

English 1111
Vanderbilt University, Fall 2022
MWF 12:20PM – 1:10PM
Classroom: Wilson Hall 121

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NATURE, RACE, AND INDIGENEITY IN THE U.S.

“Nature” is one of the weirdest words in the English language—it can refer to human trait (“it is in her nature”), a nonhuman environment (“we walked in nature”), a divine power (“mother nature”), or a biological process (“nature calls”). Despite—and indeed, because of—these ambiguities, nature has played pivotal roles in the territory that has come to be known as the United States. In various guises, nature has inspired pilgrims, pioneers, and tourists. At the same time, nature has staged struggles between settlers and Natives, whites and racialized peoples, upper classes and working classes. In this writing-intensive first-year seminar, we will learn how nature has brought us together and torn us apart. By engaging with a variety of media—from colonial-era captivity narratives to nineteenth-century abolitionist texts to contemporary Kumeyaay poetry—we will recover conflicting ideas of nature. And by reading in the environmental humanities—including history, anthropology, and literary criticism—we will discover how these ideas have impacted human and more-than-human worlds. While our inquiries will take us from prehistory to the present, they will converge on the future: now that we are destroying our ecosystems, extinguishing our fellow species, and altering our atmosphere, is there still such a thing as nature? During the semester, we will navigate this tricky terrain both collectively and individually, with each student completing a four- to five-page close-reading essay, a five- to six-page theoretical essay, and a nine- or ten-page research essay.

Course Objectives: As we explore nature, you will cultivate a variety of skills:

- A. *Writing:* Through individual assignments and in-class exercises, you will learn how to design, draft, research, and revise academic essays. While we will orient ourselves toward U.S. natures, you will be able to apply these writing skills to any academic or professional field.
- B. *Reading:* By looking at, listening to, and experimenting with a range of media, you will become a more confident critical reader. Whether you are faced with a contemporary film or a hundred-year-old letter, 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 comparing the ways in which human authors have represented and related to their more-than-human worlds, you will experience both the similarities that unite peoples and the differences that define them.

Course Structure: In our first few sessions, we will wrestle with challenging texts that try to define “Nature,” “Race,” “Indigeneity,” and other keywords. We will then proceed through three units:

- I. *Natural History (Weeks 4–6):* Commencing with our continent’s earliest English-speaking settlers and concluding with recent Indigenous and Latinx writers, we will examine how people and places have come to be known as “natural” or “unnatural.”
- II. *Human Nature (Weeks 7–9):* Analyzing an array of nineteenth- and twentieth-century archives, we will learn how all-too-human identities (such as Blackness or Latinidad) have shaped and been shaped by more-than-human environments (such as plantations or agribusinesses).
- III. *The End of Nature (Weeks 10–16):* Taking up contemporary approaches to awareness and activism, we will consider how old ideals (like the pristine wilderness) engage—or, just as importantly, fail to engage—with new realities (especially global warming).

READING AND ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE

Week 1 **Introductions**

- Wed, Aug 24
- John Muir, Selections from *The Mountains of California* (1894) (circulated in-class)
 - Various Artists, California Citrus Box Labels (1900–1930) (circulated in-class)
 - United Farm Workers, Posters and Pamphlets (1962–1970) (circulated in-class)
- Fri, Aug 26
- William Cronon, “Introduction: In Search of Nature” from *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (1996)
 - Show-and-Tell: Come to class with a physical object. Be ready to speak informally for fifty to sixty seconds about its relationship to one or more “natures.”

Week 2 **Human Identities in/and/as Nonhuman Environments I**

- Mon, Aug 29
- Thomas Moran, *Slave Hunt, Dismal Swamp* (1864) and *Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone* (1872) (view these paintings after reading Cronon’s essay)
 - William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature” from *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (1996)
- Wed, Aug 31
- Sherman Alexie (Spokane/Coeur d’Alene), “The Powwow at the End of the World” (1996) (read this poem after reading Wolfe’s essay)
 - Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native” (2006)
- Fri, Sep 2
- Class cancelled—the professor is attending a wedding. With your extra time, catch up on the Week 2 and Week 3 readings, which are the course’s most challenging.

Week 3 **Human Identities in/and/as Nonhuman Environments II**

- Mon, Sep 5
- Donna Haraway, Selections from “Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908–1936” (1985)
 - Wendy Red Star (Apsáalooke), “Four Seasons” (2006) (read Haraway first)
- Wed, Sep 7
- Robert Hayden, “Middle Passage” (1962) (read Bennett first)
 - Joshua Bennett, “Horse” and parts of “Shark” from *Being Property Once Myself: Blackness and the End of Man* (2020)
- Fri, Sep 9
- In-Class Note-Taking Workshop

Week 4 **Errands into the Wilderness**

- Mon, Sep 12
- Mary Rowlandson, *A True History of the Captivity and Restoration...* (1682)
- Wed, Sep 14
- Thomas Jefferson, Selections from *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1780–87)
 - Close-Reading Essay Assigned
- Fri, Sep 16
- Henry David Thoreau, “Economy” from *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* (1854)

Week 5 **Domesticating Nature**

- Mon, Sep 19
- Henry David Thoreau, “Where I Lived, and What I Lived For,” “Sounds,” “Solitude,” and “The Bean Field” from *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* (1854)

- Wed, Sep 21 • Henry David Thoreau, “The Ponds,” “Higher Laws,” and “Brute Neighbors” from *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* (1854)
- Fri, Sep 23 • Henry David Thoreau, “The Pond in Winter,” “Spring,” and “Conclusion” from *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* (1854)
- Sun, Sep 25 • **DUE BY 11:59PM: Close-Reading Essay First Draft. Sign up for professor conferences.**
- Week 6 Redefining Nature**
- Mon, Sep 26 • Simon Ortiz (Acoma Pueblo), Selections from *Fight Back: For the Sake of the People, for the Sake of the Land* (1980)
- Wed, Sep 28 • Gloria Anzaldúa, Selections from *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987)
- Fri, Sep 30 • In-Class Writing Workshop
- Sun, Oct 2 • **DUE BY 11:59PM: Close-Reading Essay Final Draft.**
- Week 7 Creating and Contesting Blackness**
- Mon, Oct 3 • Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (1845) (Preface – Chapter Five)
• Theoretical Essay Assigned. *Make appointment at the Writing Studio for the 10, 11, or 12.*
- Wed, Oct 5 • Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (1845) (Chapter Six – Chapter Ten)
- Fri, Oct 7 • Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (1845) (Chapter Eleven – Appendix, plus “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” from 1852, reprinted in the *Norton*)
- Sun, Oct 9 • **DUE BY 11:59PM: Theoretical Essay First Draft. Take to the Writing Studio ASAP.**
- Week 8 Engaging the Ecological Indian**
- Mon, Oct 10 • Shepherd Krech III, “Introduction” to *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History* (1999)
• Tommy Pico (Kumeyaay), Selections from *Nature Poem* (2017) (read Krech first)
- Wed, Oct 12 • In-Class Writing Workshop
- Fri, Oct 14 • No Class: Fall Break
- Sun, Oct 16 • **DUE BY 11:59PM: Theoretical Essay Final Draft.**
- Week 9 Making Mobile Communities**
- Mon, Oct 17 • Helena María Viramontes, *Under the Feet of Jesus* (1995), Parts I and II
• Research Essay Assigned.
- Wed, Oct 19 • Helena María Viramontes, *Under the Feet of Jesus* (1995), Part III
- Fri, Oct 21 • Helena María Viramontes, *Under the Feet of Jesus* (1995), Parts IV and V

Sun, Oct 23 • **DUE BY 11:59PM: Preliminary Research Essay Proposal. Sign up for professor conferences.**

Week 10 The Nature of Environmentalism

Mon, Oct 24 • In-Class Research Workshop

Wed, Oct 26 • Mary Austin, *The Land of Little Rain* (1903) (xxxv – 55)

Fri, Oct 28 • Mary Austin, *The Land of Little Rain* (1903) (56 – 109)

Week 11 Two Experiments in Environmentalism

Mon, Oct 31 • Rachel Carson, “A Fable for Tomorrow” and “And No Birds Sing” from *Silent Spring* (1962) (read Benson first)
• Etienne S. Benson, Selections from *Surroundings: A History of Environments and Environmentalisms* (2020)

Tue, Nov 1 • **DUE BY 11:59PM: Revised Research Essay Proposal and Annotated Bibliography**

Wed, Nov 2 • Werner Herzog (dir.), *Grizzly Man* (2005)

Fri, Nov 4 • Class cancelled—the professor is presenting at the Annual Meeting of the American Studies Association. With your extra time, start drafting!

Week 12 Three Versions of Environmental Justice

Mon, Nov 7 • First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, “Principles of Environmental Justice” (1991) (read Taylor first)
• Dorceta Taylor, Selections from *Toxic Communities: Environmental Racism, Industrial Pollution, and Residential Mobility* (2014)

Wed, Nov 9 • Vicky Funari and Sergio de la Torre (dir.), *Maquilapolis* (2006)

Fri, Nov 11 • Nick Estes (Lower Brule Sioux), Selections from *Our History Is the Future: Standing Rock Versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance* (2019)

Sun, Nov 13 • **DUE BY 11:59PM: Research Essay First Draft**

Week 13 Rewriting Nature, Race, and Indigeneity

Mon, Nov 14 • In-Class Writing Workshop

Wed, Nov 16 • In-Class Writing Workshop

Fri, Nov 18 • In-Class Writing Workshop

Week 14 No Class: Thanksgiving Break

Week 15 Changing Climates, Changing Cultures

Mon, Nov 28 • Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower* (1993), 1–93

- Wed, Nov 30 • Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower* (1993), 94–166
 • *DUE BY 11:59PM: Research Essay Final Draft*
- Fri, Dec 2 • Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower* (1993), 167–224
- Week 16 Shifting Futures**
- Mon, Dec 5 • Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower* (1993), 225–329
- Wed, Dec 7 • Concluding Conversations
- Fri, Dec 9 • *DUE BY 11:59PM: Optional Research Essay Revision*

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

In Fall 2022, this course 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 you may encounter, but as a starting point, I ask that you try your best to meet the following 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 or four non-emergency absences, the highest grade you can earn in the course will be an “A-,” and if you have five or six such absences, it will be a “B+”; finally, if you have seven or more non-emergency absences, you will likely fail the course.

While we convene on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, 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 Friday by 10:00AM, 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 \$60 on five physical books:

- Henry David Thoreau, *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* (Yale, 2006). ISBN 9780300110081. \$8.50.
- Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life...* (Norton, 2016). ISBN 978039325446. \$14.00.
- Helena María Viramontes, *Under the Feet of Jesus* (Plume, 1996). ISBN 9780452273870. \$12.00.
- Mary Austin, *The Land of Little Rain* (Modern Library, 2003). ISBN 9780812968521. \$16.00.
- Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower* (Grand Central, 2019). ISBN 9781538732182. \$11.50.

Writing: In addition to keeping an informal reading journal, you will complete three formal writing assignments: a four- to five-page close-reading essay about a single item from our syllabus; a five- to six-page theoretical essay about two items from our syllabus; and a nine- or ten-page research essay about several sources of your choosing. For the last of these assignments, 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. The three formal assignments will be due by the following deadlines:

First Draft of Close-Reading Essay	11:59PM on September 25
Final Draft of Close-Reading Essay	11:59PM on October 2
First Draft of Theoretical Essay	11:59PM on October 9
Final Draft of Theoretical Essay	11:59PM on October 16
Preliminary Research Essay Proposal	11:59PM on October 23
Revised Research Essay Proposal w/Annotated Bibliography	11:59PM on November 1
First Draft of Research Essay	11:59PM on November 13
Final Draft of Research Essay	11:59PM on November 30
Optional Revision of Research Essay	11:59PM on December 9

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

Attendance and Participation	20%
Reading Journal	15%
Close-Reading Essay	15%
Theoretical Essay	20%
Research Essay	30%

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 essay 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/ea/>) 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.