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Environmental Humanities in the Field of Postcolonial Studies

Within the field of postcolonial studies, Caribbean writers and scholars have long engaged in geographically and ecologically informed representations of history and culture, whether by attending to what it means to live in a multinational, multilingual archipelago or by focusing on the devastating implications of climate change for this region of islands in the path of rising seas and annual hurricane systems. I have been retooling my work toward new thinking in the “blue humanities,” whereby I focus on the ecological underpinnings of art, literature, and culture, as do many of the writers and artists I study. In this way, I have been connecting creative work with interdisciplinary research born of recent attention to climate change and its political, economic, and ideological systems of origin. My pedagogical work in the environmental humanities thus dovetails with current decolonial methodologies, and this fall I am teaching classes focused on decolonial study in a variety of contexts. In one project, students will study the US Virgin Islands—an often overlooked territory deserving of much more national attention—through art and literature that emphasizes the role of cultural ecologies. In another project, students will do their own case study of cultural ecology by building a digital archive of the social, economic, and environmental impact of Hurricane Sandy on the area surrounding Pace’s downtown campus.