have otherwise gone to waste and, through a local non-profit, redistributed those vegetables to area food pantries, halfway houses, and homeless shelters.


60 We include here “monkey wrenching,” including tree spiking.

61 ex. Luddism.