

Nature and Culture

American Studies 1E

Professor J. Sze

Class Meeting Time: Tuesday and Thursday, 1:40-3 p.m. Class Location: 206 Olson

Office Hours: Tuesday, 3:15-4:15, Wednesday 1-2, by appt.

Office Location: 2221 Hart Hall (Across from the Women and Gender Studies Office)

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Teaching Assistant and Discussion Section Information:

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Section 1 Tuesday 4:10-5 159 Olson	Section 3 Wednesday 4:10-5 127 Wellman
Section 2 Tuesday 5:10-6 115 Wellman	Section 4 Thursday 5:10-6 1128 Hart

Course Description:

What is nature? What is culture? What does nature have to do with American and cultural identity?

This course examines narratives and stories about nature and culture in the United States (and beyond). The core idea in this class is that concepts and stories of nature and the environment are culturally constructed. In other words, nature is an “artifact” of particular *cultures, contexts and communities*. Thus, this course looks at cultural issues through the prism of nature narratives and stories. We explore the relationship between nature and the environment, how artifacts contain a set of belief systems about nature and culture, political economies and how pollution creates impacts outside the object itself. We also examine how categories like race, class and gender shape experiences and representations of nature and culture.

This course is an introductory American Studies course. That means two things: the course materials and our relationship to them are interdisciplinary (meaning that we borrow and use insights from many fields such as literature, history, anthropology and folklore, sociology, visual studies etc), and that we are focused on making connections between stories and ideas of nature and culture, and our everyday lives. We will look at poetry, art and advertisements, film (fiction and documentary), journalistic and narrative non-fiction accounts of nature in contemporary life.

AMS 1E is a **General Education** course and counts in all three categories: (1) as a **breadth** course in Social Science or Humanities; (2) as a **writing** course; and (3) as a course in **social and cultural diversity**.



Course Objectives:

- Introduce basic concepts and themes fundamental to understanding cultural and natural systems in American culture and for interpreting texts, issues and concepts in terms of those systems;
- Introduce students to different methodological frameworks and approaches in understanding ideas of nature in American culture;
- Promote critical thinking and your understanding of environmental, social and political history and contemporary contexts, and expand your view of race, gender, class by examining specific topics in nature and culture.
- Develop writing and other important skills, such as discussion facilitation and public presentation.

Grading and Assignments:

Midterm	15%
Final	25%
Participation and Quizzes	15%
Found Object and Short Paper Assignment #1 (3-5 pages),	15%
Short Paper Assignment # 2 (3-5 pages)	15%
Final GROUP Presentation	15%
(extra credit: up to 10 points on the final)	

Conduct and Requirements

You will be required to attend class regularly, read all assigned texts, contribute to discussions, and complete all written assignments on time. Please turn off all cell phones before class. Come to class on time, as it is disruptive for everyone else to walk in late. I expect you to act with maturity and respect in the classroom. If you have any questions about what that means, please feel free to come see me. When a serious personal or medical emergency occurs and affects your ability to come to class or complete assignments, please contact your TA or myself (but these must be documented).

This class is a mixture of discussion and lecture. It is essential that you read each day's material thoughtfully and come to class ready to make connections to lectures and participate. Complete the readings assigned for each day before class begins. By the end of your career in college, you are expected to be able to handle large amounts of reading, and to process/ analyze arguments, themes, etc. In other words, it's in your best interest to learn how to read effectively. That means being able to digest a large amount of information efficiently. Reading effectively means not looking for facts and to get bogged down in details, but to identify main ideas and arguments. This skill is very important for your future outside of the university. Thus, DO THE READING. If you learn how to handle and process large amounts of reading, you will reap the benefits down the line in many different venues in your personal and professional life. The worst thing you can do for yourself and in this class is to skip the reading altogether.

Although this is a large course, discussion is an essential part of good teaching and learning and I have designed ways to make sure we have discussion and conversations in the lecture. Be prepared to talk, I may call on you in class (in other words- discussion is not solely the provenance of section). In American Studies, our pedagogy (i.e. theories of teaching and learning) are based on student-centered learning and interactivity. In other words, you are not a passive receptacle for knowledge, which you regurgitate for grading purposes.

You are involved in an ACTIVE conversation with the lectures, readings, classmates, discussion leaders, guest speakers and the Professor (FYI: We are fortunate in that we have exciting guest speakers scheduled to come into this course, and their lectures are considered “fair game” for the midterm and final). Your engagement with the material is paramount. Passivity will bring you little reward. Even though I do not take roll call, you CANNOT succeed in this class if you do not attend.

Assignments and exams will be based on lectures, readings, and discussion of the readings (additional info at the end of the syllabus as well as in additional descriptions located on SmartSite where applicable).

Statement on Academic Honesty

Your writing is like your signature. To turn in someone else’s writing is foolish. Plagiarism is also insulting to yourself, easily recognized, and an insult to your instructor and fellow students. Lastly, it is also a surefire way to get into trouble. Academic Senate policy requires that all cases of plagiarism be reported to Student Judicial Affairs. Please review “Avoiding Plagiarism: Mastering the Art of Scholarship” retrievable at: <http://sja.ucdavis.edu/avoid.htm>

A Note on Grading:

From this syllabus, you know everything you need to do in order to do well in this class.

A note on writing: please do not describe, but analyze- this is a important difference that we will work on throughout the assignments.

Your grade may play a significant role in your future. As your teacher, my role is as messenger: when you do your work carefully and well, I will give you an “A” on that assignment. If you sustain that exceptional work, you will get at “A” in the course. Your grade is not an entitlement, it is earned. When you choose to do less then stellar, mediocre, or no work, your TA will deliver the appropriate grade.

Letter grades correspond to the following:

A+	97-100	B+	87-89
A	93-96	B	83-86
A-	90-92	B-	80-82

and so on.....

In general, I do not believe that grade anxiety is useful. Rather, full engagement with the material and the process of learning is a better and healthier, and ultimately more constructive way for you to approach the class.

If you *strongly* disagree with a grade on an assignment, you may discuss it with your TA. However, if you do so, you must do two things: 1) wait 24 hours so that you have time to read through the comments and make sure that you understand the justification for the particular grade given; 2) write a detailed paragraph detailing your specific reasons for dispute. You must make a clear argument and support it with specific evidence taken from your work that you believe were overlooked or missing during the grading process. Only *after* you have talked with your TA and are unable to resolve your questions may you see me to discuss the grade. Please be sure to provide the originals for this process.

Effort alone will not ensure a good grade on assignments (or in the class in general), although if you do not make an effort, it may be hard to achieve a good grade. Similarly, participation is not simply a question of quantity, but also of quality and thoughtfulness. If you choose to use the class time to do something else should you decide not to attend, that is your decision. You are responsible, however, for understanding the class material discussed in your absence and your work will be graded under the assumption that you have mastered all course material (Any videos we watch in the class, unless otherwise indicated, are available at the media lab in Hart Hall). If you miss class because of documented illness or family emergency, I recommend that get notes from another student. If you need additional help, please meet your TA during office hours.

Policy on drafts, Late Papers and Make-up Assignments:

Unfortunately, due to the large number of students in this class, your TAs will not be able to read rough drafts, although we strongly encourage them to be written (they work under a contract, and between class preparation, grading and attending classes, their time is obligated for other tasks). We refer you to undergraduate writing resource centers for assistance with reading drafts. Or, alternatively, they will read drafts if you bring them to their office hours.

Papers will be collected at the BEGINNING of class the day that they are due, and will be returned as specified (papers that come in during or at the end of class will be considered late). In other words, to illustrate, the Found Object Assignment is due in section during Week 4. If you turn it in on Tuesday of Week 5, if your grade would have been an A, it goes down to an A-. IF you wait until Thursday of Week 5, your grade further drops from an A to a B+. Late papers are deducted, with the deduction increasing with each class session they are late. Again, the logic of this policy is to get you to do the assignment and to do so in a timely manner so that all similar assignments can be graded together. But better late than never: it is always better to do the reading and the assignment then not to do it at all.

Readings for the class:

Readings are located in one of three places:

- 1) in the 1 required book for this class, Rebecca Solnit's *Storming the Gates of Paradise: Landscapes for Politics* (Solnit)
- 2) in the Reader from Davis Copy Shop kitty corner from Orange Hut (in Reader)
- 3) on Smart Site (either PDF, or URL) under "Announcements"

Please bring your reader and book to class and section, as we may refer to it in class.

Class Schedule

Week 1

Date	Topic/ Theme	Reading /In-Class	Assignment	Misc/ Section
Week 1 Tues. 4/1	Approaching Nature Critically: Introduction of Four class themes:			
Thursday 4/3	Nature as Contested Terrain in contemporary US culture	1. Cronon: Introduction from Uncommon Ground (in the Reader) 2. Solnit Introduction and Every Corner is Alive 3. Thirteen Ways of Viewing Nature http://www.believermag.com/issues/200604/?read=article_price (part 1)		

Week 2:

1. NATURE AND LANDSCAPE IN THE UNITED STATES: AMERICAN STUDIES APPROACHES

Date	Topic/ Theme	Reading /In-Class	Assignment	Misc/ Section
Week 2 Tues. 4/8	Wilderness and Nature in the U.S.	1. "The Trouble with Wilderness"" (Cronon in Reader) 2. Spence,(in reader) 3. The Orbits of Earthly Bodies and The Red Lands (Solnit)		TAs will discuss Found Object assignment in section
Thursday 4/10	Wilderness and the West	1. The Post Modern Old West; Seven Stepping Stones; Other Daughters (Solnit) 2. Jamaica Kincaid, "In History" 4. Gilbert, Chapter One <u>The Last American Man</u> Guest Speaker, jessikyah marie ross <u>Saving the Sierra (invited not confirmed)</u>		

Week 3 Tues. 4/15	Nature/Violence	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Excavating the Sky, The Price of Gold, the Value of Water; Meanwhile, Back at the Ranch (Solnit) 2. Mike Davis, "The Dialectic of Ordinary Disaster" 3. Dr. Strangelove (reader) 	Prof. discuss how to pick a found object	Sign up in discussion this week for your Short assignment #2
Thursday, 4/17	Native/Native/ Belonging	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 39 steps (Solnit) 2. Kim Todd Reading (PDF) 3. David Mas Masumoto, "Belonging on the Land" (in Reader) 4 		

2. NATURE AND CONSUMPTION

Date	Theme	Reading /In-Class	Assignment	Misc / Section
Week 4 4/22	Nature and technology	Blue Vinyl (Video) Selections from <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Fast Food Nation</i> (PDF) 2. Steinberg, "Moveable Feast" (in reader) 3. "Twelve Easy Pieces" Mooallem (in Reader) 	FOUND OBJECT ASSIGNMENT DUE	TAs will also discuss the final project in section
Thursday, 4/24	Polluting Spaces:	Selections from (ALL IN READER) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sandra Steingraber , 2. Silent Spring, 3. Refuse/ Refused 3. Walker (3 short pieces) 4. Szasz 		Sign up for your final groups (and day to present)

Date	Theme	Reading /In-Class	Assignment	Misc/ Section
Week 5 4/29	Nature into Corporate Culture	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Silence of the lambswool cardigans (Solnit) Thirteen Ways of Viewing Nature http://www.believermag.com/issues/200604/?read=article_price 2. (part 2) 		Midterm study guide distributed (if you are not in class that day, get one from your TA)

Thursday, 5/1	Consuming Stuff : Trash and waste	<p>GUEST SPEAKER Michelle Yates- Selections from Trash</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Streets of Trash 2. Uncle Fernando's Garbage Tryptych 3. Sad Chairs 4. Trashed Space <p>Steinberg, Throwaway Society (in Reader)</p>		
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3. LOCATING NATURE

Date	Theme	Reading /In-Class	Assignment	Misc/ Section
Week 6 Tues. 5/6		In-class Midterm Bring a Blue Book- Covers Weeks 2-5		FINALIZE FINAL PROJECT GROUPS
Thursday, 5/8	Ecopian landscapes in CA and Davis	<p>Simon Sadler, Guest Speaker Chair, Art History</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. McDonough and Calthorpe Readings (in reader) 2. Chasing Ground (Gertner, in reader) 3. Organizational Festivals: Picnic Day (in reader) 		Choose Assignment #2 topic

Date	Theme	Reading /In-Class	Assignment	Misc/ Section
Week 7 5/13	CA places, Water and the Delta	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Garden of Merging Paths (Solnit) 2. Pacific Institute- Waste Not, Want Not (PDF) <p>Guest Speaker Fraser Shilling, Environmental Science and Policy</p>		Write draft of #2, peer review exercise
Thursday, 5/15	Nature, Food and Race	<p>Guest Speakers: A. Breeze Harper and Alison Alkon</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Michael Pollan (PDF) 2. Steinberg, Secret History of Meat (Reader) 		Midterms returned

4. Nature and Contemporary Transformation: CA, China and International Contexts

Date	Theme	Reading /In-Class	Assignment	Misc/ Section
Week 8 Tues.	Environmental Justice- and	APEN Video		PROJECT PRESENTATIONS schedule set

5/20	Community Activism	Giovanna Di Chiro (in Reader) Guest Speaker Tracey Perkins		Assignment #2 Due
Thursday, 5/22	Contemporary activism and other challenges	Solnit- Justice by Moonlight, Death of Environmentalism (PDF)		

Date	Theme	Reading	Assignment	Misc/ / Section
Week 9 Tues. 5/27	International Contexts:	Manufactured Landscapes (Video) Solnit- Poison Pictures		Bring rough written sketch of your final project presentation to Section.
Thursday, 5/29	Ecotopia/ Dystopia redux?	The Harbingers (in Reader) Solnit- The Ruins of Memory		

Date	Theme	Reading	Assignment	Misc
Week 10 Tues. 6/3	Selected Final Projects			Assignments #2 returned FINAL EXAM GUIDE DISTRIBUTED
Thursday, 6/5	Final Projects			

Final Tuesday June 10th 10:30-12:30

Additional Information on Assignments and Participation

Discussion section led by your TAs will be the **primary** place where you can make sense of the readings in this course. I do refer to readings in my lectures, but lectures are not the place where you offer take the readings apart, understand the author's arguments, and develop your own point of view in lecture meetings. I will conduct classes, particularly in the middle section of the course, that are based heavily on your already having read and *discussed* the readings. Your TAs leaders are excellent instructors. I may also visit your section- so don't be surprised if I come visit! TAs will also give pop quizzes on assigned readings if they discover a significant number of students are unprepared for section.

- *15 % of your grade will be based on your discussion sections*
- *This grade is divided between quizzes and in section participation (i.e. discussion facilitation).*

Found Object/ Short Paper Assignment #1

For this assignment, you will select a contemporary “cultural artifact” (defined at the 1990s to the present) that illuminates the themes of nature, culture, politics and representation that we are concerned with in the class and write a 3-5 page paper on it. That can be a piece of music, art, radio clips, games, literature, film or advertisement, for example. This assignment is inspired by the William Cronon article “In Search Of Nature,” in particular, his discussion (and the examples) of Found Objects, and the different ideas of nature he identifies in this piece (see the reader). Your TA will explain this assignment in depth in section.

- This Assignment is due in your section in Week 4.
- See description on this assignment on Smart Site.
- *This project is worth 15 % of your grade.*

Short Paper Assignment #2

For this assignment, you have one of two options- do an extended reading response on a specific reading (which we stipulate) or creative project. You must decide by Week 3 which option you will choose. This is a three page requirement, and your TAs will explain how to do this assignment. The assignment is due week 8. These will be returned in section during Week 10.

- See description on this assignment on Smart Site.
- *This project is worth 15% of your grade.*

Exams

You will have a course midterm and a final in this class. Both will be bluebook exams with terms for identification and/or essay questions. You will be given an exam review guide approximately a week before exam dates (for example, we may provide eight essay questions, only two of which will be used). Essays will present you questions based on lectures, readings, and class discussions and ask you to use your knowledge of these to make arguments about the connection between ideas of nature and culture and American life/ values and practices. I do not give make-up exams except in the (rare) case of genuine (documented) emergencies.

- Bring a blue book for both the midterm and final
- Midterm on Week 6. Covers Weeks 2-5
- Final Tuesday June 10th 10:30-12:30- Your Final covers material from the entire quarter
- *Midterm 15 % of course grade and Final 25% of course grade*

Final Project Presentation

On the final days of the course your group may present to the larger class, in a small group of approximately 4 people, a final poster session or movie assignment that connects some object or group of objects to a particular set of American cultural values about nature and environment in either the past or present. You will be expected to bring in a poster or clip illustrating your argument and evidence, a one-page handout that summarizes your research and your analysis, and provide a brief (5-7 minute or 10, depending on type) presentation to the class on your key cultural finding from this research. Your discussion leaders will discuss this assignment during week 6.

- See this assignment on Smart Site. *This is a group grade- attachment explains how this grade breaks down.*
- *This project is worth 15% of your grade*