

## Religion and Nature in North America (Rel 3103), Spring 2019

Prof. Erin Prophet

[eprophet@ufl.edu](mailto:eprophet@ufl.edu)

Meeting Time: T7 (1:55-2:45 p.m.)/R7-8 (1:55-3:50 p.m.)

Meeting location: Matherly 2

Office Hours: M, W 4-5 p.m.; Tu 3-4 p.m.

Office: Anderson Hall 130



*Whenever the light of civilization falls upon you with a blighting power...go to the wilderness...Dull business routine, the fierce passions of the market place, the perils of envious cities become but a memory....The wilderness will take hold of you. It will give you good red blood; it will turn you from a weakling into a man....You will soon behold all with a peaceful soul.*

—George S. Evans, 1904<sup>1</sup>

*Surfing is magic, riding liquid echoes of cosmic energy at the wild fringes of continents.*

Drew Kampion, *Stoked!*<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Cited in Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, p. 141

<sup>2</sup> Cited in Taylor, *Dark Green Religion*, p. 121.

*Brief Course Description:*

From the first contacts between Europeans and indigenous peoples, the North American continent inspired new ways of thinking about religion and nature. This historical survey explores ways in which the relationship between these two ideas has changed over time. It examines the influence of scientific developments, transformed ecosystems, and shifting values on faith traditions, indigenous religion, and an emerging scientific nature religion. Find out how Romanticism, Transcendentalism, Darwinism, the Gaia hypothesis, Asian religion, environmentalism, and even surfing culture have contributed to new religious and spiritual sensibilities. Students will understand how to evaluate tensions between elements of philosophical systems, such as otherworldliness and this-worldliness, subjugation vs. preservation of nature, humanistic and post-human values.

**Course Objectives**

Students will gain a broad knowledge of nature-related American religious history, become acquainted with pivotal figures and movements, and approach critical questions such as:

- What are the various and contested ways *religion* and *nature* are understood, and do such understandings enhance or constrain our ability to apprehend their reciprocal influence in American cultural, political, and environmental history?
- Have the habitats of North America shaped human consciousness, including “religious” or “spiritual” perceptions, ritualizing, and ethical practices, and if so, how? This question will be in mind throughout the course, from an examination of the cultures of the continent’s “first peoples,” to religionists, environmentalists and scientists in the 20th century.
- How and to what extent have religions of various sorts influenced human behavior in ways that contributed to the transformation of North American ecosystems?
- What roles have religiously-shaped concepts of nature played in American political history? For example, how have notions such as “natural theology” “natural law” and understandings of “sacred nature” influenced social life and natural systems during the history of the United States?
- How have religion-related nature discourses, attitudes, and practices been shaped by, and shaped European cultures, and later, by such developments in international spheres?



The course draws on diverse sources, including ethnographies and other studies pertinent to America's aboriginal peoples, environmental histories that attend to the role of religion in

landscape transformations, primary texts written by the figures most responsible for watersheds in the “religion and ecology” ferment in America, scholarly examinations of these figures and their influence, as well as studies of social movements engaged in the “greening of religion” or conversely, resisting religion-inspired environmentalism. A variety of theoretical issues and background articles, including biographies of many of the central figures to be examined, will be provided from *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature* (2005). Students will complete the course with a broad knowledge of nature-related American religious history, acquainted both with pivotal figures, movements, and critical questions.

## Course Outline and Learning Modules

### 1. Religion & Nature with Early European Contacts (1000-1600)

- The arrival, first of the Norse, then of the Spanish and other European peoples set in motion dramatic and sometimes devastating changes to the land, its first inhabitants, and the new immigrants. Religion had much to do with the character of these encounters and these changes.

### 2. The Colonial Period (1600-1775)

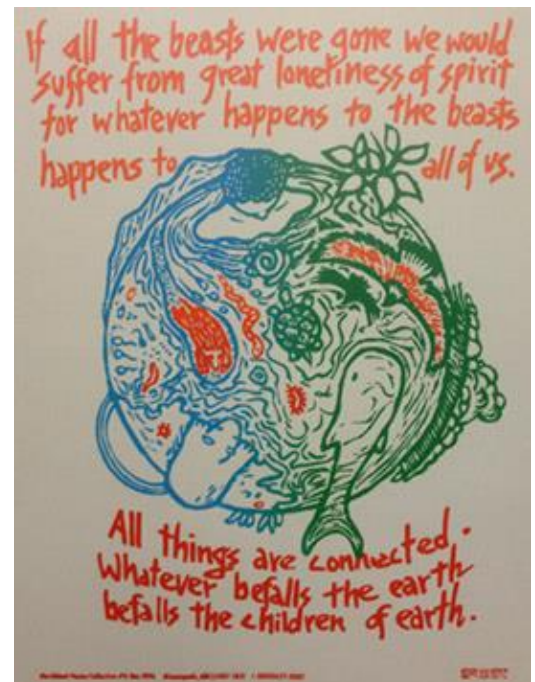
- Fear, ambivalence, and the stirrings of reverence toward nature in the Colonial period to the founding of the republic (ca. 1600-1776).
- Religion and the ideology of Manifest Destiny as the violent collision of European and Native American religious Cultures escalates.

### 3. Early Republic to the End of the Frontier (ca. 1780 to 1890)

- The subjugation of wild peoples and places (continued).
- The European tributary of aesthetic, religious, and romantic attachments toward nature.
  - Transcendentalism and Romantic theologies of correspondence.
- The influence of Darwinism on spiritualism and emerging nature-oriented spiritualities.

### 4. Wildness and wilderness emerge as nature religion. The end of the “frontier” to Earth Day (1880-1970)

- Forest reserves and national parks; scouting and Indian Guides.
- Nature writing, back to the land movements, and early “post-supernaturalistic spiritualities of connection.”
- The Land Ethic (1948), sea mysticism & *Silent Spring* (1962).
- “The Historic Roots of our Ecologic Crisis” (1967) and the turn toward the indigenous cultures of Turtle Island (1969) and those originating in Asia.



### **5. Religion and Nature from Earth Day & the Age of Environmentalism (1970 to present)**

- Asian, Pagan, and Native American Spiritualities as nature religions.
- The "Greening" of some factions of the world's major religions.
- The growth of scientific nature religion.
- Environmentalism and religion
- Reactionary responses

### **Requirements**

This course is centered on reading and discussion. Writing is limited to reading summaries or reflections and exam essay questions. There is no final paper. Students are required to bring the readings to class or be able to access them on a laptop. Excerpts from films and documentaries about the class topics will also be screened during class before or after discussion. In order to ensure an optimum learning experience for the entire class, please do not take this course if you are not prepared to do the reading and engage in thoughtful discussion.

A high priority will be placed on the quality of preparation, participation, and thus also attendance (30%). To ensure careful preparation, knowledge of material will be assessed weekly. Each week (or for each topic) there will either be a quiz held in class based on the readings, or students will be asked to submit by email a 300-500 word summary of the reading. Reading summaries must include the major arguments being articulated in the major reading, and identify major fault lines and competing perspectives. See website for specific grading rubric.

### **Exams:**

- Multiple choice in class & take home essay mid term exam (30%); see class schedule for details.
- Multiple choice and short answer final exam (40%); see class schedule for details.

### **Required Texts (purchase)**

- Albanese, Catherine L. *Nature Religion in America: From the Algonkian Indians to the New Age*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990.
- Deloria, Vine (Jr.). *God Is Red: A Native View of Religion*. Updated ed. Golden, Colorado: 1972; reprint, Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum, 1994.
- Nash, Roderick Frazier. *Wilderness and the American Mind*. 4th ed. 1967; reprint, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001.

### **Recommended Texts:**

- Taylor, Bron, ed. *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*. London: Thoemmes Continuum 2005, 2 volumes (hereafter ERN).
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *Nature*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1986 (reprint); also in Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Edited by

Brooks Atkinson. New York: The Modern Library, 2000. Or *Essays and Lectures* (includes "Nature") Library of America, 1983.

- Muir, John. *Nature Writings*. Edited by William Cronon. New York: Library of America, 1997.
- Pike, Sarah. *New Age and Neopagan Religions in America*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.
- Thoreau, Henry David. Full-length works. There are many editions; two from the Library of America are nicely produced, 1985 & 2004.

Additional required readings will be made available on Canvas.

Assignment	Points per Assignment	Percentage Weight
<b>Weekly Quizzes &amp; Summaries</b>	<b>6 quizzes (10 points ea.) 6 reading summaries or reflections (6-15 points ea.)</b>	<b>35%</b>
<b>Oral Presentations/ Discussion Contribution</b>	<b>Varies</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>Midterm Exam</b>	<b>150 points</b>	<b>25%</b>
<b>Final Exam</b>	<b>200 points</b>	<b>30%</b>
	<b>Total Possible Points:</b>	<b>100%</b>

### ***Use of Technology***

During class, electronic devices may be used only for note-taking or participation in the course, such as accessing readings.

### ***Disability Policy***

Any student with a documented disability seeking academic adjustments or accommodations (including those involving the use of technology) is requested to speak with me during the first two weeks of class. All such discussions will remain as confidential as possible. Students with disabilities will need to also contact Disability Support Services.

### ***Canvas Reading Assignment Pages are Authoritative***

Course readings and requirements may be modified. The syllabus distributed at the beginning of class may be updated. The course reading assignment pages on Canvas are the operative and binding version, so it is imperative that you refer to those pages, rather than the version distributed

at the beginning of class.

### ***Attendance***

The quality of this seminar depends on the insights of every participant. Only in exigent circumstances may students be absent. In such cases, such an absence should be pre-approved by the instructor and the reasons documented. Students are also expected to be punctual out of courtesy and respect for colleagues.

### ***Late or Missing Assignments***

Students who do not turn in study guides or reading analyses on the days they are collected will not receive points.

### ***Returned Assignments***

Assignments will usually be returned to students no later than one week after they were due. At the end of the semester, unreturned course work will be available for pickup in the Religion Department office in Anderson 107 for 30 days after the official date that grades are posted by the registrar. After this time, they will be recycled.

### ***Grading Policies***

For both the midterm and final exams, the total number of points earned by each student will be divided by the total number earned by the highest-scoring student. The resulting percentage will be used to calculate each student's grade for the course. Put in a formula, it looks like this:

the score of each individual student (your score)

---

(divided by) the highest score earned by a student

This kind of scoring is fairer than many other forms of grading because: (1) It is based on what students actually achieve rather than some preconceived standard held by the professor; (2) Each student can receive a high grade; (3) Hard-working students will not be penalized for staying in a demanding course full of industrious students. With a traditional curve, demanding courses that “weed out” less industrious students, leaving hard-working ones, can unintentionally harm good students putting them in competition with each other. This will not occur in this course. To further ensure fairness, any extra credit points will be added to the individual student's score *only after the highest score earned by a student has been established*. This ensures that the extra credit earned will not increase the difficulty of the grading scale.

The percentage arrived at by means of this formula will be incorporated into the course grading rubric. A 94 to 100

- A- <94 to 90
- B+ <90 to 87
- B <87 to 84
- B- <84 to 80
- C+ <80 to 77
- C <77 to 74
- C- <74 to 70
- D+ <70 to 67
- D <67 to 64
- D- <64 to 61
- F <61 to 0

Please note that there is no A+ grade; grades are not rounded up. For example, a 93.85% is an A- and not an A; grades are consistent with UF policy:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

The course instructor reserves the right to lower or raise course grades based on classroom contributions or upon absences.

### ***Academic Dishonesty***

Students engaged in any form of academic dishonesty, as defined under the “Academic Misconduct” section of the Student Discipline Code, may fail the course and will be subject to other disciplinary measures.

### Course Schedule

Day	Topic	Reading and Assignments
Week 1 Tue. Jan. 8	Syllabus and Student Learning Goals Intro. to Religion and Nature	
Week 1 Thu. Jan. 10	What is religion? What is nature?	Bron Taylor, "Surfing into Spirituality" from the <i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i> 75(4), 2007
Week 2 Tue. Jan. 15	Native American Religion and Culture	Albanese pp. 1-46, Intro. and ch. 1, "Native Ground: Nature & Culture in Early America"
Week 2 Thu. Jan 17	Native American Religion and Culture (discussion)	From the <i>Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature</i> (henceforth the ERN): "American Indians as First Ecologists"; "Traditional Ecological Knowledge"; "Haudenosaunee Confederacy"; Due in class: Reading summary: week 2 readings (750 words).
Week 3 Tue. Jan 22	Wilderness and the American Mind	Nash, ch. 1 & 2
Week 3 Thu. Jan. 24	Republican nature	From the ERN: "Deism," "Book of Nature," "Christianity (7h)-Natural Theology"; Albanese ch 2: "Republican Nature," pp. 47-79. Quiz on readings to date
Week 4 Tue. Jan. 29	Romanticism	Nash, ch. 3 & 4
Week 4 Thu. Jan. 31	Transcendentalism	Nash, ch. 5; Taylor 2010, "Appendix with Commentary on Thoreau" ERN "Transcendentalism," "Emerson" Reading summary: week 4 readings due (750 words)
Week 5 Tue. Feb. 5	John Muir and American Wilderness	ERN: "National Parks and Monuments," "Pinchot, Gifford" "Muir, John," "Sierra Club," "Scouting," John Muir. "Cedar Keys," "Wild Wool."
Week 5 Thu. Feb 7	John Muir and American Wilderness (cont.)	Nash, ch. 8-10, 122-181, "John Muir," "The Wilderness Cult," and "Hetch Hetchy." In class: Quiz on Week 5 readings Watch: "The National Parks: America's Greatest Idea" (exc.)
Week 6 Tue. Feb. 12	Dark Green Religion	Taylor, Preface and ch. 1, "Introducing Dark Green Religion"



Day	Topic	Reading and Assignments
Week 6 Thu. Feb. 14	Dark Green Religion (cont.)	Taylor, ch 2, "Dark Green Religion"; Taylor, "Wilderness, Spirituality and Biodiversity in North America" Reading summary on week 6 readings due (750 words) Review for midterm
Week 7 Tue. Feb. 19	MIDTERM	Midterm covers readings for weeks 1-6; take-home essay due 2/21
Week 7 Thu. Feb. 21	Nature Religion and the African-American Experience	Smith, "Wilderness in Black Thought" Reading TBA Review midterm
Week 8 Tue. Feb. 26	Darwinism and Nature Religion	ERN, "Charles Darwin"; TBA
Week 8 Thu. Feb. 28	Darwinism, Science and Nature Religion	TBA Reading summaries due: 300 words on Week 7 and 500 on week 8
No class March 4-8 (spring break)		
Week 9 Tue. Mar. 12	Class Cancelled	
Week 9 Thu. Mar. 14	The Land Ethic	Watch in class: "Greenfire" Nash, chs. 11-12, "Aldo Leopold, Prophet," and "Decisions for Permanence" Quiz: Leopold Readings
Week 10 Tue. Mar. 19	Aldo Leopold and the Mystical Origins of Ecocentrism	Leopold: selections from <i>A Sand County Almanac</i> ; ERN: "P.D. Ouspensky" Quiz: Leopold readings
Week 10 Thu. Mar. 21	Science and Nature Religion in the Mid-20 <sup>th</sup> Century	ERN: "Back to the Land Movement," "Creationism and Creation Science;" John Burroughs, <i>Time and Change</i> (selections);
Week 11 Tue. Mar. 26	Science and Nature Religion in the Mid-20 <sup>th</sup> Century (cont.)	Loren Eiseley, <i>The Immense Journey</i> , <i>The Unexpected Universe</i> , <i>All the Strange Hours</i> (selections); ERN: Loren Eiseley Quiz: Science and Nature Religion
Week 11 Th. Mar. 28	Rachel Carson and Environmental Nature Writing	Rachel Carson selections ERN: "Terry Tempest Williams" and Williams, "The clan of the one-breasted women" (1991) Reading summary on week 9-11 readings due (1000 words)
Week 12 Tue. Apr. 2	Contemporary Native American Nature Spiritualities	ERN: Vine Deloria; and Deloria, <i>God is Red</i> , ch. 1-6.

Day	Topic	Reading and Assignments
Week 12 Th. Apr. 4	Native American Nature Spiritualities (cont.)	Deloria chs. 11, 14-16 Quiz on Native American Nature Spiritualities
Week 13 Tu. Apr. 9	Radical Environmentalism and Nature Religion	ERN: "Radical Environmentalism" Nash ch. 15, "The Irony of Victory" Taylor 2010, "Civil earth religion"
Week 13 Thu. Apr. 11	Paganism and New Age	ERN: "Paganism: Contemporary," "Odinism," "Wicca," "New Age," "Harmonic Convergence" Due in class: Reading summary on radical environmentalism, paganism, and New Age spirituality (750 words)
Week 14 Tu. Apr. 16	Asian Nature Spirituality in North America	Readings: TBA Watch in class: "In the Light of Reverence" (2001), exc.
Week 14 Th. Apr. 18	Greening of Religion	Taylor, Van Wieren & Zaleha 2016 Due in class: Reading summary on Week 14 readings
Week 15 Tu. Apr. 23	Review for Final	Discussion
Week 15 Th. Apr. 25	No class	Reading Day
Wed. May 1	FINAL EXAM	10:00 a.m. – 12:00 pm

## Films and Documentaries

We will watch short excerpts from a number of films and documentaries in class. Below is a selection of films that relate to the topics we will be discussing.

### *Radical Environmentalism*

- The East (2013)
- If a Tree Falls: A story of the Earth Liberation Front (2011)
- Edward Abbey: A Voice in the Wilderness (1993)
- Dave Foreman, Radical Environmentalism talk, the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh (1990)
- Earth First!, on 60 Minutes (1990)
- DamNation (2014)
- Wrenched (2014)

### *Environmental Thought/Thinkers/Movements/Ethics*

- Seeds of Vandana Shiva (forthcoming)
- Holmes Rolston Lecture on Leopold, Greenfire, and Earth Ethics (2013)
- Greenfire (2011) [Aldo Leopold]

- American Values / American Wilderness (2006)
- Lessons from the Rainforest (ca. 1993) [Lou Gold]
- The Faithkeeper [Oren Lyons with Bill Moyers]
- Gaia-Goddess of the Earth (1986) PBS|Nova
- Ecopsychology-Restoring the Earth | Healing the Self (1995)

## Websites

### *Academic Organizations and Initiatives Involved in Religion and Nature*

- [International Society for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture](#)
- [Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale University](#)
- [Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture](#)

Additional resources, such as links to podcasts, music, slideshows, video, music, and websites, will be made available during the course. Students are encouraged to send the instructor their own ideas for resources.