

English 3892W.04
Vanderbilt University, Spring 2022
TR 4:30PM – 5:45PM
Classroom: Furman Hall 202

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REIMAGINING AND RESHAPING NORTH AMERICAN ENVIRONMENTS

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. Although these scientists still disagree about the Anthropocene’s starting date—their proposals range from the Neolithic Agricultural Revolution to the post-WWII Great Acceleration—they all see the significance 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. As these scientists continue to analyze the Anthropocene’s material traces (from radionucleotides trapped in tree-rings to chemicals frozen in ice cores), environmental humanists are starting to study its cultural causes. To draw on and develop these efforts, our course will explore how all-too-human imaginaries (such as “the frontier,” “the wilderness,” and indeed “the environment”) have contributed to and/or conflicted with more-than-human realities (from air pollution to ocean acidification to global warming) in the territory that has come to be called the United States. Through our readings of colonial-era journals, nineteenth-century slave narratives, contemporary Indigenous poetry, and many other media, we will try to see this territory in its full complexity: a scene of countless crimes, it is also a source for resilient and respectful ideas. During the semester, we will navigate this tricky terrain both collectively and individually: to enrich our in-class discussions, each student will complete a four- to five-page theoretical essay, a thirteen- to fourteen-page research essay, and a natural history mini-exhibit or other small creative project.

Course Objectives: As we explore North American environments, 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 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 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: After a theoretical introduction, we will move through three historical units:

- I. *Exploring New Worlds (Weeks 3–5):* Cutting across five centuries of Spanish, British, and U.S. colonialisms, we will try to understand exploration—that is, we will try to understand the processes through which colonizers have come to know the “natural” and the “unnatural.”
- II. *Land, Labor, and Identity (Weeks 6–10):* Moving through nineteenth-century slave plantations, twentieth-century agribusinesses, and other socio-ecological sites, we will learn how various forms of labor have given shape to human identities and nonhuman environments.
- III. *Cultures of Environmentalism and Environmental Justice (Weeks 11–15):* Concluding with more recent approaches to awareness and activism, we will consider how old ideals (such as the pristine wilderness) engage (or fail to engage) with new realities (like global warming).

READING AND ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE

- Week 1**
Introductions
- Tu, Jan 11
- Georgia O’Keeffe, Selected Paintings (1929–66) (circulated in class)
 - La Alianza Federal de Mercedes, Selected Archives (1962–70) (circulated in class)
 - Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna Pueblo), Selected Poems (1993) (circulated in class)
- Th, Jan 13
- 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)
- Week 2**
Reimagining the Anthropocene
- Tu, Jan 18
- 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)
- Th, Jan 20
- Donna Haraway, “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin” (2015)
 - Wendy Wolford, “The Plantationocene: A Lusotropical Contribution to the Theory” (2021)
- Week 3**
Exploring New Worlds
- Tu, Jan 25
- Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, *Chronicle of the Narváez Expedition* (1542) (1–69)
 - Theoretical Essay Assigned
- Th, Jan 27
- Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, *Chronicle of the Narváez Expedition* (1542) (70–109)
 - María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, “Savages Welcomed: Imputations of Indigenous Humanity in Early Colonialisms” from *Indian Given: Racial Geographies across Mexico and the United States* (2016)
- Week 4**
Errands into the Wilderness
- Tu, Feb 1
- Mary Rowlandson, *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God: A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* (1682)
 - Mark Fiege, “Satan in the Land: Nature, the Supernatural, and Disorder...” from *The Republic of Nature: An Environmental History of the United States* (2012)
 - **DUE BY 11:59PM: Theoretical Essay First Draft. Sign up for professor conferences.**
- Th, Feb 3
- 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)
 - Elizabeth Kolbert, “Prologue” and “The Mastodon’s Molars” from *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* (2014)
- Sun, Feb 6
- **DUE BY 11:59PM: Theoretical Essay Final Draft**
- Week 5**
Natural Histories
- Tu, Feb 8
- Research Essay Assigned During a Workshop in Special Collections Room 203

- Th, Feb 10
- Donna Haraway, “Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, 1908–1936” (1985)
 - Wendy Red Star (Apsáalooke), “Four Seasons” (2006)
 - Natural History Mini-Exhibit Assigned
- Week 6** **Plantation Ecologies**
- Tu, Feb 15
- Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years A Slave* (1853) (Editor’s Preface – Chapter 11)
- Th, Feb 17
- Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years A Slave* (1853) (Chapter 12 – End)
- Sun, Feb 20
- *DUE BY 11:59PM: Preliminary Research Essay Proposal. Sign up for professor conferences.*
- Week 7** **Frontier Fantasies**
- Tu, Feb 22
- Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” (1893)
 - Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native” (2006)
- Th, Feb 24
- Class Cancelled—the Professor is Lecturing at Arizona State University
- Week 8** **Frontier Realities**
- Tu, Mar 1
- Willa Cather, *O Pioneers!* (1913), Parts I, II, and III
- Th, Mar 3
- Willa Cather, *O Pioneers!* (1913), Parts IV and V
- Sun, Mar 6
- *DUE BY 11:59PM: Revised Research Essay Proposal with Annotated Bibliography*
- Week 9** **No Class: Spring Break**
- Week 10** **Borderlands of Indigeneity**
- Tu, Mar 15
- Gloria Anzaldúa, “Preface,” “The Homeland, Aztlán/El otro México,” and “Movimientos de rebeldía y las culturas que traicionan” from *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987)
- Th, Mar 17
- Jake Kosek, “The Cultural Politics of Memory and Longing” and “Sovereign Natures” from *Understories: The Political Life of Forests in Northern New Mexico* (2006)
 - Russel Albert Daniels (Diné and Ho-Chunk), *The Genízaro Pueblo of Abiquiú* (2020)
- Week 11** **Environmentalism and Its Discontents**
- Tu, Mar 22
- Ansel Adams, *Parmelian Prints of the High Sierras* (1927)
 - Jaune Quick-to-See Smith (Salish), *Selected Paintings* (1978–2012)
 - 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 24
- Rachel Carson, “A Fable for Tomorrow” and “And No Birds Sing” from *Silent Spring* (1962)
 - Finis Dunaway, “Gas Masks, Pogo, and the Ecological Indian: Earth Day and the Visual Politics of American Environmentalism” (2008)

- Sun, Mar 27 • *DUE BY 11:59PM: Research Essay First Draft*
- Week 12 Reassessing and Revising North American Environments**
- Tu, Mar 29 • In-Class Writing Workshop
- Th, Mar 31 • In-Class Writing Workshop
- Week 13 Environmental Justice I: The Toxic City**
- Tu, Apr 5 • First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, “Principles of Environmental Justice” (1991)
• Karen Tei Yamashita, *Tropic of Orange* (1997) (HyperContexts – Chapter 21)
- Th, Apr 7 • Karen Tei Yamashita, *Tropic of Orange* (1997) (Chapter 22 – End)
- Sun, Apr 10 • *DUE BY 11:59PM: Research Essay Final Draft*
- Week 14 Environmental Justice II: The Toxic Countryside**
- Tu, Apr 12 • Jesmyn Ward, *Salvage the Bones* (2012) (Start – The Sixth Day)
- Th, Apr 14 • Jesmyn Ward, *Salvage the Bones* (2012) (The Seventh Day – End)
- Sun, Apr 17 • *DUE BY 11:59PM: Natural History Mini-Exhibit or Other Creative Project*
- Week 15 Environmental Justice III: Sacred Land**
- Tu, Apr 19 • Presentations on Natural History Mini-Exhibits and Other Creative Projects
- Th, Apr 21 • Nick Estes (Lower Brule Sioux), “Prologue: Prophets,” “Siege,” “Origins,” and “Liberation” from *Our History Is the Future: Standing Rock Versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance* (2019)
- Sun, Apr 24 • *DUE BY 11:59PM: Optional Research Essay Revision*

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

In Spring 2022, “Reimagining and Reshaping North American Environments” 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 1:00PM, 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 \$65 on five physical books:

Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, *Chronicle of the Narváez Expedition* (Penguin, 2002). ISBN 9780142437070. \$11.50.

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

Willa Cather, *O Pioneers!* (Vintage, 1992). ISBN 9780679743620. \$9.00.

Karen Tei Yamashita, *Tropic of Orange* (Coffee House, 2017). ISBN 9781566894869. \$17.00.

Jesmyn Ward, *Salvage the Bones* (Bloomsbury, 2012). ISBN 9781608196265. \$10.00.

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 two weeks together. Next, you will develop a thirteen- to fourteen-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 1
Final Draft of Theoretical Essay	11:59PM on February 6
Preliminary Research Essay Proposal	11:59PM on February 20
Revised Research Paper Proposal w/Annotated Bibliography	11:59PM on March 6
First Draft of Research Essay	11:59PM on March 27
Final Draft of Research Essay	11:59PM on April 10
Natural History Mini-Exhibit or Other Small Creative Project	11:59PM on April 17
Optional Revision of Research Paper	11:59PM on April 24

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 papers 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_Short Paper_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.