

Religion and Nature in North America (Rel 3103), Spring 2020

Prof. Erin Prophet

eprophet@ufl.edu

Meeting Time: Tu: 4 (10:40-11:30 a.m.)

R (Th): 4-5 (10:40-12:35 p.m.)

Meeting location: Matherly 113

Office Hours: Tu 12:30-1:30 pm, 3-4 pm; Th 4-5 pm

Office Location: 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, 1904¹

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

Drew Kampion, *Stoked!*²

¹ Cited in Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, p. 141

² 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)

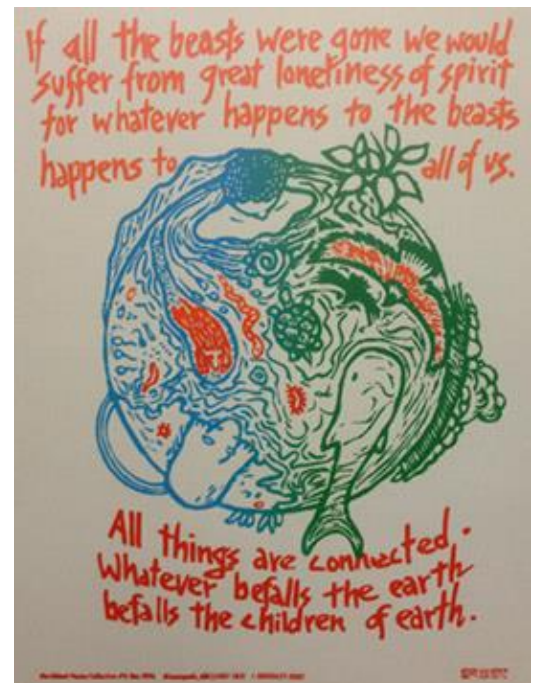
- Fear, ambivalence, and the stirrings of reverence toward nature in the Colonial period to the founding of the republic (ca. 1600-1776).
- Religion and the ideology of Manifest Destiny as the violent collision of European and Native American religious Cultures escalates.

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 reflections, blog posts 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. 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 a reflection on the reading. Reading reflections must include the major arguments being articulated in the major reading, identify major fault lines and competing perspectives and convey original thoughts about the themes identified. See website for specific grading rubric.

Exams

- Multiple choice, short answer and short essay in class mid-term exam (20%); see class schedule for details.
- Multiple choice, short answer and essay final exam (30%); 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
Attendance	N/A	15%
Quizzes	6 quizzes (10 points ea.)	10%
Reading Reflections	7 reading reflections (10-15 points ea.)	15%
Group work	10 group assignments completed in class	10%
Blog posts	9 blog posts reflecting on group work	10%
Midterm Exam	150 points	15%
Final Exam	200 points	25%
Total		100%

Use of Technology

During class, electronic devices may be used only for note-taking or participation in the course, such as accessing readings or completing group assignments. Headphones may not be worn in class.

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 requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

Canvas Reading Assignment Pages are Authoritative

Course reading assignments 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 to be sure of your assignment, check Canvas rather than the version distributed at the beginning of class. The course assignments and weighting will remain as they are in the syllabus, though due dates may be adjusted. Students should set up their Canvas account so that they receive instructor announcements via Canvas directly in their email.

Attendance

The quality of this course 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 the class. Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found at: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>.

Late or Missing Assignments

Late assignments will be penalized and may not receive credit.

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 Dr. Prophet's office in Anderson 130 for 60 days after the official date that grades are posted by the registrar. After this time, they will be recycled.

Grading Policies

The course grading rubric follows the standard UF grading scheme:

- 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
- E <61 to 0

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

Humanities Credit

This course meets the requirements for the University of Florida's Humanities credit. Humanities courses provide instruction in the history, key themes, principles, terminology, and theory or methodologies used within a humanities discipline or the humanities in general. Students will learn to identify and to analyze the key elements, biases and influences that shape

thought. These courses emphasize clear and effective analysis and approach issues and problems from multiple perspectives. A minimum grade of C is required for general education credit.

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 Evaluations

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>.

Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results/>

Course Schedule

Day	Topic	Reading	Assignments
Week 1 Tue. Jan. 7	Syllabus and Student Learning Goals Intro. to Religion and Nature		
Week 1 Thu. Jan. 9	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. 14	Native American Religion and Culture	Albanese pp. 1-46, Intro. and ch. 1, "Native Ground: Nature & Culture in Early America"	
Week 2 Thu. Jan 16	Native American Religion and Culture (discussion)	Group work 1: readings 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 reflection 1 on Albanese intro and ch. 1 (750 words) In class: Group work 1: readings from the <i>Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature</i>
Week 3 Tue. Jan 21	Wilderness and the American Mind	Nash, ch. 1 & 2	Due before class: Blog post 1
Week 3 Thu. Jan. 23	Republican nature	Albanese ch. 2: "Republican Nature," pp. 47-79. Group work 2: ERN readings: "Deism," "Book of Nature," "Christianity (7h)-Natural Theology"	In class: Quiz on Nash ch. 1&2, Albanese ch. 2: "Republican Nature," pp. 47-79 In class: Group work 2 on ERN readings.
Week 4 Tue. Jan. 28	Romanticism	Nash, ch. 3 & 4	Due before class: Blog post 2
Week 4 Thu. Jan. 30	Transcendentalism	Nash, ch. 5; ERN "Transcendentalism," "Emerson"; Taylor 2010, "Appendix with Commentary on Thoreau"	Due in class: Reading Reflection 2 on Nash ch. 3-5 (750 words) In class: Group work 3 on ERN readings and Taylor appendix
Week 5 Tue. Feb. 4	John Muir and American Wilderness	Nash, ch. 8-10, 122-181, "John Muir," "The Wilderness Cult," and "Hetch Hetchy"	Due before class: Blog post 3 In class: Quiz on Nash ch. 8-10

Day	Topic	Reading	Assignments
Week 5 Thu. Feb 6	John Muir and American Wilderness (cont.)	ERN: "National Parks and Monuments," "Pinchot, Gifford" "Muir, John," "Sierra Club," "Scouting," "John Muir," "Cedar Keys," "Wild Wool"	Group work 4 on ERN readings
Week 6 Tue. Feb. 11	Darwinism and Nature Religion	ERN, "Charles Darwin ERN, "Alfred Russel Wallace" ERN, "Pierre Teilhard de Chardin"	Due before class: Blog post 4
Week 6 Thu. Feb. 13	Darwinism, Science and Nature Religion	Hardinge-Britten: "Spirit--Its Origin and Destiny" in <i>Chicago Addresses</i> , pp. 85-107 (1860) and Teilhard de Chardin, <i>Phenomenon of Man</i> , selections Review for midterm	Group work 5 on Hardinge-Britten and Teilhard de Chardin selections
Week 7 Tue. Feb. 18	MIDTERM	Midterm covers readings for weeks 1-6	Due before class: Blog post 5
Week 7 Thu. Feb. 20	Nature Religion and the African-American Experience	Smith, "Wilderness in Black Thought"; Hooks 2010 Review midterm	
Week 8 Tue. Feb. 25	The Land Ethic	Nash, chs. 11-12, "Aldo Leopold, Prophet," and "Decisions for Permanence"; Leopold, "The Land Ethic"	Due in class: Reading Reflection 3: 500 words on Smith and Hooks
Week 8 Thu. Feb. 27	Aldo Leopold and the Mystical Origins of Ecocentrism	Leopold: selections from <i>A Sand County Almanac</i> ; Foreword, Arizona + New Mexico; "Goose Music"; ERN: "P.D. Ouspensky"	In class: Quiz on the Land Ethic Group work 6 on all 2/27 readings
No class March 1-7 (spring break)			
Week 9 Tue. Mar. 10	Dark Green Religion	Taylor, Preface and ch. 1, "Introducing Dark Green Religion"	Due before class: Blog post 6
Week 9 Thu. Mar. 12	Dark Green Religion (cont.)	Taylor, ch. 2, "Dark Green Religion"; Taylor, "Wilderness, Spirituality and Biodiversity in North America"	Due in class: Reading Reflection 4 on <i>Dark Green Religion</i> selections and Taylor article (750 words)

Day	Topic	Reading	Assignments
Week 10 Tue. Mar. 17	Science and Nature Religion in the Mid-20 th Century	ERN: "Back to the Land Movement," "Creationism and Creation Science;" John Burroughs, <i>Time and Change</i> (selections): "Preface," "The Gospel of Nature," "The Long Road"	Quiz: ERN articles and Burroughs selections
Week 10 Thu. Mar. 19	Science and Nature Religion in the Mid-20 th Century (cont.)	Loren Eiseley, "The Flow of the River," "The Secret of Life," "The Coming of the Giant Wasps" ERN: Loren Eiseley	Group work 7: Eiseley
Week 11 Tue. Mar. 24	Rachel Carson	Rachel Carson selections (5): <i>The Sea Around Us</i> (ch. 1); "Enduring Sea"; "Marginal World"; "Fable for Tomorrow"; "The Real World Around Us"	Due in class: Reading Reflection 5 on Burroughs and Eiseley (750 words)
Week 11 Th. Mar. 26	Environmental Nature Writing	ERN: "Terry Tempest Williams" and Williams, "The clan of the one-breasted women" (1991); <i>Refuge</i> : Selections.	
Week 12 Tue. Mar. 31	Contemporary Native American Nature Spiritualities	ERN: Vine Deloria; and Deloria, <i>God is Red</i> , ch. 1-6.	Due in class: Reflection 6 on all Carson and Williams readings (750 words) Quiz on Native American Nature Spiritualities (Deloria ch. 1-6)
Week 12 Th. Apr. 2	Native American Nature Spiritualities (cont.)	Deloria chs. 11, 14-16	Group work 8: Deloria 11,14-16
Week 13 Tu. Apr. 7	Radical Environmentalism and Nature Religion	ERN: "Radical Environmentalism" Nash ch. 15, "The Irony of Victory" Taylor 2010, "Civil earth religion"	Due before class: Blog post 7 on Deloria readings In class: Quiz: Radical environmentalism, covering all April 7 readings
Week 13 Thu. Apr. 9	Paganism and New Age	ERN "Paganism: Contemporary," "Odinism," "Wicca," "New Age," "Harmonic Convergence"	Group work 9: Paganism and New Age

Day	Topic	Reading	Assignments
Week 14 Tu. Apr. 14	Asian Nature Spirituality in North America	ERN Buddhism; ERN Ahimsa; Snyder, Turtle Island exc.	Due before class: Blog post 8 on 4/9 readings
Week 14 Th. Apr. 16	Greening of Religion	Taylor, Van Wieren & Zaleha 2016; optional: White, Lynn	Due in class: Reading Reflection 7 on April 14 readings on Asian spirituality (600 words) Group work 10: Greening of religion
Week 15 Tu. Apr. 21	Review for Final	Discussion	Due before class: Blog post 9 on greening of religion
Week 15 Th. Apr. 23	No class	Reading Day	
Th. Apr. 30	FINAL EXAM	Time TBA	

Films and Documentaries

We will watch 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.