Course Description: American environmental literature is renowned for its powerful evocation of place. Recently this local focus has been criticized as inadequate to the global scope of modern environmental problems. This course rethinks that critique by restoring several classic works to their global contexts, giving particular attention to authors’ evolving awareness of living in an age defined by humans’ ability to alter the natural world on a global scale—what many today call the Anthropocene. We’ll read Thoreau’s *Walden* alongside Alexander von Humboldt’s “cosmic” South American voyages, consider Rachel Carson’s crusade against pesticides from an African perspective, and update Wendell Berry’s agrarian vision by thinking about ecological imperialism in the Caribbean and community gardens in Los Angeles. We’ll also practice using concepts developed by contemporary critics and historians to think about American environmental practices and literary traditions from a comparative, global perspective. Can literature offer skills and strategies for living in more mindful, less damaging ways in the midst of the planet’s “Sixth Extinction”? Class will consist of discussion and occasional lectures. Requirements include class participation, two brief response papers, and two essays.

Required books: The following texts are available at the Brandeis University Bookstore. If you buy them from another vendor, please get these editions. Other readings will be available on the course page on Latte ([http://latte.brandeis.edu](http://latte.brandeis.edu)). They are marked “[L]” on the reading schedule.

William Least Heat-Moon, *PrairyErth (a deep map)* (Mariner, 1999)
Henry David Thoreau, *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* (Dover, 1995)
Reading Schedule

I. Thoreau, Humboldt, and the Cosmic Imagination

Jan 15 (Tu)  Welcome and Introduction

Jan. 17 (Th)  Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (1854): “Economy,” “Where I Lived, and What I Lived For,” “Sounds” (pp. 1-17, 53-64, 72-84)

Jan. 22 (Tu)  Brandeis Monday – No Class


Jan 31 (Th)  Alexander von Humboldt, *Personal Narrative of Travels to the Equinoctial Regions of America* (1814-1825), “Lake of Tacarigua” (pp. 1-20) [L]
Thoreau, *Walden*: “The Pond in Winter,” “Spring,” and “Conclusion” (pp. 182-216)

II. Thinking like a Mountain: The Land Ethic

Feb. 5 (Tu)  George Perkins Marsh, *Man and Nature; or, Physical Geography as Modified by Human Action* (1864), Preface and Chapter 1: “Introductory” (pp. 3-52) [L]
Recommended: Andrea Wulf, “Man and Nature: George Perkins Marsh and Alexander von Humboldt” (2017) [L]

Feb. 7 (Th)  Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (1949): “January” through “October” (pp. 3-66)

Friday, Feb. 8: Response paper #1 due uploaded to Latte by 5:00 p.m.

Feb. 12 (Tu)  Leopold, *Sand County Almanac*, “November” and “December,” “Thinking Like a Mountain” “The Land Ethic,” (pp. 66-92, 129-33, 201-226)
Aldo Leopold, “Conservationist in Mexico” (1937) [L]
III. Webs of Life and Death: Ecology, Contamination, and Gender

Feb. 14 (Th)  Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (1962), chaps. 1-5 (pp. 1-61)

Feb. 18-22:  Midterm Recess – No class

Feb. 26 (Tu)  Carson, *Silent Spring*, chaps. 7-8, 11-12 (pp. 85-127, 173-198)

Feb. 28 (Th)  Carson, *Silent Spring*, chaps. 15-17 (finish)

IV. Slow Violence and Environmental Apocalypse


Mar. 7 (Th)  Silko, *Ceremony*, pp. 67-120

Sunday, March 10: Essay #1 (5-6 pp.) due uploaded to Latte by 5:00 p.m.

Mar. 12 (Tu)  Silko, *Ceremony*, pp. 121-190

Mar. 14 (Th)  Silko, *Ceremony*, pp. 191-244 (finish)

V. Agrarianism from the Margins

Mar. 19 (Tu)  Wendell Berry, “A Native Hill” (1968) [L]
Wendell Berry, “The Making of a Marginal Farm” (1980) [L]

Mar. 21 (Th)  Wendell Berry, *The Unsettling of America: Culture & Agriculture* (1978), chaps. 1-4, 6 (pp. 3-48, 81-95) [L]


VI. Unsettling the Plains, Rewilding the Prairie: Bioregionalism
April 2 (Tu)  William Least Heat-Moon, *PrairyErth (a deep map)* (1991): “Crossings,” and “Saffordville” (pp. 3-56)

April 4 (Th)  Heat-Moon, *PrairyErth*: “Gladstone” (pp. 59-89)
Deborah Epstein Popper and Frank J. Popper, “The Great Plains: From Dust to Dust” (1987) [L]
Recommended: Tom Lynch et al., Introduction to *The Bioregional Imagination: Literature, Ecology, and Place* (2012), pp. 2-18 [L]

**Friday, April 5: Response paper #2 due uploaded to Latte by 5 p.m.**

April 9 (Tu)  Heat-Moon, *PrairyErth*: “Thrall-Northwest,” “Matfield Green” (pp. 93-130, 215-52)

April 11 (Th)  Heat-Moon, *PrairyErth*, “Hymer”: “With the Grain of the Grid” (pp. 279-87); “Elk”: “Among the *Hic Jacets*” (pp. 430-38); “Wonsevu”: “In the Quadrangle,” “Beside Coming Morning,” “Below the Turf,” “Until Black Hole XTK Yields Its Light” (pp. 547-60, 583-99); “Circlings” (pp. 603-622)
Recommended: Michael Soulé and Reed Noss, “Rewilding and Biodiversity: Complimentary Goals for Continental Conservation” (1998) [L]

### VII: Welcome to the Anthropocene: Climate Change and the Future of Place


April 19-April 26: Passover and Spring Recess – No Class

April 30 (Tu)  Nnedi Okorafor, “*Spider the Artist,*” (2011) [L]
Olivia Clare, “*Pétur*” (2014) [L]
Lauren Groff, *Florida* (2018): (story TBA) [L]
Browse the Chicago Review of Books’ “*Burning Worlds*” column [L]
Recommended: Rebecca Tuhus-Dubrow, “Cli-Fi: Birth of a Genre” (2013) [L]

May 2 (Th)  Brandeis Friday – No Class

**Monday May 6: Final Essay (7-8 pp.) or Project due uploaded to Latte by 5 p.m.**
Course Policies and Assignments

Prerequisites: None

Four-Credit Course (three hours of class-time per week): Success in this 4 credit hour course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings, papers, discussion sections, preparation for exams, etc.).

Learning goals:

- To learn about the works of several major American environmental writers and their significance both as literary figures as well as change agents in the history of environmental thought and practice
- To understand the historical development of ecological thought and environmentalism, particularly the awareness of the role of human activities in environmental damage and literature’s role in shaping and spreading that awareness
- To use literature to think about environmental issues across multiple spatial and temporal scales, from the local to the cosmic and the moment to the geologic age
- To improve academic writing skills, including their ability to write a literary analysis
- To build students’ fluency discussing literature in a classroom setting
- To gain a greater appreciation of and enjoyment from works of environmental literature, including works on this syllabus and beyond it

Course Requirements:

1. Attendance: Regular and prompt class attendance is mandatory. If you need to miss class because of sickness, religious observance, or an emergency, please contact me in advance if possible. You will be responsible for posting a response to the readings for the session you missed on the discussion board on Latte within a week. Students who come to class without that day’s assigned readings will be marked absent. Each unexcused absence will lower your attendance grade by a letter grade. Missing more than four classes will result in failing the class.

2. Active class participation: Participating fully in this class requires completing the readings and participating in class discussion. Reading assigned material carefully and in its entirety before class is essential for your success in this class. This is a literature class, and the readings are substantial: you can expect to read between 50 and 100 pages per class period. Please be sure to buy the exact editions listed on the syllabus so we can all refer to the same page numbers, and bring assigned texts to class in hard copy (bring the book). Most of our class time will be spent in detailed discussion of these texts as well as the images and films presented in class, so your participation grade includes contributing to class discussion. Every student is expected to speak at least once per class. I may call on you even if you haven’t raised your hand.

3. Response papers: These brief (2-3 pp.) papers analyze texts that are not the subject of students’ formal essays. They may be guided by a question or problem provided by the
instructor. The purpose of these papers is to ensure that every student writes about each major required text at least once, and also to provide a springboard for class discussion. Response papers do not need to be as polished as formal essays—I am more interested in your ideas and your thoughtful response to a text. I will grade these on a three-point scale: a check for satisfactory work; a check-minus for work that is sloppy, too short, or turned in late; and a check-plus if you really wow me. I will make brief written comments to these papers (often some marginal comments and two or three handwritten sentences at the end).

4. Formal essays: These two longer (5-8 pp.) papers account for half of your final grade. For our purposes, an essay should make a clear claim (expressed in a thesis statement) and support it with relevant textual evidence. The argument should unfold in a logical, well-organized fashion and be framed by a compelling introduction and conclusion. Formatting guidelines are below. For the final assignment, students will have the option to produce a multimedia final project instead of a formal essay; this will involve some analytical writing and is intended to involve an equivalent amount of work to the assigned 7-8 page essay.

Grading breakdown:

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<th>Category</th>
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<tr>
<td>Attendance:</td>
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<td>In-class participation</td>
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<td>Response papers (2):</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Essay #1:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Essay/Project</td>
<td>30%</td>
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Formatting guidelines: All papers should be in 11- or 12-point type, double-spaced, using Times New Roman or another standard, readable font, and not in italics. Margins should be 1 inch all around. Please include your name and page numbers. Any citations should use Chicago style (see the “Quick Guide” at http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html).

Late policy: Assignments will be docked a half-grade for each day they are late (e.g., from A to A-) unless you make arrangements with me ahead of time.

Academic Integrity: You are expected to be honest in all of your academic work. This includes avoiding plagiarism, which is the use of someone else’s ideas or words in your writing without acknowledging the source. Please consult Brandeis’ Rights and Responsibilities page (http://www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/srcs/rightsresponsibilities/index.html) for all policies and procedures related to academic integrity. Students may be required to submit work to TurnItIn.com software to verify originality. Cases of alleged academic dishonesty will be forwarded to the Director of Academic Integrity. Sanctions for academic dishonesty can include failing grades and/or suspension from the university. When in doubt, see me or consult the LTS Academic Integrity Support page (https://lts.brandeis.edu/courses/instruction/academic-integrity/index.html), including this guide to Citing Your Sources.
**Writing Center:** Students who want additional help with their writing are encouraged to visit the campus Writing Center ([http://www.brandeis.edu/writingprogram/writingcenter/](http://www.brandeis.edu/writingprogram/writingcenter/); Goldfarb 232 (Mezzanine Level); 781-736-4885; writingcenter@brandeis.edu).

**Electronic devices:** Computers and tablets are allowed during class for taking notes and for specific activities. Browsing the Internet, checking email or Facebook, etc. is not allowed during class; if I find you doing those things I will bar you from bringing your device to future classes. Cell phone and smartphone use during class is prohibited.

**Communications:** Any changes to the syllabus or class schedule, including accommodations for snow days, will be communicated via the class email list and posted on Latte. Please plan to check your university email account and Latte daily to keep informed.

**Disabilities:** 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 see me immediately.