Just Books Seminar
VISIONS OF THE AMERICAN ENVIRONMENT: IMAGES TO ACTION
Spring 2013
Laura Goldin
“Open Door Always”
Rabb 347
Wed 2-5pm
Office Hrs: M, Th 1:30-4 pm
or check google calendar posted
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What role does the natural environment play in the North American vision of the world? Is it a warm and welcoming womb; a savage, fearsome force; a worldly embodiment of a higher power; a precious resource needing protection from man’s destruction; a convenient source of images for product marketing? Are its services justly accessible to all? This course explores the role of the natural environment in the North American vision, through the lens of books and selected readings, films and art. In this field-based and hands on course, we focus primarily on the 1800s to the present with a view toward how these works reflect our relationship with the environment over time. We also consider how this relationship shapes our treatment of the earth and its natural resources as we address daunting environmental challenges. Our examination will cut across a series of broad environmental themes and issues, including environmental justice concerns in the fair distribution of environmental services and harms, and the meaning of “place” and “home” in the American vision. Tools for understanding will include intensive class discussion, writing and journaling, collaborative project development and oral presentation, as well as field trips, guest speakers and outdoor explorations. In addition, students will have the opportunity to partner with grassroots groups to engage in hands-on environmental justice related activities, primarily with schoolchildren and the low-income community, to share their learning, learn together and address issues of local environmental need.

EL Practicum Option: Students who take this course also will be offered the option to participate in an accompanying two-credit EL practicum, “Housing for Good: Safe, Healthy, and Just”. Practicum students will meet weekly and receive training, chance for written and oral reflection and hands-on experience as advocates at the Brandeis/Watch Housing Advocacy Clinic. (If hyperlink does not appear go to): http://www.brandeis.edu/programs/environmental/undergrad/clinic.html

Learning Goals:
- Skills in rigorous intellectual inquiry through focus on the critical role of selected works in shaping the American vision and treatment of the natural world.
- Greater abilities in critical thinking, careful reading and observation, analytical writing, oral persuasion and presentation, and proper use of source material.
- Insight and connection with topics and themes explored through direct engagement with people, places and issues involved in the works studied.
Experience in working in groups to identify, research, plan and implement a viable and effective project to educated or otherwise address a local community need.

Understanding of the broader connection between safe and just housing and environmentalism.

Greater understanding of the connection between Brandeis and the broader Waltham community, including both the natural and human environment.

Exposure to and understanding of the challenges to the low income, ethnically diverse community outside the bounds of the Brandeis campus.

Experience in working directly with low income children, elders and local community groups addressing their needs.

**Important Notes:**

1) That page was once a tree, so this is a paperless class. All written assignments should be submitted as directed on LATTE in WORD format (.docx or .doc)

2) All field trips will leave campus as scheduled. If you are late, may have to be left behind! Out of courtesy to everyone else, please make sure to be on time.

3) You are expected to be honest in all your academic work. The University policy on academic honesty is in the Rights and Responsibilities handbook. Instances of alleged dishonesty will be forwarded to the Office of Campus Life for possible referral to the Student Judicial System. Potential sanctions include failure in the course and suspension from the University. If you have any questions about my expectations, please do ask.

4) If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please let me know immediately.

5) Laptops, smartphones, other technology: respect, attention, connection among the class is key in this course. We are all in this experience together. So use of these during class time in any way that could tend to distract you or others, or reflect lack of involvement, just isn’t okay.

6) Attendance (just in case it’s not obvious to everyone): In this course, it’s a big deal if you miss class or a field trip Of course illness and extenuating circumstances always happen, but otherwise we are counting on you.

**Texts:**


Rachel Calof, *Rachel Calof’s Story: Jewish Homesteader on the Northern Plains* (Indiana University Press, 1995)

Farley Mowat, *Never Cry Wolf* (Bantam, 1963)


**Text Selections:**

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Terry Tempest Williams, *Refuge* (Vintage, 1991)
Series of others on LATTE

FILMS (tentative list; addition, substitution possible): *Jeremiah Johnson, Erin Brockovitch, Winged Migration, Sun Come Up*

**Grading:**
Class involvement, preparation and worthwhile participation are key and play a critical role in grading. Please note that you are required to complete all the required readings on time and be prepared to discuss them in class as scheduled.

Papers: First - 10%; Second - 20%; Third - 15%
My Walden essay and other essays, journal, written reflections: 30%
Oral presentations, class and field contribution and participation, project work, timely attendance: 25%

**Jan 17:**
Introduction: Perspectives from the Past
Imported Vision – Europe meets the New World
Nature in Art: Hudson River School and other American landscape artists.
Begin journal. Due for review at next class, Jan 24

**Jan 24, 31:**
The Classics: Thoreau, Walden and a Vision of Nature
Walking in Thoreau’s Footsteps – In the Field at Walden Pond.*

Jan 24: Field Trip to Thoreau Institute. Discussion with Jeff Kramer, Collections Curator and author; Brister Hill walk.
Jan 31: Walden and Thoreau Discussion with Susan Frey, Education Director, Thoreau Institute; Walden Pond walk and exploration, journaling exercise.
* Meet by 2:00 pm at base of campus to board bus.
My Walden essay due Feb 7

**Feb 7:**
Settling the Land: Nature’s Resources v. Human Development?
Reading: *Jewish Homesteader on the Northern Plains*
Film: “Jeremiah Johnson”
Assign Paper 1 (5 pages, double-spaced) due Feb 14
My Walden essay due.
Feb 14:
Communing with Animals: Zookeeper or Fellow Creature?
Reading and film (Film available on LATTE site): Never Cry Wolf
Film: Tent: “Winged Migration”
Assign *Never Cry Wolf* reflection and questions due Feb 28
[New for 2012: theater exploration with Adrianne Krstansky.]
Paper 1 due.

Feb 28:
Experiencing the “Wonders of Nature”: Essential to saving our humanity, sanity, the earth?
Reading: Last Child in the Woods
*Never Cry Wolf* assignment/reflection due (Feb 28)
Assign group projects for March 7

March 7:
Student group projects: hands-on with children and elderly
Assign *Last Child* and project presentation assignment due March 14.

March 14:
Human impact on nature has never been benign, but during the 20th century the orgy of increasing industrialization explodes.
Reading: *A Silent Spring*
4-5PM: Hands-on library and research training, Vershbow training Room, mezzanine level, Goldfarb Library. (Preparation for Carson assignment, Civil Action paper.
Student group presentations.

Extra: Class Film Showing March 14, 8pm: “Rachel Carson’s Silent Spring”, includes 1950-60’s congressional testimony, Dept. of Agriculture pesticide films, chemical company ads. (Also available digitally on LATTE site for students unable to attend.)
Assign Rachel Carson reflection essay due March 21

March 21:
The Human Ecology: Health Effects
Evolutionary biologists say that every species strives to perpetuate itself through ensuring offspring, yet we seem to be undermining our own chances. Some say that the environmental damage we have wrought is hurting our health and even risking our ability to reproduce successfully.
Reading: *A Civil Action*
Assign Paper 2, A “Civil Action” at Home, (8-10 pages) DUE April 11***
Rachel Carson reflection essay due.

March 28:
Ecological and Human Impact in Sharp Relief:
Field trip: Woburn wells and plume migrations, W.R. Grace Plant, visit and discussion with Woburn Families and lawyers

April 11:
Reading: *Refuge*
Civil Action Recap and student research reports
Student presentations
Assign reflection essay due April 18

April 18, 25:
*New for 2012*: *A Place called Home in the American Vision*
Reading: *Reimagining Equality*
Talk and discussion with Professor Hill
*Refuge* reflection essay due
Assign paper 3 (final paper) due May 9 (5 pages)
April 25: TBA: Student group presentations or Healthy Housing visit or activity.

May 2:
***Journals due***
Final class: journal selections and readings, reflections, looking ahead.

May 9: Final paper 3 due