

## ENVS 215: Nature's Meanings: American Experiences--Spring 2016

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KM Office Hours, Axinn 240. Spring 2016: Mondays, 11am-12pm; 2-4pm; Thursdays 3-4pm, except 2/25; Fridays 1:30-2:30, except 2/26; and by appointment (please email).

### Course Meeting Times:

Lecture: Mon/Fri 10:10-11:00, The Orchard, Hillcrest 103

Wed. Disc. X: 12:30-1:20, Wright Theater Seminar Room

Wed. Disc. Y: 1:45-2:35, Wright Theater Seminar Room

Wed. Disc. Z: 2:50-3:40, Wright Theater Seminar Room

Nature's Meanings is a core course in the Environmental Studies major. It is designed to introduce Environmental Studies majors and minors to the study of the human relationship to nature in American culture through the humanities. In doing so, it complements the three other core courses required of E.S. majors, which introduce students to that study through the social sciences (ENVS 211) and the natural sciences (ENVS 112), as well as spatial analysis (GEOG 120). Nature's Meanings is centered on close analysis of primary sources and scholarly works which presents diverse ideas and stories about nature (however defined) in diverse American cultures over time. It is an interdisciplinary course to some degree, in that it attempts to integrate history, religion, philosophy, and literature, with more coverage in this version for history and literature. Students are expected to engage and develop their critical reading, thinking, listening, discussion, and writing skills through class readings, lectures, discussions, examinations, and a final paper.

The Environmental Studies Faculty is working on a new title and description for ES 215. The current draft is designed to better reflect the mission of the course, given that it has evolved quite a bit over the past 7-10 years. The proposed description reads, *in part*:

*From European-Native contact to the present, Americans' various identities, cultures and beliefs about the bio-physical world have shaped the stories they tell about "nature," stories that sometimes share common ground, but often create conflicting and contested understandings of human-environment relationships. In this class, we will investigate these varied and contested stories from multi-disciplinary perspectives in the humanities—history, literature, and religion--and will include attention to race, class, gender, and environmental justice.*

### **Required work in ENVS 215:**

**Students must complete all required written work (2 sets of book notes, 2 exams, 1 paper topic, 1 paper) in order to pass the course. All required work is detailed below:**

1) Assigned readings, as detailed in this syllabus. **These are subject to change. Listen for announcements in class.** Readings are listed for both "lecture" classes (Mondays and Fridays) AND "discussion sections" (Wednesdays). In Wednesday discussion sections, with smaller groups of 12-14, we will have more in-depth discussions of the readings assigned for those days, and I will expect participation from everyone. Mondays and Fridays will be different. We cannot have the same sort of discussion in a lecture room with 40 students. Not everyone will be able to comment on the readings assigned for Mondays and Fridays. However, I will ask for your thoughts and contributions on Mondays and Fridays, though more briefly, and sometimes in groups of 2-4 students.

**2) Attendance and active engagement in class.** Attendance at all classes is required, but **discussion section** attendance (on Wed), in particular, will be recorded and counted as 5% of the final grade. Students may miss **one discussion section** during the semester, for any reason, without any penalty. **However, if you are experiencing a personal or medical emergency which leads you to miss class, please do notify all of your professors as well as your dean. The faster you inform relevant faculty and staff of the situation, the better we can work together to address missed work and other academic issues.** As per college policy, absence for athletic commitments are explained rather than excused absences (see further policy details below). Again, all students may take one unexcused absence from discussion section without penalty.

3) **Two "Book Notes" assignments** on our two books of historical scholarship, Joshua Reid, The Sea is My Country and Susan Schrepfer, Nature's Altars, with details to be handed out ahead of time. For Reid (**book notes turned in twice**) due dates are: 8 pm Friday March 11; and 8 pm Friday April 8. For Schrepfer (**book notes turned in once**) due date is **Friday March 25 (day before spring break)**. All due in class or **emailed by 8 pm** to [kmorse@middlebury.edu](mailto:kmorse@middlebury.edu).

5) **Two take-home written exams** (open book) due by 8 pm by email Friday March 4 (Week 3); and Monday April 11 (Week 8). **No extension days may be applied to exam due dates.**

**6) Final paper topic: brief description and rationale for your final paper topic (details TBA), due Monday April 18, by email by 8 pm.**

**7) Final paper: 8-10 pp paper due during exam period, Monday May 23, 2016, by 8 pm.**

**Books and Other Assigned Readings:** I have ordered 7 books to be available at the book store, but each student reads only 6 of those. They are all available at the College Bookstore (and through on-line booksellers); **and on 2-hour reserve at Davis Library.** Two of the books will be divided up: half of each discussion section will read Masumoto, Epitaph for a Peach and half will read Viramontes, Under the Feet of Jesus. You are welcome to read both books in each pair, but of course are not required to do so. We'll decide early in the semester who will read each one. **Additional readings (many of them) will be found either on the web or in the Share Folder in our course classes folder.**

Books available for purchase or library loan:

Joshua L. Reid, The Sea is My Country: The Maritime World of the Makahs (2015)—Kindle option.

Camille Dungy, ed. Black Nature: Four Centuries of African American Nature Poetry (2009)

Susan Schrepfer, Nature's Altars: Mountains, Gender, and American Environmentalism (2005)

Aldo Leopold, A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There (1949)—Kindle option.

David Mas Masumoto, Epitaph for a Peach: Four Seasons on my Family Farm (1996)—Kindle option.

Helena Maria Viramontes, Under the Feet of Jesus (1996)—Kindle option

Joe Mooallem, Wild Ones: A Sometimes Dismaying, Weirdly Reassuring Story About Looking at People Looking at Animals in America (2014)—Kindle option

### **Course Policies:**

1) **Honor Code:** The honor code is in effect for all work in this class, and should be stated and signed on all formal written work (papers and exams). As best practices for honor code encourage the professor to create contexts and conditions which provide the best possible environment for honoring the code, I will provide details as to what constitutes “authorized” aid for each assignment.

2) **Grades:** As the semester progresses, I will provide handouts and further information on specific criteria for evaluation on specific assignments. Final grades will be determined *mostly* by the following percentages, though there is always room for adjustment. The formula is not guaranteed to be numerically exact. Attendance: 5%; active engagement in discussion: 10%; Book Notes (10 % each for 20% total); first exam: 20%; second exam: 20%; final paper: 25%.

### 3) **Late Papers and Extensions:**

Each student may take two (2) “extension days” during this semester in this class to use or spend to extend book notes deadlines, or the paper topic submission deadline, or the final paper deadline without penalty (**but not take-home exams**). As a result a student may turn in one assignment two days late without penalty, or two assignments 1 day late each, to make a total of two “late days.” However, the student is responsible for NOTIFYING the professor when turning the paper in that their free “extension day or days” are in effect. A day is considered 24 hours, and Friday 8 pm-Monday 8 pm will count as one (1) 24-hour period. The half-day codicil: Students may consider a 12-hour extension a one-half (1/2) day extension. Papers turned in past the deadline without extension-day-benefits will lose 2 points (85 to 83) for each 24 hour period of lateness. **There will be at least one opportunity to earn an “extra” extension day by attending a lecture, exhibit, or other on-campus event Watch the schedule!**

4) **Technology in the classroom.** Please turn off or at last utterly silence all cellphones and other hand held personal electronic devices during ALL CLASSES.

With so many digital readings (pdfs), many of you will use laptops and tablets (with sound alerts OFF) during class to refer to readings. I reserve the right to ask you to sit in the back or to limit laptop use if that use is distracting to myself or to other students. **For discussion:** We may all need to refer to our readings on electronic devices if we choose not to print them out; however, we must all take care to give out attention to discussion rather than to electronic device. In both large and small groups, I reserve the right to ask for device-free moments (“eyes up”) when it seems necessary to our group discussions in any particular situation.

**5) Technology outside of class:** BEFORE you call or email ANY professor with a specific question about details of the course (or about anything), ask yourself this important question: **Is there ANY other way to gain this information or answer this question? Is the answer on the syllabus or on other class handouts? Might a classmate know the answer. You will see your professor in class soon...might you ask the question then? Independent learning and inquiry is an important skill. THINK BEFORE YOU EMAIL.**

**That being said:** Students are welcome to email to make an appointment outside office hours, or to attend to course-related matters that need attention. Please be advised that I do not read and answer email constantly or immediately. I will attempt to return your email or call within 24 hours during the week. Please address emails in a polite and formal manner (no: “hey prof” or “hey there”).

**Email Sabbath: I often sign off of work email after 5 pm for the evening.** Furthermore, during the semester, at 5 pm on Fridays, I usually declare an “email Sabbath” and take a break from work email until 1 or 2 pm Sunday afternoon. If you need to communicate with me immediately (i.e. to change or set up a meeting in the very near future), send an email with the “urgent” exclamation point so that I will look at it quickly.

The above does not apply to true emergencies, such as those involving serious illness, personal crisis, or loss. In the event of such an event, I will respond as quickly as possible, by phone or email.

**I do assume that you read your Middlebury college email on a regular basis, several times a week. If you do not read your email with any regularity, please remember to ask me in class whether I have sent out any information or updates.**

**In addition, please familiarize yourself with our class folders on the server. All registered students will have access to the class folder. The “share” folder will contain necessary material for the class.**

**6) Classroom behavior.** I expect students to behave as professional adults usually do: to treat each other (and me) with courtesy and respect; to address all persons with the form of address they prefer (and to ask what that is, when you don't know). Although the classroom is open to vigorous and thoughtful debate, and to disagreement on topics under discussion (some of them contentious and difficult) we all must work to critique each other's ideas, and not each other as fellow students and scholars. If at any time you feel limited by me or others in your ability to express your ideas openly, or feel that our standards of professional and courteous behavior have been breached or compromised (by me or anyone else) in ways that leave you feeling excluded from the conversation, or silenced for your contributions, please let me know in person or by email, or ask someone you trust to communicate your concerns to me.

**7) Please avoid leaving during class.** Unless you are experiencing a physical or emotional emergency, please do not leave the classroom during our 50 minute classes once we have begun class. If you need to leave a specific class early, please let me know at the beginning of class, and sit near the door so as to minimize disruption.

**8) Accessibility, Accommodations, Abilities:**

We all have varying abilities; we all carry various strengths and weaknesses. Some of these might even be "documented" with a place like the ADA Office. If so, please just let me know. With or without documentation, it is my intent to make our learning experience as accessible as possible. With documentation, I am especially interested in providing any student accommodations that have probably been best determined by the student and the ADA Coordinator (Jodi Litchfield) in advance. Please let me know NOW what we can do to maximize *your* learning potential, participation, and general access in this course. I am available to meet with you in person or to discuss such things on email.

The ADA Office is located at Meeker House 003. [46 Porter Field Road]  
Jodi Litchfield, coordinator: 802.443.5936; [litchfie@middlebury.edu](mailto:litchfie@middlebury.edu)  
<http://www.middlebury.edu/studentlife/doc/ada/about>

**9) Intercollegiate Athletics and Other Activities:** If you are a member of a team or engaged in other campus activities, you may, at various times during the semester, have athletic contests or artistic performances on a schedule which conflicts with our classes. Although **no activity can require** that you miss class or other academic events, you may need to choose which activity (class or non-class) you would prefer to attend. Those choices are entirely your own, and I will respect them as valid choices. However, be aware that according to college policy such absences are explained rather than excused. It is **your responsibility** to inform me of your schedule, what work you will miss, and how and when you intend to make up that work. I do not regularly check sports schedules or know team departure times, so it is your job to present me with that information, well in advance of the absence itself.

**10) While not a Requirement the Environmental Studies Colloquium is a weekly gathering of Students, Faculty, Staff, Community Members, and Guest Speakers, to hear a talk and discuss relevant questions. The schedule is widely available and part of the college calendar of events: Every Thursday at 12:30 at Hillcrest in The Orchard (103)—our lecture room. I’ve noted a few particularly interesting speakers in the series below on our schedule, as well as other events planned for this semester.**

Schedule of Classes and Assignments: This schedule is subject to change with advance notice. I will not change any deadlines to make them earlier than announced due dates. I will not add to the workload or assignments detailed here. I will only subtract or substitute assignments, or delay due dates. **Exception:** I may add very short readings or poems to the syllabus for reading and analysis, but always with some advanced warning, or with time in class to consider the text.

Spring 2016 Weekly Schedule (Subject to change with plenty of advanced warning):

Week 1:

Mon Feb 15: First class: introductions and deconstructions....

Wed Feb 17: For Discussions: **Two readings split between halves of the class.** Half of the class reads excerpts from Richard White, Land Use, Environment, and Social Change (1980); half of the class reads excerpts from William Cronon, Changes in the Land (1983); both in share folder and distributed by email.

Thurs. Feb 18: ES Colloquium, Antarctica! with Prof. Jill Mikucki, Biology.

Fri Feb 19: Read for class: Two .pdfs in share folder: Jonathan Edwards, “The Spider Letter” (all of it) (1723); Jonathan Edwards, excerpts, “Images or Shadows of Divine Things,” .pdf in share folder; In Dungy, ed., Black Nature, George Moses Horton, “On Summer,” pp. 10-11.

Week 2:

Mon Feb 22: To prepare for class, read Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nature, (1836), all sections, online at: <http://www.emersoncentral.com/nature.htm>. **HOWEVER, you don’t need to read this essay with painstaking care to understand every phrase and sentence.** It is difficult 19<sup>th</sup>-century transcendentalist prose and thus hard to get the first time through (or the twelfth). The essay is divided into 8 sections (the Introduction and 7 chapters). Before you begin, make an outline on paper with 8 sections (hand written or electronic).

a) Everyone read the Introduction, and note BRIEFLY in that part of your outline your sense of how Emerson defines “nature.” **Everyone read the whole essay, but with focus (as below) on ONE of the chapters.**

b) We will divide up the other 7 chapters amongst the group (so in 7 groups), so that each student focuses on defining as best as possible the argument THEIR particular chapter makes in response to the question: “What is Nature For?”. In class we will crowd source our responses to come to a fuller understanding of Emerson’s argument.

Wed Feb 24: Read for class (from four texts): Henry David Thoreau, **three separate excerpts:**  
**1)** from Walden (1854), chapter entitled “Spring” (ch. 17 on website below). Walden is widely available in multiple forms and also online at: <http://thoreau.eserver.org/walden00.html>

**2)** From “Chesuncook,” (published in Atlantic Monthly, Summer 1858, and later in The Maine Woods (1864)), excerpts in **cut-and-paste .pdf file** in share folder, **OR** read at: <http://thoreau.eserver.org/mewoods.html> the following sections (by paragraph number): “Chesuncook” Part Two, paragraphs 17-21 & 23; Part Three, Paragraphs 1-7; Par. 11-14 ; Part Four, Paragraphs 1, 3, 4, 8, 10,11, 13, 14, 15; Part Six, Paragraphs 20-22; **AND:**

**3)** Thoreau address, “Succession of Forest Trees,” 1860, at: <http://thoreau.eserver.org/foresttrees.html>

**4)** AND in Dungy, ed., Black Nature, “To Waste at Trees,” Gerald Barrax Jr., p. 40; Wood and Rain,” Melvin Dixon, p. 96.

Thurs. Feb. 25: ES Colloquium: The Paris Moment, Neoliberal Climate Governances, with Prof. Timmons Roberts, Brown Univ.

Fri Feb 26: NO CLASS—Winter Carnival

Week 3:

Mon Feb 29: Thoreau, “Slavery in Massachusetts,” (1854) at <http://thoreau.eserver.org/slavery.html>; In Dungy, ed., Black Nature, George Marion McClellan, “September Night,” p. 22; Claude McKay, “Joy in the Woods,” p. 97.

Wed. March 2: For discussion: Read from George Perkins Marsh, Man and Nature (1864); from John Muir (all .pdfs in Share Folder): “Cedar Key,” from A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf (essay 1867; book pub 1916); “A Near View of the High Sierra” (1880); and “A Windstorm in the Forests,” (1878); from The Mountains of California (1894); From Dungy, ed., Black Nature, Al Young, “The Mountains of California, Part I,” p. 8; James Weldon Johnson, “Deep in the Quiet Wood,” p. 335.

Thurs. Mar. 3: ES Colloq, 12:30 Hillcrest 103, Poet Ross Gay. Poetry!

Fri March 4: Class will meet with Poet Ross Gay. For class, read : In Dungy, ed., Black Nature, Paul Laurence Dunbar, “The Haunted Oak,” p. 159-61; and Ross Gay, “To the Fig Tree on 9<sup>th</sup> and Christian.”

Week 4:

Mon March 7: No class—drop in session in our classroom during class time for questions.

**Take-home exam (details TBA) due by email by 8 pm. Details TBA. Readings for exam: Selected poems, Edwards, Emerson, Thoreau, Marsh, Muir.**

Wed March 9: How to read scholarly history. Using ENVS 215 Book Notes handout, read and prepare notes on Joshua Reid, The Sea is My Country, Read for class: Reid, The Sea is My Country (for purchase (bookstore, Kindle); on line; also on reserve at Davis Lib): All Read **Foreword, Introduction, Conclusion, Afterword.**

Thurs. 3/10: ES Colloq.: A Painter and a Poet on the Working Forest-- Kathleen Kolb, painter and Verandah Porche, poet

Fri March 11: Read: In three groups as assigned. Group 1 reads Reid, chapter 1; Group 2, chapter 2; Group 3, chapter 3. Add to your book notes for your assigned chapter; **book notes turned in or emailed by 8 pm (yes, even though we are not done with the book).**

Week 5:

Mon March 14: In Dungy, ed., Black Nature, Toi Derricotte, “The Minks,” p. 237-238;

Wed March 16: For Discussion, everyone reads Reid, ch. 4; Schrepfer, Nature’s Altars, Introduction, Epilogue, Part I preface, and ch. 1 (pp. 1-38): continue Reid book notes for ch. 4; start Schrepfer book notes.

**Earn an additional extension day!**

**Wed March 16: 7 pm, RAJ seminar room, annual Env. Affairs Margolin Lecture, Prof. Traci Brynn Voyles, Talk : “Environmentalism in the Interstices: California’s Salton Sea and the Borderlands of Nature and Culture”**

Thurs. Mar. 17, ES Colloq: Jon Turner, Wild Roots Farm, VT, on Food Systems.

Fri March 18: Everyone reads: Schrepfer, ch. 2-3 (continue book notes); **AND** Article pdf (in share folder), Mark Spence, “Dispossessing the Wilderness: Yosemite Indians and the National Park Ideal, 1865-1930,” Pacific Historical Review 65:1 (February 1996): 27-59.

Week 6:

Mon March 21: Read: Schrepfer ch. 4, 5, or 6; Class divided in thirds, complete book notes for only your chapter, either ch. 3, 4, or 5; plus in Dungy, ed., Black Nature, Kendra Hamilton,

“Southern Living,” p. 344-345; **Submit Schrepfer book notes by 8 pm Friday or before you leave for break.**

Wed March 23: .pdfs in share folder: W.E. B. DuBois, excerpt from *Darkwater*; Evelyn White, “Black Women and Wilderness” (both pdfs in share folder); From Dungy, ed, Black Nature, Margaret Walker, “Sorrow Home,” p. 99; Amaud Jamaul Johnson, “The Maple Remains,” p. 262-263.

Thurs. Mar. 24: ES Colloq. Mary Powell, Green Mountain Power, the Energy Company of the Future

Fri March 25: In Dungy, ed., Black Nature, Yusef Komunyakaa, “The Millpond,” p. 287-289; Camille Dungy, “Growing Out of This Land,” p. 283; Major Jackson, “Urban Renewal,” p. 77.

Bring Black Nature to class for poem reading and discussion; **submit Schrepfer book notes through ch. 5 by email by 8 pm (or earlier, of course)!**

## **SPRING BREAK!**

### Week 7

Mon April 4: Bring Black Nature to class.

Wed April 6: Reid ch. 5 & 6 & Conclusion (all read all 3); bring book notes for Reid to class.

Thurs April 7: ES Colloq: Matt Landis, Forecasting Global Water Stress

Fri April 8: No pre-assigned reading, bring Black Nature to class. **Final Reid book notes due by email by 8 pm.**

### Week 8

Mon April 11: **No class. Drop in question session for exam during class time. Take-home exam No. 2 due by email by 8 pm. Details TBA.**

Wed April 13: Read for Discussion; **Briefly Review book notes (as shared) for Schrepfer, ch. 6; AND** Aldo Leopold, A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There, Foreword; in Part I: “January—January Thaw;” “February—Good Oak;” “November—Axe in Hand;” In Part II: “Marshland Elegy;” “Odyssey;” “Arizona and New Mexico” (**check**); and “Thinking Like A Mountain.”

Thurs. April 14: Katherine Michaels ’14.5, Conservation at Breadloaf

Fri April 15: NO CLASS—Spring Student Symposium!

Week 9

Mon April 18: Reading for class, in Dungy, ed., Black Nature, Honorée Fanonne Jeffers, “April in Eatonton,” p. 249-51; Lucille Clifton, “mulberry fields,” p. 260; Clifton, poem before table of contents in Black Nature (epigraph), “surely i am able to write poems”

**PLUS**, Submit ideas for final paper, in class or by email by 8 pm. Details TBA.

Wed April 20: Read Leopold, In Part III: All of “Wilderness” and “The Land Ethic” (final 2 sections through until end); and excerpts from Lauret Savoy, Trace: Memory, History, Race, and the American Landscape (2015)--.pdf in share folder.

Thurs. April 21: ES Colloq. Brian Deese, '00, Senior Advisor to the President, American Leadership in the Global Climate Movement

Fri April 22: Read excerpt (3 pp) from Rachel Carson, Silent Spring (Boston, 1962), pdf in Share Folder; in Dungy, Black Nature, Anthony Walton, “Carrion,” p. 80-81.

Week 10

Mon April 26: Read in Dungy, ed., Black Nature, Major Jackson, “Pest,” p. 116; Tara Betts, “For Those Who Need a True Story,” p. 124-125; Audre Lord, “The Brown Menace,” p. 132; G.E. Patterson, “The Natural World,” p. 153.

Wed April 27: Split reading: Half of each discussion section reads David Mas Masumoto, Epitaph for a Peach: Four Seasons on my Family Farm; half reads Helena Maria Viramontes, Under the Feet of Jesus (as arranged in Week 3).

Thurs April 28: ES Colloq: Four Midd professors on “Looking Back a Half Century: LBJ and the ‘New Conservation’ of 1966.”

Fri April 29: Read in Dungy, ed., Black Nature, excerpt from Richard Wright, 12 Million Black Voices, p. 71-72; and Askia M. Touré, “Floodtide,” p. 184-187.

Week 11

Mon May 2: No assigned reading (but Mooallem is fun (sort of) so feel free to start reading—specifics of reading listed for May 11).

Wed May 4: Read: Excerpts, Bill McKibben, The End of Nature (1989); Richard White, “‘Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for Living,’ Work and Nature,” in William Cronon, ed. Uncommon Ground (pdfs in share folder); excerpts from Robert Bullard on environmental racism and toxic waste (pdf in share folder).

Thurs. May 5: ES Colloq.: Robert Greeley, Dept of Arabic, Lebanon's Biosphere Reserve and Sport Hunting

Fri May 6: No assigned reading, but can get started on Mooallem for next Wed if time (see May 11).

### Week 12

Mon May 9: No assigned reading, but keep going with Mooallem if time.

Tues May 10: ES Colloq: ES Senior Seminar Presentations

Wed May 11: Read: Jon Mooallem, Wild Ones (2014), Introduction, Part One (Bears); and Epilogue. Read more if you would like, but other sections not required.

Thurs. May 12: ES Colloq.: ES Senior Seminar Presentations

Fri May 13: No assigned reading.

### Week 13

Mon May 16: Final Thoughts, and perhaps poems.

Exam Week: Due Monday May 23: Final Paper Assignment: 8-10 pp. paper on individual topic chosen earlier in semester. See assignment for greater detail.