

IDEAS OF NATURE IN AMERICAN CULTURE

LBST 514
Spring 2008
TUES 6-9 PM
VKC 104

Jenny Price
jennifjp@usc.edu

off hrs 3:30-5:30-THH355

The idea of nature contains, though often unnoticed, an extraordinary amount of human history
---Raymond Williams, "Ideas of Nature"

Williams wrote also that "nature" may be the most complicated word in the English language. This course examines the centrality of ideas of nature to past and contemporary American life. We'll look at how Americans have drawn on their deepest beliefs about people to think about nature, but also how people have used nature powerfully to think about themselves. And we'll investigate the importance of ideas of nature to environmental change and environmentalism, but also to understanding such large and diverse topics as American identity, gender and class relations, the American West, and the development and mythology of Los Angeles.

Readings

William Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*
Jennifer Price, *Flight Maps: Adventures with Nature in Modern America*
Leah Hager Cohen, *Glass, Paper, Beans: Revelations on the Nature and Value of Ordinary Things*

Course Reader--LBST514

Glass, Paper, Beans on reserve in Leavey Library; all three books available at USC Bookstore.

Articles, chapters, and other readings available in Course Reader (R), as handouts (HO), and online on JSTOR or at URLs listed below.

Assignments:

Two interpretive papers (5-7 pp.), and a rewrite of one of these, are required. Students will also be responsible for several informal oral presentations, and will partner together on an oral interpretation of a primary source.

There is a required field trip to the Los Angeles River.

Grading:

Class participation	30%
Written assignments	45%

Oral assignments 25%

An overall B grade is required to pass.

SCHEDULE:

WEEK 1 -- 1/15 INTRODUCTION

WEEK 2 -- 1/22 WHAT IS NATURE?

William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," in *Uncommon Ground*

Responses to Cronon, in *Wild Earth*--Read Foreman, Snyder, Sessions, Willers (HO)

Jenny Price, "Thirteen Ways of Seeing Nature in L.A.," *The Believer*, Part 1 (April 2006)--
http://www.believermag.com/issues/200604/?read=article_price

Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature*--excerpts (R)

WEEK 3 -- 1/29 USING NATURE TO THINK

"Missed Connections: The Passenger Pigeon Extinction," in *Flight Maps*

"The Fetish," in *Glass, Paper, Beans* (pp. 199-252--skip 216-23)

"The Apple," in Michael Pollan, *The Botany of Desire: A Plant's-Eye View of the World* (R)

WEEK 4 -- 2/5 HISTORICAL ROOTS--EUROPEAN

Raymond Williams, "Ideas of Nature," in *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (R)

Carolyn Merchant, "Reinventing Eden: Western Culture as a Recovery Narrative," in *Uncommon Ground*

"A Natural History of the Plastic Pink Flamingo," in *Flight Maps*--Read to p. 125

WEEK 5 -- 2/12 HISTORICAL ROOTS--AMERICAN

Henry David Thoreau, "Walking"--<http://www.ecotopia.org/ehof/thoreau/walking.html> (and look at Ecotopia website generally)

Anne Whiston Spurr, "Constructing Nature: The Legacy of Frederick Law Olmsted," in *Uncommon Ground*

Thomas Jefferson, "Manufactures," *Notes on the State of Virginia*--
<http://www.historytools.org/sources/Jefferson-agrarianism.pdf>

J.B. Jackson, "Jefferson, Thoreau, and After," "Several American Landscapes," in Ervin H. Zube, ed., *Landscapes: Selected Writings of J.B. Jackson* (R)

WEEK 6 -- 2/19 WHOSE NATURE?--CLASS

Karl Jacoby, "Working Class Wilderness" (ch. 3), in *Crimes Against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves, and the Hidden History of American Conservation*--electronic access from USC library catalog

Jennifer Price, "Looking for Nature at the Mall: A Field Guide to the Nature Company," in *Uncommon Ground*

DUE: PAPER # 1

WEEK 7 -- 2/26 WHOSE NATURE?--GENDER

"When Women Were Women, Men Were Men, and Birds Were Hats," in *Flight Maps*

Rebecca Solnit, "The Aesthetics of Nature Calendars," in *As Eve Said to the Serpent: On Landscape, Gender, and Art* (R)

Lindsay Van Gelder, "It's Not Nice to Mess with Mother Nature--Ecofeminism 101," *Ms. Magazine* (Spring 2002)--<http://www.msmagazine.com/spring2002/Ecofeminism.asp>

Peter Boag, "Thinking Like Mount Rushmore: Sexuality and Gender in the Republican Landscape," in Virginia J. Scharff, ed., *Seeing Nature Through Gender* (R)

Robert Bly, *Iron John: A Book About Men*--excerpts (R)

Clarissa Pinkola Estés, *Women Who Run with the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype*--excerpts (R)

WEEK 8 -- 3/4 SCIENCE--ECOLOGY AND BEHAVIOR

Michael G. Barbour, "Ecological Fragmentation in the Fifties," in *Uncommon Ground*

Rebecca Solnit, "Lise Meitner's Walking Shoes," in *As Eve Said to the Serpent*

Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, *The Woman That Never Evolved*--excerpts

WEEK 9 -- 3/11 AMERICAN WEST--WESTERNS

"Roadrunners Can't Read: The Greening of Television in the 1990s," in *Flight Maps*--Read pp. 215-35

Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America*--excerpts

Films: Pick a western to watch from list provided

WEEK 10 -- 3/25 ENVIRONMENTALISM

Mark Dowie, *Losing Ground: American Environmentalism at the Close of the Twentieth Century*--excerpts (R)

Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*--excerpts (R)

Rachel Carson, "A Fable for Tomorrow," in *Silent Spring* (R)

Edward Abbey, "The Great American Desert," in *The Journey Home: Some Words in Defense of the American West* (R)

"The Wilderness Act of 1964"--read through "Definition of Wilderness"--
<http://www.wilderness.net/index.cfm?fuse=NWPS&sec=legisAct&error=404>

"Greenpeace Declaration of Interdependence"--
http://www.rexweyler.com/resources/green_declaration.html#6

"The Letter That Shook a Movement" (HO)

"Rio Declaration on Environment and Development"--<http://habitat.igc.org/agenda21/rio-dec.html>

WEEK 11 -- 4/1 ANIMALS (NOTE: class on M, W, or TH this week)

Susan Davis, "'Touch the Magic,'" in *Uncommon Ground*

Andrea Gullo et al, "The Cougar's Tale," in Jennifer Wolch and Jody Emel, eds., *Animal Geographies: Place, Politics, and Identity in the Nature-Culture Borderlands* (R)

"Animal Rights"--debate between Peter Singer and Richard Posner, on *Slate* (June 2001)--
<http://www.utilitarian.net/singer/interviews-debates/200106--.htm>

David Foster Wallace, "Consider the Lobster," in *Consider the Lobster: And Other Essays*

WEEK 12 -- 4/8 WHOSE NATURE?--RACE AND ETHNICITY

Giovanna Di Chiro, "Nature as Community: The Convergence of Environment and Social Justice," in *Uncommon Ground*--Read pp. 310-20

Barbara Deutsch Lynch, "The Garden and the Sea: U.S. Latino Environmental Discourses and Mainstream Environmentalism," *Social Problems* (Feb. 1993) (JSTOR)

Alison H. Deming and Lauret E. Savoy, eds., *The Colors of Nature: Essays on Culture, Identity, and the Natural World*--introduction; essays by Jamaica Kincaid, bell hooks, David Mas Masumoto (R)

DUE: PAPER # 2

WEEK 13 -- 4/15 SOUTH-CAMPUS FIELD TRIP--"What Does California Mean?" panel w/ William Deverell, D.J. Waldie, Kevin Starr, et al --Leonard Davis Auditorium, Andrus Gerontology Center--7-9 PM

No readings this week--Class meets 5:30-6:30 before panel

WEEK 14 -- 4/22 LOS ANGELES

"Thirteen Ways of Seeing Nature in L.A," Part 2 (May 2006)--
http://www.believmag.com/issues/200605/?read=article_price

Mike Davis, "The Dialectic of Ordinary Disaster" (part), "The Case for Letting Malibu Burn," in *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster*" (R)

Lawrence Weschler, "L.A. Glows," *New Yorker* (23 February 1998) (R)

WEEK 15 -- 4/29 THE FUTURE OF ENVIRONMENTALISM

Jenny Price, "Remaking American Environmentalism: On the Banks of the L.A. River"--online link to be provided

Michael Shellenberger and Ted Nordhaus interview with Michael Pollan (~45 min. video--audience questions optional, but watch if possible)--
http://thebreakthrough.org/blog/2007/11/michael_pollan_and_break_thru.shtml#more

MAY 5: REWRITE DUE