

Nature and American Culture

AM103W 001

Spring 2009

Tisch Learning Center 307

T/R 12:40-2:00pm

Prof. B.V. Hollenbeck

This course introduces students to the interdisciplinary study of American culture by focusing on the relationship between Americans and nature, while also helping students to become more effective writers. We will explore the ways in which Americans, past and present, have thought about nature, and we will examine how these beliefs about the natural world have influenced politics and power relations, shaped the landscape, and contributed to ideas about national identity. Additionally, we will consider how gender, race, and class influence understandings of and relationships with the natural, non-human world. Using historical, literary, and popular texts, as well as art, film, and material culture, we will explore wilderness ideologies, expansionism, managed nature and cultivation, consumption, environmental movements and other topics.

Goals:

The goals for this course are:

To introduce you to the field of American Studies and to develop your ability to do interdisciplinary work

To increase your nuanced understanding of American culture and the place of nature in its history, identities, and ideologies

To develop your ability to read and contextualize primary sources

To develop your ability to critically read and evaluate secondary sources

To develop and refine your writing, research, and speaking skills

Readings:

Please attain a copy of the following books:

Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (4th edition)

Henry David Thoreau, *Walden: Or, Life in the Woods* (Dover Thrift Edition, 1995)

Kathleen Norris, *Dakota*

Jennifer Price, *Flight Maps*

Other readings are available on our course Blackboard website. Please bring a copy with you to class.

Course Requirements:

Student work in this course will include:

10% - a series of very short written responses and the presentation of these responses in class (these will be informally graded on the “check” system)

15% - an annotated bibliography during our Literature unit

15% - a 5 page paper during our Art unit

15% - a 5 page paper during our Popular Culture unit

15% - class participation. This includes class attendance (see below); reading assignments carefully and fully, and being prepared to discuss them in class; contributing consistently, thoughtfully, and respectfully in class; and speaking about work you did for a paper or other assignment. Participation will be graded as following: A = most classes, informed participation. B = many classes, informed participation. C = rare participation.
20% - research paper and presentation (on a topic of interest to you, to be cleared by me)
10% - final portfolio (comprised of gathering and revising the work you did during the semester)

Attendance:

More than three absences will have a negative impact on your final grade. Absences for observing religious holidays do not count, but all other absences, for whatever reason, do count. This three-absence leeway is intended to accommodate sickness and real emergencies – they are not free passes to be used in addition to sick days or days when personal emergencies prevent you from attending class. You are responsible for any missed material or missed announcements – getting notes from classmates and meeting with me will never account fully for a missed class. Keep in mind that you will be building your participation grade during *every* class. Class begins promptly at 12:40pm, and multiple late arrivals will count against you.

Students should familiarize themselves with the Skidmore Honor Code and Student Handbooks.

Please turn off all cell phones (at least to “silent,” not vibrate, please) and portable electronics during class.

Finding Me:

Office: 305a

Phone: 8027

Email: bhollenb@skidmore.edu

Office Hours: M 1-2pm, R 2-3pm.

If you are unable to see me during my office hours, please speak with me to arrange another time. I am normally on campus Monday through Friday.

Schedule

Tuesday, January 20

American Studies, Studies of Nature

Unit I: History

Thursday, January 22

America and Nature, A History

*Nash, pp. 8-43 (chapters 1 & 2)

Bring: annotations for chapters 1 & 2

Assignment Due: 1 page response on nature

(See separate assignment sheet for details.)

Tuesday, January 27

*Nash, pp. 67-74 (half of chapter 4); 96-140 (chapters 6, 7, & 8)

Bring: annotations for chapters 4, 6, 7, & 8

In class group writing.

Thursday, January 29

*Nash, pp. 141-160 (chapter 9), 182-199 (chapter 11).

Bring: annotations for chapters 9 & 11

Tuesday, February 3

*Nash, pp. 238-271 (chapter 13), 379-390 (epilogue)

Bring: a recent (since 2000) news article, editorial, speech, or government document which you think may end up in a historical document collection on early 21st century environmental history. Be ready to summarize it and tell the class why you choose it.

Unit II: Art

Thursday, February 5

Hudson River School Painters

*Novak, "Introduction: The Nationalist Garden and the Holy Book," *Nature and Culture: American Landscape and Painting 1825-1875*, pp. 3-17.

*Schuyler, "The Sanctified Landscape: The Hudson River Valley, 1820-1850," in *Landscape in America*, ed. Thompson (1995), pp. 93-109.

*Carpenter, "A Preface to Art Criticism"

Bring: annotation for *either* Novak or Schuyler

In class group exercise: thesis statements/arguments

Tuesday, February 10

Assignment Due: 5 page graded paper

We will discuss your papers in class.

The Great American West - Paintings of westward expansion

- a. Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History*. 1893.
- b. President Jackson, "Second Address to Congress." 1830.
- c. Indian Removal Act of 1830.
- d. Cherokee Responses.
- e. Senator Thomas Hart Benton on Manifest Destiny, 1846.
- f. Hezekiah Niles, "Indians within the United States," 29 Dec 1827, *Niles' Weekly Register* (Baltimore).
- g. Alexis de Tocqueville, A Letter to Countess de Tocqueville. 1831.
- h. Paintings of the West
 1. Jewett, *The Promised Land – The Grayson Family*, 1850.
 2. Bingham, *Daniel Boone Escorting Settlers through the Cumberland Gap*, 1851-2.
 3. Leutze, *Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way*, 1862.
 4. Bierstadt, *Emigrants Crossing the Plain*, 1867.
 5. Goddard, *Where to Emigrate and Why*, 1869.
 6. Waud, *Building the Union Pacific Railroad in Nebraska*, 1867.
 7. Palmer, *Across the Continent*, 1868.
 8. Durand, *Progress*, 1853.
 9. Gast, *American Progress*, 1872.
 10. King, *Young Omahaw, War Eagle, Little Missouri, and Pawnees*, 1822.
 11. Miller, *Surround of Buffalo by Indians*, 1848-58.
 12. Catlin, *Mandan Village*, 1837-39.
 13. Tait, *The Prairie Hunter*, "One Rubbed Out!," 1852.
 14. Wimar, *The Attack on an Emigrant Train*, 1856.
 15. T. Kaufmann, *Westward the Star of Empire*, 1867.
 16. Matteson, *Last of the Race*, 1847.

Thursday, February 12

Today's Art and Nature

*Peter Bacon Hales, "Environmental Art," from *Encyclopedia of American Studies*, pp. 92-94.

Assignment Due: 1 page response on a contemporary art work.

(See separate assignment sheet for details.)

Please remember to email me a picture (jpeg if possible) by 6pm Wednesday night. We will look at and discuss these works of art in class.

Unit III: Literature

Tuesday, February 17

*Nash, chapter 5, pp. 84-95.

*Thoreau, *Walden*

Thursday, February 19

*Thoreau, *Walden*, continued

Tuesday, February 24

Assignment Due: Annotated Bibliographies

Be ready to discuss your author and scholarship surrounding him or her in class.

Thursday, February 26

Children's Literature

*Anne Scott MacLeod, "Children's Literature," from *Encyclopedia of American Studies*, pp. 318-321.

*Dr. Seuss, *The Lorax*

Assignment Due: 1 page response on a children's book from Scribner Library.

(See separate assignment sheet for details.)

Tuesday, March 3

*Kathleen Norris, *Dakota*

Unit IV: Geography, Landscape, and Material Culture

Thursday, March 5

*Lewis, "Axioms for Reading the Landscape"

*Jackson, *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape*, pp. 42-55.

SPRING BREAK

Tuesday, March 17

Spring Break Sense of Place/Landscape reports

Assignment Due: 1 page review of the place of nature at your spring break location – plus 1 picture.

(See separate assignment sheet for details.)

Thursday, March 19

Making Nature: Parks

*Spirn, "Constructing Nature: The Legacy of Frederick Law Olmsted," in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. Cronon (1995), pp. 91-113.

Assignment Due: 1 page response on constructing nature.

(See separate assignment sheet for details.)

Tuesday, March 24

Making Nature: Summer Camps

*Van Slyck, *A Manufactured Wilderness*, selections

Please bring, if you have any, images from summer camps you have attended.

Thursday, March 26

Making Nature: Consumption

*Price, "A Brief Natural History of the Plastic Pink Flamingo," *Flight Maps*, pp. 111-166.

*Price, "Looking for Nature at the Mall: A Field Guide to the Nature Company," *Flight Maps*, pp. 167-206.

Assignment Due: Find an advertisement that in some way uses nature to sell a product or service. Hand in – 1 page cultural analysis of this ad.

(See separate assignment sheet for details.)

Unit V: Popular Culture

Monday, March 30 – 7pm: Film Screening

Tuesday, March 31

Popular Culture: Film and TV

*Price, "Roadrunners Can't Read: The Greening of Television in the 1990s," *Flight Maps*, pp. 207-256.

*Film - TBA

Thursday, April 2

Assignment Due: Paper #2 – Nature in Popular Culture

Peer critiquing & discussion of nature in popular culture papers

Unit VI: Sociology

Tuesday, April 7

Race and Nature

*Merchant, "Shades of Darkness: Race and Environmental History," *Environmental History* Vol 8, no. 3 (July 2003), pp. 380-394. This is available on Jstor.

*McGurty, "From NIMBY to Civil Rights: The Origin of the Environmental Justice Movement," *Environmental History* Vol. 2:3 (July 1997), pp. 301-323. This is available on Jstor.

*Peretti, "Nativism and Nature: Rethinking Biological Invasion," *Environmental Values* 7 (1998), pp. 183-192.

*Bullard, *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class and Environmental Quality* (2000), pp. 21-36.

Bring: annotation for *one* of today's readings

Thursday, April 9

Class and Nature

*Jacoby, "Class and Environmental History: Lessons from 'The War in the Adirondacks,'" *Environmental History* Vol. 2:3 (July 1997): 324-334. This is available on Jstor.

*White, "'Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?': Work and Nature," in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. Cronon (1995), pp. 171-185.

Bring: annotation for *one* of today's readings

Tuesday, April 14

Gender and Nature

*Ortner, "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?" in *Woman, Culture and Society*, Rosaldo & Lamphere eds. (1974), pp. 67-87.

*King, "Feminism and the Revolt of Nature," *Heresies* 4:1 (1981), pp. 12-16.

*Additional reading: TBA

Bring: annotation for *one* of today's readings

Unit VII: Final Papers, Presentations, and Critiques

Thursday, April 16

Research Papers

Assignment: Active Listening & Review

Tuesday, April 21

Research Papers

Assignment: Active Listening & Review

Thursday, April 23

Research Papers

Assignment: Active Listening & Review

Tuesday, April 28

Nature Past and Present

Evaluations, wrap-up, final portfolio discussion

Final Portfolios Due: May 4, 2008