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*

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)


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)


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 Spirn, "Constructing Nature: The Legacy of Frederick Law Olmsted," in Uncommon Ground


**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


**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)


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


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)


"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*


"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


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

http://www.believermag.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)--

MAY 5: REWRITE DUE