

ARC Knickerbocker Archival Research Grant Summary, Summer 2013

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The purpose of this research project is to develop a critical geographical history of the globalized environmental policy mechanism known as environmental impact assessment (EIA). A major component of this project is using the works of Lynton Keith Caldwell, the Political Science professor credited with developing the theoretical and practical details of EIA, to illustrate the relationship between the political and administrative theory behind EIA as developed within the U.S. National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, with the dynamics of EIA as a set of practices within U.S. and international contexts. Funds from the ARC Knickerbocker Award for Archival Research in American Studies (Knickerbocker Award) allowed me to spend a week at the University Archives at Indiana University, Bloomington, where the bulk of Professor Caldwell's personal and scholarly archive is housed. The documents contained within the archive provided me with a wealth of information that paints a much clearer picture than was possible for me through a previous review of Caldwell's publications.

After sifting through Caldwell's non-scholarly writings and correspondence on the topics of environmental policy and "biopolitics," it became apparent that his broad intentions, objectives, and means for engaging the field of environmental policy and public administration remained rigidly fixed over time. Over the duration of his forty year career as a professor of environmental politics, Caldwell maintained his commitment to the shaping of bureaucratic institutions and other state apparatuses as a means of promoting a specific set of environmental values based around the concepts of ecological sustainability and the prudent application of biotechnological scientific inquiry. This latter aspect of Caldwell's work highlights one of the most interesting subjects related to my research project, the subfield of political science that Caldwell designated "biopolitics."

The concept of biopolitics was popularized in the fields of social and political theory and the humanities by Michel Foucault and his followers since the 1970s. However, the term biopolitics has conveyed a related yet distinct meaning for the field of political science since the 1960s when Caldwell popularized the term in environmental and health policy circles. Having access to Caldwell's complete collection of writings on the topic of biopolitics will allow me to expand my research on the relationship between the two uses of the term as a way of understanding the expansive—yet simultaneously myopic—approach that Caldwell took toward environmental policy. This relationship is precisely related to one of the fundamental contradictions of EIA that my research seeks to address. That is, the EIA process is structured to allow for epistemological ruptures within the dominant state logics of capitalist development and white supremacy, allowing for alternative and often subversive forms of environmental and geographical knowledge to emerge. And yet, the same EIA processes render these alternative forms of knowledge, and the people who claim them, as legible and therefore subject to the same forms of state sanctioned domination that they intended to subvert. It seems, from my review of the archival materials thus far, that this problematic inherent to Caldwell's biopolitics was perhaps less a shortcoming and more of an outcome of Caldwell's deep belief in the emancipatory promises of unadulterated liberalism. Thus, the next stage of my research will be fleshing out the links between the development of EIA in practice and the growth of neoliberal policies in the U.S. and abroad over the latter third of the 20th century.