

## **Environmental Politics in the USA**

**Melanie Meunier**, Professeur d'anglais

**Type course : 24h - 3**

### **Résumé :**

In the current context of severe political polarization and the mounting effects of climate change, American environmental policies constitute one of the most hotly contested areas of debate in the United States. The anti-environmentalism that has developed amongst conservatives since the Reagan years has made it difficult to agree on how to respond to this threat, indeed on the very existence of it. Once the precursor in environmental policy in the 1970s, the United States is seen today as one of the worst offenders due to the predominant consumerist lifestyle and attachment to fossil fuel energy, as well as its reluctance to commit to international treaties to mitigate climate change. Yet, the image of US recalcitrance and gridlock portrayed by the international media, although relatively accurate at the federal level, masks the environmental dynamism present in sub-federal levels of government and society. States, regions and local governments have risen to the challenge of combating climate change by initiating numerous programs and setting objectives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Citizen groups, institutions and businesses play a significant role in maintaining policies and advancing causes. In addition, the election of President Joe Biden has ushered in a new approach and greatly increased the willingness of the federal administration to tackle environmental issues.

Environmental protection, which affects nearly every aspect of life, is thus multi-layered and more complex than at first view. This course will explore the historical, cultural, and political contexts that shaped the current situation. Topics will include: a review of the political institutions involved in environmental and energy policy, political polarization and its impact on policy, the philosophical underpinnings of the dominant values in American culture, resource depletion and the corresponding rise of ecological thought, the American response to climate change, and international agreements. Key events, developments, or periods will be highlighted during this course, including the creation of the first national parks, the epic battle over the Hetch Hetchy Dam project in Yosemite National Park (1908-1913), the Dust Bowl and federal conservation programs during the 1930s, growing citizen activism during the 1960s that led to the passage of major federal legislation regulating air and water pollution, which, in turn, provoked a powerful anti-environmental movement.

Parallel to the historical overview, this course will explore numerous issues through group presentations, such as:

- Consumerism as an American invention and its impact on the environment
- American car culture: origins and how it has transformed the landscape
- US dependency on fossil fuels: oil crises, fracking, offshore drilling, XL Keystone/Dakota pipelines
- Renewable energy initiatives
- Environmental justice movement (poor, colored or indigenous communities)
- Impact of industrial food production (factory farming, GMOs, etc.)
- Sustainable business practices: example of Interface, a leading carpet maker

- California as environmental precursor
- Smart cities or other innovative ecological urban initiatives in the US
- The extension of rights from humans to animals to geographical features
- Civil disobedience and its limits: the case of ..... (choose an extremist group: the Animal Liberation Front, Earth First!, the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, the Earth Liberation Front)
- Extreme weather events: federal preparedness, now and future?
- Climate activism (350.org, March for Science, Fridays for Future, Divestment movement)
- National parks: genesis, realization, current issues
- The zero growth movement

## **Bibliographie sélective :**

### **Essential reading :**

- Clarke, Jeanne and Hanna Cortner, *The State and Nature: Voices Heard, Voices Unheard in America's Environmental Dialogue*, Prentice Hall, 2002
- Rosenbaum, Walter, *Environmental Politics and Policy*, 9th +10th editions, CQ Press, 2014, 2017
- Vig, Norman and Michael Kraft, *Environmental Policy*, 9th +10th editions, CQ Press, 2016, 2019

### **Excellent references**

- Nash, Roderick Frazier, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, Yale University Press, 2014 (or earlier editions, first published 1967)
- Nash, Roderick Frazier, *The Rights of Nature*, University of Wisconsin Press, 1989
- Worster, Donald, *Dust Bowl*, Oxford University Press, 1979 and any of his other books
- Steiguer J.E. de, *The Age of Environmentalism*, McGraw-Hill, 1997

### **Specific & historical references :**

- Carson, Rachel, *Silent Spring*, Fawcett Crest, 1962
- Fox, Josh, *Gasland*, DVD, 2010
- Fox, Stephen, *The American Conservation Movement: John Muir and His Legacy*, University of Wisconsin Press, 1985
- Hays, Samuel P., *A History of Environmental Politics Since 1945*, Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, 2000
- Klein, Naomi, *This Changes Everything*, DVD (Avi Lewis, director), 2016
- Leopold, Aldo, *A Sand County Almanac*, Oxford University Press, 1966
- Runte Alfred, *National Parks: The American Experience*, Taylor Trade Publishing, 2010
- Thoreau, Henry David, *On the Duty of Civil Disobedience*, 1849, *Walden*, 1854: literatureproject.com
- Yvard-Djahansouz, Gelareh, *Histoire du mouvement écologique américain*, Ellipses, 2010

References for websites, audio-visual resources & articles will be available on Moodle.

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