

English 2330W  
Vanderbilt University, Spring 2023  
TR 1:15PM – 2:30PM  
Classroom: Commons West 109

Carlos Alonso Nugent  
Assistant Professor of English  
carlos.nugent@vanderbilt.edu  
Office: Benson Science Hall 422

## INTRODUCTION TO THE ENVIRONMENTAL HUMANITIES

Climate scientists have come to a consensus that the planet has passed into the Anthropocene—a geological epoch in which human societies have a dominant and even determining influence on their nonhuman environments. As these scientists have analyzed the Anthropocene’s material traces (from radionucleotides trapped in tree-rings to chemicals frozen in ice cores), other academics and activists have explored the epoch’s cultural causes and consequences. Aware that our precarious condition necessitates new forms of cognition, these thinkers have begun breaking boundaries that have long separated fields such as anthropology, history, and literature. Through their new approaches to the humanities, they have started redefining humanity, linking decade- and century-long conflicts over gender, race, and class to the thousand- and million-year cycles of biology, geology, and chemistry. Joining these thinkers in the *environmental humanities*, we will spend the semester experimenting with methods from different academic disciplines—and, in the process, elucidating all-too-human struggles for a more-than-human planet. While we will range back to the Neolithic Agricultural Revolution, we will focus on the fallout of 1492, when Europeans began both a genocide against Native North and South Americans and a trade in enslaved Africans, which together fueled the rise of carbon-intensive capitalism. Engaging these events via colonial-era journals, nineteenth-century slave narratives, contemporary Indigenous poetry, and other media, we will try to understand why some humans have become so destructive—and how others have remained so resilient. Throughout, we will work both collectively and individually: to enrich our in-class discussions, each student will complete a four- to five-page theoretical essay, a twelve- or thirteen-page research essay, and a small creative project.

**Course Objectives:** As we explore the environmental humanities, you will cultivate several skills:

- A. *Writing:* Through individual assignments and in-class exercises, you will learn how to design, draft, research, and revise academic essays. With environmental issues playing increasingly prominent roles in public life, you will also practice presenting ideas in alternative styles.
- B. *Reading:* By looking at, listening to, and experimenting with a range of media, you will become a more confident critical reader. Whether faced with a contemporary website or a hundred-year-old photograph, you will be able to analyze its style, structure, and significance.
- C. *Speaking:* In our collaborative discussions, you will practice talking through difficult subjects, especially the construction of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and other identity categories.
- D. *Historical Reasoning:* As we learn how ideas of nature have responded to and participated in historical struggles, you will gain insight into our planet’s past, present, and future.
- E. *Intercultural Understanding:* By thinking with Natives, Latinxs, whites, and other groups, you will experience both the similarities that unite peoples and the differences that define them.

**Course Structure:** Our course will be divided into three units:

- I. *Experiments in Environmental Humanities (Weeks 1–3):* Reading widely across the sciences, the social sciences, the humanities, and the arts, we will consider how and why the environmental humanities have emerged—and crucially, how and why they might continue to evolve.
- II. *“Falling into the Anthropocene” (Weeks 4–9):* Transitioning to fifteenth- and sixteenth-century exploration media—and then moving up through twentieth- and twenty-first-century literature—we will discuss how different human groups have reimagined and reshaped the planet.
- III. *Cultures of Environmentalism and Environmental Justice (Weeks 10–15):* Concluding with activists and artists who have tried to protect the planet, we will weigh strategies for surviving, if not thriving.

## READING AND ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE

- Week 1**  
**What are the Environmental Humanities?**
- Tu, Jan 10
- Woody Guthrie, “Grand Coulee Dam” (1941) (circulated in class)
  - Sherman Alexie (Spokane/Coeur d’Alene), “The Powwow at the End of the World” (1996) (circulated in class)
- Th, Jan 12
- William Cronon, “Introduction: In Search of Nature” from *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (1996)
  - Etienne Benson, “Introduction: What Was an Environment?” from *Surroundings: A History of Environments and Environmentalisms* (2020)
- Week 2**  
**Debating the Anthropocene**
- Tu, Jan 17
- Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer, “The Anthropocene” (2000)
  - Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Climate and Capital: On Conjoined Histories” (2014)
  - “Introduction to *Feral Atlas*,” “How to Read *Feral Atlas*,” and any “Field Report” from *Feral Atlas: The More-than-Human Anthropocene* (2020)
- Th, Jan 19
- Simon Lewis and Mark Maslin, “Defining the Anthropocene” (2015)
  - Heather Davis and Zoe Todd (Métis), “On the Importance of a Date, or Decolonizing the Anthropocene” (2017)
  - Wendy Wolford, “The Plantationocene: A Lusotropical Contribution to the Theory” (2021) (1622–1625 required, 1626–1639 recommended)
- Week 3**  
**Theorizing Resilience**
- Tu, Jan 24
- Macarena Gómez-Barris, “Introduction: Submerged Perspectives” from *The Extractive Zone: Social Ecologies and Decolonial Perspectives* (2017)
  - Alex Pritz (dir.), *The Territory* (2022)
- Th, Jan 26
- Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, “Prologue: Autumn Aroma” and “Part I: What’s Left?” from *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (2015)
  - Donna Haraway, “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin” (2015)
  - Theoretical Essay Assigned
- Week 4**  
**Exploring New Worlds**
- Tu, Jan 31
- Class Cancelled—the Professor is Lecturing at Columbia University
- Th, Feb 2
- Selections from *The Diario of Christopher Columbus’s First Voyage to America* (1492)
  - Edgar Garcia, Selections from *Skins of Columbus: A Dream Ethnography* (2019)
  - Rebecca Earle, “The Columbian Exchange” (2012)
- Sun, Feb 5
- *DUE BY 11:59PM: Theoretical Essay First Draft. Sign up for professor conferences.*
- Week 5**  
**Naturalizing Settler Colonialism**
- Tu, Feb 7
- Thomas Jefferson, Queries 1, 6 (skim the long lists), 11 (again, skim the long lists), 14, 18, and 19 from *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1780–87)
  - Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native” (2006)

Th, Feb 9 • Henry David Thoreau, “Walking” (1851–62)

Sun, Feb 12 • *DUE BY 11:59PM: Theoretical Essay Final Draft*

**Week 6 Ecologies of Racial Capitalism**

Tu, Feb 14 • Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years A Slave* (1853) (Editor’s Preface – Chapter 10)  
 • Destin Jenkins and Justin Leroy, “Introduction: The Old History of Capitalism” from *Histories of Racial Capitalism* (2021) (1–15 required, 16–26 recommended)  
 • Research Essay Assigned

Th, Feb 16 • Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years A Slave* (1853) (Chapter 11 – End)

**Week 7 Living and Laboring in Built Environments**

Tu, Feb 21 • Jacob Lawrence, *The Migration Series* (1940–41)  
 • Brian McCammack, “Introduction: Kinship with the Soil” and “Booker T’ Washington Park and Chicago’s Racial Landscapes” in *Landscapes of Hope: Nature and the Great Migration in Chicago* (2017) (read this first)

Th, Feb 23 • Lorna Dee Cervantes, “Beneath the Shadow of the Freeway” and “Freeway 280” from *Emplumada* (1981)  
 • Andrew Needham, “Introduction: Beyond the Crabgrass Frontier” to *Power Lines: Phoenix and the Making of the Modern Southwest* (2014) (read this first)

Sun, Feb 26 • *DUE BY 11:59PM: Preliminary Research Essay Proposal. Sign up for professor conferences.*

**Week 8 Creating and Contesting Modernity**

Tu, Feb 28 • Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna Pueblo), *Ceremony* (1977), 1-80

Th, Mar 2 • Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna Pueblo), *Ceremony* (1977), 81-160

**Week 9 Toxic Infrastructures**

Tu, Mar 7 • Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna Pueblo), *Ceremony* (1977), 161-243

Th, Mar 9 • Class Cancelled—the Professor is Lecturing at UC Santa Cruz

Sun, Mar 12 • *DUE BY 11:59PM: Revised Research Essay Proposal with Annotated Bibliography*

**Week 10 No Class: Spring Break**

**Week 11 Environmentalism and Its Discontents**

Tu, Mar 21 • Ansel Adams, *Parmelian Prints of the High Sierras* (1927)  
 • William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature” from *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (1996)

Th, Mar 23 • Adelina Otero-Warren, “The Wind in the Mountains” and “The Harvest” from *Old Spain in Our Southwest* (1936)  
 • Aldo Leopold, “Thinking Like a Mountain,” “The Community Concept,” “The Ecological Conscience,” “Substitutes for a Land Ethic,” and “The Outlook” from *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There* (1949)

- Enriqueta Vasquez, “La Santa Tierra” and “Money, Money, Money” (1970)
- Priscilla Solis Ybarra, “The Forgotten History of Wilderness” (2022) (read this first)

**Week 12****From Environmentalism to Environmental Justice**

Tu, Mar 28

- United Farm Workers, Posters and Pamphlets (1962–1970) (engage these last)
- First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, “Principles of Environmental Justice” (1991) (engage these second)
- Sarah D. Wald, “‘Elixirs of Death’: The United Farm Workers and the Modern Environmental Movement” from *The Nature of California: Race, Citizenship, and Farming since the Dust Bowl* (2016) (read this first)
- **DUE BY 11:59PM: Research Essay First Draft**

Th, Mar 30

- In-Class Writing Workshop: In advance, you will be asked to engage 3–5 essays.

**Week 13****Revising the Environmental Humanities**

Tu, Apr 4

- In-Class Writing Workshop: In advance, you will be asked to engage 3–5 essays.

Th, Apr 6

- In-Class Writing Workshop: In advance, you will be asked to engage 3–5 essays. You should also get a head start on next week’s (substantial!) readings.

**Week 14****Climate Justice**

Tu, Apr 11

- Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (2016) (3–33 and 58–84 required, 33–58 recommended)
- Claire Vaye Watkins, *Gold Fame Citrus: A Novel* (2016) (Book One)

Th, Apr 13

- Claire Vaye Watkins, *Gold Fame Citrus: A Novel* (2016) (Book Two)
- **DUE BY 11:59PM: Research Essay Final Draft**

**Week 15****Planetary Possibilities**

Tu, Apr 18

- Claire Vaye Watkins, *Gold Fame Citrus: A Novel* (2016) (Book Three)
- **DUE BY 11:59PM: Natural History Mini-Exhibit or Other Small Creative Project**

Th, Apr 20

- Creative Project Presentations

Tu, Apr 25

- **DUE BY 11:59PM: Optional Research Essay Revision**

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

In Spring 2023, “Introduction to the Environmental Humanities” is coinciding with a global pandemic of COVID-19, a national fight for racial justice, and other unprecedented situations. Because we experience these situations in different ways—and crucially, because we arrive at them with disparate resources—we will need to be flexible with each other. As professor, I look forward to helping you with any challenges that may arise during our time together, but as a starting point, I ask that you try your best to meet the following course requirements:

**Attendance, Participation, and Communication:** This course is a seminar; it should be collective, collaborative, and convivial. Please come to each of our sessions prepared to talk and listen: if a text

is interesting (or not), explain why; if an idea is confusing (which is totally fine), ask a question; and if you agree or disagree with another comment, describe your own position. Throughout, treat one another with respect: since we are coming to this course from different contexts, we will need to value our unique identities, and since we are engaging with some intense and perhaps irresolvable problems, we will need to maintain a culture of mutual understanding. In short: over the semester, we will disagree on many points, but we will not make disrespectful comments against one another.

To participate in our community, you must be present, so unless you experience a medical problem (which could be either mental or physical, but which should be documented by a doctor's note or an approved alternative) or family emergency, your "attendance and participation" grade will affect your overall grade as follows: if you miss one to two sessions, you will suffer a small penalty, but will remain eligible for an "A"; if you have three non-emergency absences, the highest grade you can earn in the course will be an "A-," and if you have four such absences, it will be a "B+"; finally, if you have five or more non-emergency absences, you will likely fail the course.

While we convene on Tuesdays and Thursdays, we can continue our conversations during other parts of the week. If you would like to review readings, think through assignments, or simply chat, please get in touch to set up a meeting. To normalize this practice, I will take the initiative of scheduling two mandatory one-on-one conversations over the course of the semester.

**Reading:** Set aside enough time to read carefully and think deeply. As you work, annotate passages and take notes, and in ten of the semester's fifteen weeks, add an entry to the "Reading Journal" on Brightspace. Due each Thursday by 12:00PM, these entries should be 300- to 400-word engagements with one or more of the week's readings. Whether they answer questions the professor asks in his initial thread, address arguments other students advance in their responses, or go in a completely different direction, these entries should not be polished: instead of scintillating sentences and perfect paragraphs, they should be experiments with interesting ideas or questions without easy answers.

During the discussions themselves, you are strongly encouraged to stay off laptops and smart phones. To that end, please print as many of the readings that are posted to Brightspace as you are able to afford. In turn, please spend a grand total of \$40 on three physical books:

Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years A Slave* (Norton, 2016). ISBN 9780393264241. \$14.00.

Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony* (Penguin, 2006). ISBN 9780143104919. \$13.00.

Claire Vaye Watkins, *Gold Fame Citrus* (Riverhead, 2016). ISBN 9781594634246. \$13.00.

**Writing:** In addition to the informal reading journal (see above), you will complete three formal assignments. First, you will write a four- to five-page theoretical essay about readings from our first three weeks together. Next, you will develop a twelve- or thirteen-page research paper about several sources of your choosing; to arrive at this polished product, you will proceed through a collaborative process that includes a preliminary proposal, a revised proposal, an annotated bibliography, a first draft, a final draft, and one-on-one and small-group meetings. Finally, at the end of the semester, you will review the things that you have learned by making a natural history mini-exhibit or other small creative project. Your formal assignments will be due by the following deadlines:

First Draft of Theoretical Essay	11:59PM on February 5
Final Draft of Theoretical Essay	11:59PM on February 12
Preliminary Research Essay Proposal	11:59PM on February 26
Revised Research Paper Proposal w/Annotated Bibliography	11:59PM on March 12
First Draft of Research Essay	11:59PM on March 28
Final Draft of Research Essay	11:59PM on April 13
Natural History Mini-Exhibit or Other Small Creative Project	11:59PM on April 18
Optional Revision of Research Paper	11:59PM on April 25

**Grading:** All grades are non-negotiable. They will be calculated as follows:

Attendance and Participation	20%
Reading Journal	20%
Theoretical Essay	15%
Research Essay	35%
Multimedia Map	10%

## COURSE POLICIES

**Formatting:** All essays should be double-spaced, with one-inch margins, in a nice-looking twelve-point font (a few good choices: **Georgia, Cambria, or Times New Roman**; some bad ones: *Mistral, HERCULANUM, DESDEMONA*). The first page should have a header in the upper left-hand corner that includes your full name, my full name, the course title, and the date. Each subsequent page should have a header in the upper right-hand corner with your last name and the page number. The file should be titled as follows: “Name\_Assignment\_Date,” i.e. “Nugent\_Research Essay\_090817.” The rest of the paper should be formatted in Chicago Style as defined in the most recent edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style* (<https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org>).

**Submissions:** Informal reading journal entries should be pasted directly into the “Discussions” section of Brightspace. Essays and creative projects should be uploaded under “Assignments.” One of these formal assignments is eligible for a forty-eight-hour extension, no questions asked. Except in cases of emergency, any other assignment that is late will be marked down one third of a grade per day (from an ‘A’ to an ‘A-,’ from an ‘A-’ to a ‘B+,’ and so on). If an assignment is more than forty-eight hours late, the professor may provide a grade but withhold more substantive feedback.

**Academic Integrity:** Among other things, this course will teach you how to engage productively with scholarly research. In this context, appropriating another scholar’s words or ideas without proper documentation is incredibly disrespectful, both to them and to yourself. Therefore, any instance of academic dishonesty (especially plagiarism, but also unauthorized collaboration) will be grounds for failing the assignment and, in all likelihood, the course. If you have any questions about citing sources, attributing ideas, or avoiding plagiarism, please get in touch. In addition, please see Vanderbilt’s guides at (<https://www.vanderbilt.edu/studentaccountability/academic-integrity>) and (<https://researchguides.library.vanderbilt.edu/plagiarism>).

**Resources:** In the context COVID-19, we must all look out for one another, and during our time together, I stand ready to support you in whatever ways I can. In addition, I encourage you to take advantage of Vanderbilt’s many other resources. The Equal Opportunity and Access Department (<https://www.vanderbilt.edu/EOA/>) helps students secure the academic accommodations that they need in the context of one or more disabilities, so reach out to them early in the quarter if you could use their assistance. The Student Health Center (<https://www.vumc.org/student-health/>) employs a range of physical and mental health practitioners, and even if you are away from campus, you can access their resources on sexual violence, alcohol and drug use, adjusting to college culture, and many other areas. On an academic level, the Writing Studio (<https://www.vanderbilt.edu/writing/>) offers individual writing consultations and other programs, while the Jean and Alexander Heard Libraries (<https://www.library.vanderbilt.edu>) have many ways of helping you with your work.