

English 190s
TT 1-2:15 p.m.
Bowden 104

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Office hours:

ENGLISH 190s: Thoreau for the Twenty-First Century

Overview:

In this seminar, we will use the writing of Henry David Thoreau to raise questions about the nature of intellectual inquiry, the process of writing, and the relationship of the academy to the larger world. We will not, therefore, spend much time studying Thoreau in his nineteenth-century context. Rather, we will focus on what Thoreau might offer us for our own time. We will do so primarily by reading Thoreau's writing -- especially Walden -- slowly and with care. In addition, we will read more recent writing from the late twentieth century. These more contemporary works not only address many of the topics that seemed important to Thoreau in his own time -- such as the environment, the nature of labor, and racial equality -- but also offer a variety of models for activist writing. Throughout the entire semester, this course will operate on two levels: We will consider the "content" of the writing we read, and we will try to evaluate the arguments that our readings proffer. At the same time, we will be interested in how these works put their ideas forward.

This course is a seminar, which means that it will require your participation in order to be successful. I will expect you to come to class every day well-prepared to discuss the readings. I will also expect you take initiative in pursuing the questions that most interest you. Regardless of what one thinks of Thoreau, he offers us a model of intellectual independence that I hope you will follow. Most of the class meetings will be grounded in class discussion. However, we will take an occasional walk around the Emory campus (also in the spirit of Thoreau). I recommend wearing comfortable shoes to class.

Course Requirements:

Attendance: Attending class regularly and being prepared to discuss the assigned reading is a course requirement. If you do not attend class regularly and are not prepared to participate in class discussion, you will fail the course. I take attendance in each class; I will lower your final grade for the semester if you have excessive (more than three) unexcused absences. Should you miss class for any reason, you are responsible for obtaining the relevant notes and information from your classmates. Finally, I urge you to

attend class on time; I make announcements related to reading and writing assignments at the beginning of class.

Writing: Writing plays an integral role in this course. The main writing requirement of the course are four essays of approximately 4-6 pages in length. These assignments will ask you to perform different tasks: to analyze our reading as works of literature, to seek out means of evaluating the arguments the readings articulate, and to consider the usefulness of those arguments to the world that you know.

In addition, I will ask you to post responses to the reading on Learnlink. You will not need to do so every week, but will be assigned to a schedule in which you will be responsible for posting once every three weeks. In addition, you are responsible for reading your classmates posts.

I will not grade each of your Learnlink contributions. However, I will keep track of your contributions, and assign you a grade at the end of the semester based on their quality. I will also pay close attention to the quality and quantity of your responses to your classmates.

Course evaluation: I will calculate your final grade on the following basis:

Essay 1 = 15%

Essay 2 = 15%

Essay 3 = 25%

Essay 4 = 25%

Learnlink writing = 20%

Plagiarism: Emory University considers plagiarism to be a serious offense, and so do I. Plagiarism occurs when a writer represents someone else's ideas or writing as his or her own. You are, of course, free to draw on sources that you have read, including those you have read in other courses. However, you must document those sources adequately. For a discussion of plagiarism, consult www.emory.edu/ENGLISH/WC/plagiarism.html.

In addition, you may not turn in work to me that you originally completed for another course. Should you wish to draw on a paper that you have written for another course, please discuss the matter with me.

Texts: The required texts are available at the bookstore in the DUC. They are:

Thoreau, Walden and Other Writings (Modern Library)

Carson, Silent Spring (Houghton Mifflin)

Ehrenreich, Nickled and Dimed (Owl)

Baldwin, The Fire Next Time (Vintage)

DeLillo, White Noise (Penguin)

Since we will be reading these texts together in class, you must purchase the editions that I have ordered. This is particularly crucial in the case of Thoreau.

Schedule of Readings:

This schedule is subject to change. If no author is provided, assume that the reading comes from Thoreau, Walden and Other Writings.

Thurs., 8/29: Introduction

Tues., 9/3: "Walking," pp. 623-663

Thurs. 9/5: William Cain, "Thoreau: A Brief Biography" (electronic reserve)

Tues., 9/10: Walden, "Economy," pp. 1-76

Thurs., 9/12: Walden, "Where I Lived, What I Lived For," pp. 77-93

Writing Assignment One, Due Monday, 9/16

Tues, 9/17: Walden, "Reading," "Sounds," "Visitors," pp. 94-145

Thurs., 9/19: Walden, "The Bean Field," "The Village," pp. 146-163

Interlude I: Labor

Tues., 9/24: Ehrenreich, Nicked and Dimed, 1-10, 51-120

Thurs., 9/26: Ehrenreich, Nickled and Dimed, 121-221

Tues., 10/1: Walden, "Baker Farm," "Higher Laws," "Brute Neighbors," 190-223

Thurs., 10/3: Walden, "House-Warming," "Former Inhabitants," 224-254

Interlude II: The Footprint

Tues., 10/8: Selections from Our Ecological Footprint (electronic reserve)

Thurs., 10/10: Selections from McDonough and Braungart, Cradle to Cradle (electronic reserve)

Writing Assignment Two, Due Friday, 10/11

[Fall Break, no class 10/15]

Thurs., 10/17: Walden, "Winter Animals," "The Pond in Winter," "Spring," "Conclusion," pp. 255-312

Interlude III: Ecology

Tues., 10/22: Rachel Carson, Silent Spring, 1-84

Thurs., 10/24: Rachel Carson, Silent Spring, 245- 297

Tues., 10/29: Emory, the environment, and the World Wide Web
[evaluate: <http://www.environment.emory.edu>]

Thurs., 10/31: The Earth Charter:

<http://www.earthcharter.org/earthcharter/charter.htm>

http://www.earthcharter.org/aboutus/overview1945_1992.htm

http://www.earthcharter.org/aboutus/overview1994_1999.htm

http://www.earthcharter.org/aboutus/press_kit.pdf

Tues., 11/5: “Slavery in Massachusetts” and “A Plea for Captain John Brown” (697-743)

Thurs., 11/7: “Life Without Principle” (747-769)

Interlude IV: Race in America

Tues., 11/12: Baldwin, The Fire Next Time, pp 1-106

Thurs., 11/14: Continue discussion of Baldwin

Interlude V: Activism, Irony, and Fiction

Tues., 11/19: Don DeLillo, White Noise, pp.1-105

Thurs., 11/21, DeLillo, White Noise, pp. 106-163

Writing Assignment Three, Due Tuesday, 11/26

[Thanksgiving, no class 11/26 and 11/28]

Tues., 12/3: DeLillo, White Noise, pp. 164-246

Thurs., 12/5: DeLillo, White Noise, pp. 247-end

Tues., 12/10: Conclusion

Final writing assignment due Friday, 12/15