

Title - *Literature, Ecology, and Environmental Justice*

Host – George Hutchinson, Professor of English

Date – Wednesday November 16, 2016 12:00 – 1:00pm 300 Rice Hall

Recently the Atkinson Center screened the film “Time to Choose,” which powerfully showed how issues of environmental justice and global sustainability are indivisible. A week later, in an Atkinson Center topical lunch, Mildred Warren presented her research on the sustainability priorities of local governments across the United States, which showed that “social equity” ranked dead last. First, not surprisingly, was “economic development.”

We know that “economic development” often comes at the expense of poor and/or racialized people, in urban renewal programs that displace them or cordon them off from new real estate developments with highways, gated walls, and police surveillance; and in rural areas devastated by mountaintop removal, pipelines, and the like.

Can aesthetics have any relevance to this situation, or is it merely, as usually supposed, an adornment to what *is*? I will start this conversation by talking about the traffic between ecologists, social scientists, cultural critics, and writers in the 1940s, focusing on Richard Wright, and hope to invite conversation about how in our teaching and research we can bring these spheres together while also thinking about the relationship between aesthetics and sustainability.