Research Project 2: Environmental Debate

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Geography 1301: Introduction to Human Geography

Project #2: Should the Colorado River Delta be restored?

Overview

The lower Colorado River runs through many states in the U.S. and ends in the Colorado River Delta in Mexico. Because of the many demands for water by urban dwellers, agriculturalists, industrialists, and others (largely in the U.S. but also in Mexico), the biodiversity and environment of the Delta has experienced severe degradation. In recent years, many different interest groups in both countries have discussed whether the delta should be restored, and how Colorado water should be allocated.

In this project, you will explore these issues by conducting research, participating in a class debate and writing a paper. You are asked to answer the following questions: Should the Colorado River Delta be restored? How should water (a natural resource) and rights to that water be allocated? In answering these questions you should consider how different social groups understand the meanings of natural resources and nature in the controversies surrounding how Colorado River water should be used. For this project, you will need to become familiar with the current water use and needs placed on the Colorado River, if and how water use should be changed, and the views of different social groups about nature and water use. As an important step in answering those questions, you will conduct research and participate in a class debate from the perspective of a randomly assigned interest group (see below). Your audience for the debate and the project essay is composed of U.S. Congress and International Boundary Water officials.

Your Project

To begin this project, you must become familiar with the Colorado River and begin conducting basic research about the history of water use in the lower Colorado River Basin. Read the handouts with historical and social information about the delta region, as well as Chapter 4 in your textbook. Additional materials are available under "general" sources on the class webpage and on reserve readings at Wilson Library.

Next, you will need to become familiar with the needs and goals of a particular interest group, if that group thinks the delta should be restored, and what their water use/needs are. The groups of the debate include: the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, the Imperial Valley Irrigation District, San Diego (CA), Las Vegas (NV), mainstream environmental groups, alternative environmental groups, First Nations, and Mexico. Note that some of these groups are diverse coalitions that
may have more than one point of view. Today, your T.A. will discuss this project with you and give you a general sense of your interest group. You will be assigned a particular research role to help your team prepare for the debate. In the next few weeks, you will work together individually, in small groups, and as a team to come up with a debate strategy and also discuss the view(s) of nature your interest group holds.

**Project components**

There are three components of this project:

(1) *Research report:* You will be assigned a specific research task and role in the debate. You may be assigned to work in groups to complete these tasks. You will become an expert on a particular topic and report back to the larger group (your recitation section) by week 12. After reading this handout, chapter 4 of Knox and Marston, internet and reserve readings, and conducting internet and library research on your specific task, you will write a written report. This report must be ready to share with your section teammates in section in week 12 (11/21, 11/22). This is a mandatory section meeting. You are also required to turn in a copy of your research report to your T.A. and to the rest of the class (typed) as part of your grade for this project. Be sure to keep a copy for your own records and for use in your final essay. *The report is worth 10 points. If you do nothing for this session, the maximum you can receive for Project 2 is ten points.*

(2) *Class Debate:* You will work with your section to devise a debate strategy. The debate will take place in week 14 (on both Tuesday and Thursday), and attendance is mandatory. On the first day of the debate (12/3), your group will have about six minutes to provide a statement about your group's interests, your view of the future of the Delta, and evidence to support your view. After each group presents their perspectives, we will begin a short discussion period in which questions will be asked from the rest of the class. Groups will be allowed to respond briefly to questions (about a one minute for responses). On the second day of the debate (12/5) each group will provide a one-minute recap of their main points. The rest of the time will be devoted to discussion and debate. Again, groups will be allowed to respond briefly to questions (one to two minutes only). The debate will end with each group giving a one to two minute final statement. A written vote will be taken by all class attendees. First we will vote if the delta should be restored. Second we will vote on what group did the best job during the debate. *Attendance for the debate is mandatory; if you do not attend the maximum possible points you can receive for Project Two is ten points.* After the debate, you will write a short statement about your contribution to the class debate and about your personal views about the Delta (again using evidence to support your statement). If your viewpoints changed doing research for the project or during the debate, please indicate how or why they changed. *Debate reflection is worth 5 points.*

(3) You will be asked to write a three to four page *essay* (double spaced, one inch margins) that answers the question: should the delta be restored? How should water be allocated? First you will answer this question from the perspective of your section’s interest group, and then you will
critically evaluate that answer from your own point of view. You should roughly organize your paper in the following way.

- First write an introductory paragraph that briefly overviews the problem (in your own words) and answers the question: Should the Delta be restored and why/why not? First answer this question from your section perspective (“According to the USBR, …”). Then you will need to state your thesis statement, something like, “Based upon my research for this debate, I agree/disagree with this perspective. I believe that the Colorado River Delta should/should not be restored because …”
  - So, your introduction (1-2 paragraphs; 1/2 to 1/3 page) should answer the following questions: What is your topic? Why is this topic important? What are the different actors who have stakes in this issue? What is the solution/proposal/argument of your section interest group? (Thesis statement, part I) What is your personal solution/proposal/argument? How does your proposal for the delta relate to your views on water? How do your views about restoring the delta and water use reflect your views of nature? (Thesis statement, part II) What is your “road map” for this essay? What will you do in this essay and in what order?

- Second, the body, or main part, of the essay should develop your argument. (3-7 paragraphs; 2-3 pages) It should provide necessary background information, provide evidence that supports your thesis. Each paragraph should fully develop one idea that supports your thesis and argument. The body of the essay should follow the organization of the “road map” you wrote in the introduction. (NOTE: Be sure not to plagiarize and properly cite your sources. See class webpage for help.)
  - You may wish to organize the body of your essay in this way. Provide a brief overview of the case study, that is, the Lower Colorado River Basin and Delta. Why is the delta degraded? Why is water is such a valuable resource in this region? What different groups are involved in gaining access to water? How do different social groups interpret “nature” and “natural resources”? Be sure to relate the case study to larger geographic themes covered in lecture and the textbook.
  - Next, introduce your section’s assigned interest group. From this perspective, discuss the reasons why or why not the delta should be restored, and how water should be allocated. For this part of your essay, be sure to use the research you conducted for the debate as evidence supporting this point of view.
  - Finally, you will agree and/or disagree with your section’s perspective, arguing from your personal point of view, and using evidence from your research, the textbook, readings, and the class debate. If you changed your mind by doing research and participating in the debate you can indicate this in your essay.

- The conclusion should summarize your main arguments (“wrap up”) and possibly offer additional insights (perhaps ideas for solutions, about the significance of water wars more generally, about social views of nature more generally, about why this case study is relevant for other environmental issues or resource debates elsewhere). If you wish, you
can end your essay with a proposal about the future of the delta, or comment in another way about the future of your group or of other interest groups in the region. (1-2 paragraphs, ½ to 1/3 a page).

- Include a bibliography that has at least four internet sources (that are annotated) and two reserve (library) reading sources. For the internet sources explain why they were helpful and how you found them (how did you search the web? Why was this a helpful site?). In addition, you may also cite information from this handout, the textbook, and the America’s Nile video).

Remember: *Your audience* for the essay are Congress and International Water Authority officials. Pretend you are a hired researcher for your interest group, and that your expertise as a geographer is one of the reasons you were hired.

The essay (with annotated bibliography) and Project 2 reflection is due at the end of week 15 in section. Participation in the class debate, the project reflection, and your essay is worth 45 points.

**Important deadlines!**

This project is worth 60 points. To get full credit for this project, please note the following dates: 1) *Mandatory section attendance* in week 12 (11/21 and 11/22); research reports are due in section on that day. 2) *Mandatory lecture attendance* in week 14. You must attend both days to get full credit (12/3 and 12/5). 3) Final papers due in recitation the last week of classes (week 15).

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