

DEPARTMENT OF TEACHING AND LEARNING
ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION EDUCATION

Foundations of Environmental Thought: E15.2019-001

Fall 2009, New York University

SYLLABUS

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Required Texts:

- *Walden*, Henry David Thoreau, ed. Bill McKibben (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1997) [W]
- *A Sand County Almanac*, Aldo Leopold (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1949) [SCA]
- *Silent Spring*, Rachel Carson (any edition)
- *Wilderness and the American Mind*, Roderick Nash (New Haven, CT., Yale University Press) [WAM]

Recommended texts:

- *American Environmental History*, Louis Warren, editor (Blackwell Publishing, 2003)
- *The Landscape of Reform: Civic Pragmatism and Environmental Thought in America*, Ben A. Minteer (MIT Press, 2006)
- *Natural Visions: the power of images in American environmental reform*, Finis Dunaway (University of Chicago Press, 2005)
- *Thoreau's Nature: Ethics, Politics, and the Wild*, Jane Bennett (Altamira Press—Rowan and Littlefield, 2000)
- *A Word for Nature: Four Pioneering Environmental Advocates, 1845 – 1913*, Robert L. Dorman, editor (University of North Carolina Press, 1998)
- *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, edited by William Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996)
- *The Rights of Nature: History of Environmental Ethics*, Roderick Nash (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989)
- *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*, Lawrence Buell (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995)

Articles:

- "The Chain of Being in Eighteenth-Century Thought, and Man's Place and Role in Nature," Arthur Lovejoy
- "Providence, Capitalism, and Environmental Degradation: English Apologetics in an Era of Economic Revolution," William Coleman

- “Errand into the Wilderness,” Perry Miller
- “On the Situation of the American Farmer,” J. Hector St John De Crevecoeur
- “Essay on American Scenery,” Thomas Cole
- *The Rights of Nature*, Roderick Nash:
Chapter 2 “Ideological Origins of American Environmentalism”
- “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” Lynn White Jr.
- “The Historical Dimensions of the American Crisis,” H Paul Santmire
- *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture*, Wendell Berry:
Chapter 2 “The Ecological Crisis is a Crisis of Character”

Survey:

General observations on the relationship between nature and culture provide the foundations of environmental thought, while value assessments provide contextualizing perspectives. Throughout history we witness repeated divisions between nature and culture; different ways of constructing that relationship, sometimes weighing value religiously, other times philosophically, politically, and economically, etc. Thus the foundations of environmental thought shift between what is perceived at the time as the nature and culture dualism. In this course, we will proceed with a review of this “procrustean” fit through the canonical works of ‘nature writing’.

We begin by identifying the prominent themes that have defined the various relationships between human art and nature through the influential works of renowned “environmentalists”. Next we assess the normative (value) components found in various nature – culture dichotomies: anthropocentrism; intrinsic, extrinsic and inherent value systems. Finally, we attempt a critique of the American environmentalism.

As this is a graduate seminar, the course is based on discussions on topics derived from the readings and related sources. Students are expected to participate regularly, and to advance this end each student will prepare a one-paragraph commentary on each assigned reading for possible dissemination at the seminar meetings. In addition there are two papers (7 – 12 pages) on topics approved by the instructor. (Unapproved topics result in failure for the assignment.) The first paper is due on October 24th and the final paper on December 19th. The final grade for the seminar is calculated as follows: Each paper 45% (90%) and class participation 10%.

Schedule:

- S09: Introduction: Prologue, Chapters 1 & 2 (pp. 1 – 43) in *Wilderness and the American Mind*
- S16: “The Great Chain of Being in Eighteen Century Thought, and Man’s Place and

Role in Nature,” Arthur Lovejoy and “Providence, Capitalism and Environmental Degradation: English Apologetics in an Era of Economic Revolution,” William Coleman

- S23: MATHIS WACKERNAGEL TALK—OUR ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT@ JEFFERY GOULD WELCOME CENTER, 50 WEST 4TH
Chapter 3 “The Romantic Wilderness” and Chapter 4 “The American Wilderness” (pp. 44 –83) in *Wilderness and the American Mind*; and “Errand into the Wilderness,” Perry Miller
- S30: “The Trouble with Wilderness: or getting back to the wrong nature,” William Cronon, and “On the Situation of the American Farmer,” J Hector St John De Crevecoeur
- O07: Chapter 3 in *Nature & Culture* “Sound & Silence: Changing Concepts of the Sublime” and “Essay on American Scenery”
- O14: *Walden* (pp. 1 – 93) and Chapter 5 (pp. 84 – 95) in *Wilderness and the American Mind*
- O21: *Walden* (pp. 94 – 163)
- O28: *Walden* (pp. 164 – 312); First Paper Due
- N04: Chapter 6 “Preserve the Wilderness”; Chapter 7 “Wilderness Preserved”; Chapter 8 “John Muir: Publicizer”; Chapter 9 “The Wilderness Cult”; Chapter 10 “Hetch Hetchy” (pp. 96 – 181) in *Wilderness and the American Mind*
- N11: “Ideological Origins of American Environmentalism” in Roderick Nash *The Rights of Nature and Sand County Almanac, Part 1* (pp. 3 – 92)
- N18: *Sand County Almanac, Part 2* (pp. 95 – 164)
- N25: Holiday
- N28: *Sand County Almanac, Part 3* (pp. 165 – 226)
- D02: “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” Lynn White, Jr.
- D09: “The Historical Dimensions of the American Crisis,” H Paul Santmire
- D16: “The Ecological Crisis is a Crisis of Character,” Wendell Berry