

University of Wisconsin-Madison
HIST/ENVIR ST/HIST SCI 125
Green Screen: Environmental Perspectives Through Film
Fall 2021
MW, 9:55-10:45 Educational Sciences 204
Discussion sections, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday
Screenings, Wednesday, 4:00-6:00 pm, Social Sciences 5206
3 credits

Instructors

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Course Description

From the 1933 Hollywood blockbuster "King Kong" to the recent Netflix hit "My Octopus Teacher," from the somber 2006 documentary "An Inconvenient Truth" to the upbeat animated film "Happy Feet," made the same year, the history of cinema offers a lens through which to understand changing ideas and attitudes about the relationships between humans and the natural world. How can film shed light on changing environmental ideas and beliefs in American thought, politics, and culture and their impact on the real-world struggles of people and wildlife throughout the world? And how can we come to see, understand, and confront racial, class, and gender biases that have shaped the contours of American environmentalism over the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries?

This course will explore such questions as we treat film both as a historical document, offering a window onto the past, and as a cultural force helping to define the concerns of past, present, and future environmental visions and actions in the United States and elsewhere in the world.

Course Learning Outcomes

Through this course, you will

- 1) develop the skills needed to interpret film as a historical document and to place it in a particular historical context.
- 2) understand the changing historical contours of American environmentalism and how the past continues to shape issues around the meanings and representations of "the environment," particularly with respect to issues of class, gender, and race.

3) recognize how the experiences and struggles of different underrepresented minorities, including those of Black, Indigenous, and Latinx peoples, have led to a diversity of environmental visions and viewpoints.

4) be able to identify the major environmental issues and controversies of the past, present, and future in the United States and around the world.

Course Requirements

Discussion (20%): Each one in class needs to assume the responsibility of an active participant and learner. Success in the class depends largely upon the time, energy, and commitment you invest. You will be required to arrive at class having attended the required film screening on Wednesday evening, read the material assigned for the day, and be prepared to engage in a thoughtful and constructive conversation that is respectful of others in the classroom and takes seriously the issues and themes presented in the films and readings. You need to post at least one comment or question on the films screened to the course webpage each week.

Film Reviews (40%): Choose two films, either screened in class, or approved in consultation with us, and write a 1,000 word review essay for the film that discusses how the film has reflected and/or shaped past or present environmental perceptions. Who made the film and why? In what context was the film shown and seen? Who was its intended audience? How was the film received by critics and the public? In what ways did the film reinforce or alter public attitudes toward nature or the environment in significant ways? These are due, in class, on Wednesday, October 6th and Monday, November 22nd.

Take-Home Exam (30%): You will have one week to prepare answers of 1,000 words each to two of three questions on the course content. The due date for the take-home exam is **TBA**.

OR

Digital Short Option (30%): You will produce a 3-5 minute short video that challenges viewers to see the environment in a new way or offers a mashup of a previous film, challenging us to see its content in a completely different light. See separate handout.

Grading Structure

A=93-100%, AB=88-92%, B=83-87%, BC=78-82%, C=70-77%, D=60-69%, F=0-59%

Honors

If you are taking this class for Honors' credit, you need to be enrolled in the Tuesday discussion section of this class, sec. 309. The Honors' section of this class includes additional reading and writing assignments, which will be shared with students enrolled for Honors' credit in the discussion section.

Attendance Policy

We understand the challenges and uncertainties that the COVID pandemic presents, particularly in the event of illness, either of yourself or a family member. Class attendance in lecture, discussion sections, and film screenings is strongly encouraged for you to get the most out of the course. However, we realize that under certain circumstances, it may not be possible for you to attend. Consequently, we will not be enforcing an attendance policy as part of your final grade.

COVID-19 Public Health Guidelines

We want to ensure a safe environment for all students and instructors in the class.

All students, employees and visitors to campus are required to wear face masks when inside campus buildings, unless an individual is unable to for medical reasons. You are responsible for following the UW-Madison's policy regarding COVID-19: <https://news.wisc.edu/changes-to-campus-masking-policy/>. If you show up to class without a face mask, we will provide one for you before entering the classroom.

Caring for Your Well-Being

As a student you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learning. These might include strained relationships, anxiety, high levels of stress, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, or loss of motivation. University Health Services can help with these or other issues you may experience. Help is always available. You can learn about free, confidential mental health services available to you; call 608-265-6600 (option 2) or visit uhs.wisc.edu.

Privacy of Student Records & the Use of Audio Recorded Lectures

Lecture materials and recordings for this course are protected intellectual property at UW-Madison. Students in this course may use the materials and recordings for their personal use related to participation in this class. Students may also take notes solely for their personal use. If a lecture is not already recorded, you are not authorized to record my lectures without my permission unless you are considered by the university to be a qualified student with a disability requiring accommodation. [Regent Policy Document 4-1] Students may not copy or have lecture materials and recordings outside of class, including posting on internet sites or selling to commercial entities. Students are also prohibited from providing or selling their personal notes to anyone else or being paid for taking notes by any person or commercial firm without the instructor's express written permission. Unauthorized use of these copyrighted lecture materials and recordings constitutes copyright infringement and may be addressed under the university's policies, UWS Chapters 14 and 17, governing student academic and non-academic misconduct.

Diversity & Inclusion

[Diversity](#) is a source of strength, creativity, and innovation for UW-Madison. We value the contributions of each person and respect the profound ways their identity, culture, background, experience, status, abilities, and opinion enrich the university community. We commit ourselves to the pursuit of excellence in teaching, research, outreach, and diversity as inextricably linked goals. The University of Wisconsin-Madison fulfills its public mission by creating a welcoming and inclusive community for people from every background – people who as students, faculty, and staff serve Wisconsin and the world.

Academic Integrity

By virtue of enrollment, each student agrees to uphold the high academic standards of the University of Wisconsin-Madison; academic misconduct is behavior that negatively impacts the integrity of the institution. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, and helping others commit these previously listed acts are examples of misconduct which may result in disciplinary action. Examples of disciplinary action include, but is not limited to, failure on the assignment/course, written reprimand, disciplinary probation, suspension, or expulsion.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

The University of Wisconsin-Madison supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Wisconsin State Statute (36.12), and UW-Madison policy ([UW-855](#)) require the university to provide reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities to access and participate in its academic programs and educational services. Faculty and students share responsibility in the accommodation process. Students are expected to inform Professor Mitman of their need for instructional accommodations during the beginning of the semester, or as soon as possible after being approved for accommodations. We will work either directly with you or in coordination with the McBurney Center to provide reasonable instructional and course-related accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA. (See: [McBurney Disability Resource Center](#))

Required Readings:

The following books, from which reading selections are drawn, are available for free as e-books through the UW-Madison libraries:

Carolyn Finney, *Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).
<https://search.library.wisc.edu/catalog/9910571295102121>

Gregg Mitman, *Reel Nature: America's Romance with Wildlife on Film*, rev. ed. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009).
<https://search.library.wisc.edu/catalog/9911078687902121>

A set of digital readings are available on the course's Canvas website,
<https://canvas.wisc.edu/courses/272536>

Introduction

9/8 Introductions and course overview

9/13-9/15 Whose Nature? Widening the Environmental Frame
Carolyn Finney, *Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), pp. xi-xviii, 1-10.
Tom Gunning, "[Making Sense of Films](#)," History Matters: The U.S. Survey Course on the Web, February 2002.
Gregg Mitman, *Reel Nature: America's Romance with Wildlife on Film* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009), pp. 209-220.
Julie Furmanek, "[My Octopus Teacher' is not for the faint of heart](#)," *The Daily Free Press*, April 12, 2021.
Colleen Walsh, "[So Why did you love 'My Octopus Teacher'?](#)" *The Harvard Gazette*, May 19, 2021.

Environmental Pasts: Landscapes of Purity and Whiteness

- 9/20-9/22 Great White Hunting
Finney, *Black Faces, White Spaces*, pp. 32-50.
Gene Demby, "[Can You Make a Movie with King Kong Without Perpetuating Racial Undertones?](#)", National Public Radio, March 11, 2017.
The Meaning of a Monument, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eI.2CW8bZ0to>
Mitman, *Reel Nature*, 26-59.
- 9/27-9/29 The Myth of the Vanishing Race
Robert Flaherty, "How I Filmed *Nanook of the North*," *World's Work* 44 (1922): 632-640.
John Grierson, "Flaherty" in *Grierson on Documentary*, edited and compiled by Forsyth Hardy (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), pp. 139-144
Michelle H. Raheja, "Reading Nanook's Smile: Visual Sovereignty, Indigenous Revisions of Ethnography and *Atanarjuat (The Fast Runner)*," *American Quarterly* 59 (2007): 1159-85.
Fatimah Tobing Rony, *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 99-126.
- 10/4-10/6 New Deal Visions
Finis Dunaway, *Natural Visions: The Power of Images in American Environmental Reform* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 33-86.
Paul Sears, *Deserts on the March* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1935), 157-184.
Anne Whiston Spirn, *Daring to Look: Dorothea Lange's Photographs and Reports From the Field* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 3-5, 8-9, 15-20.
William Stott, *Documentary Expression and Thirties America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 5-17.
- 10/11-10/13 Disney's Nature
Mitman, *Reel Nature*, 109-131
Ralph Lutts, "The Trouble with Bambi: Walt Disney's Bambi and the American Vision of Nature," *Forest & Conservation History* 36 (1992): 160-171.
Scott Macdonald, "Up Close and Political: Three Short Ruminations on Ideology in the Nature Film," *Film Quarterly* 59 (2006): 4-21.
Walt Disney, "What I've Learned from the Animals," *American Magazine* 155 (February 1953): 23, 106-109.
- 10/18-10/20 The End Times of Ecology
Paul Ehrlich, *The Population Bomb* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1968), 15-35, 46-67.
Jacob Hamblin, "The Doomsday Men," in *Arming Mother Nature: The Birth of Catastrophic Environmentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 151-178.
Garrett Hardin, "[Lifeboat Ethics: The Case Against Helping the Poor](#)," *Psychology Today* (September 1974)
Charis Thompson, "Back to Nature?: Resurrecting Ecofeminism after Poststructuralist and Third-Wave Feminisms," *Isis* 97 (2006): 505-512.

Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), xix-xxiv.

Environmental Presents: Diversifying Issues and Audiences

- 10/25-10/27 Reclaiming Indigenous Sovereignty
Kyle Whyte, “Settler Colonialism, Ecology, and Environmental Injustice,” *Environment and Society: Advances in Research* 9 (2018): 125-144.
Fatimah Tobing Rony, “Victor Masayesva, Jr., and the Politics of *Imagining Indians*,” *Film Quarterly* 48 (1994-1995): 20-33.
Finis Dunaway, “Gas Masks, Pogo, and the Ecological Indian: Earth Day and the Visual Politics of American Environmentalism,” *American Quarterly* 60 (2008): 67-99.
- 11/1-11/3 The Politics of Food
Cesar Chavez, “[Perils of Pesticides](#),” Address to Pacific Lutheran University, 1989
Alexandra Hall, “[Under Trump, Wisconsin Dairies Struggle to Keep Immigrant Workers](#),” *Wisconsin Public Radio*, March 16, 2017.
Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation* (New York: Perennial, 2002), 169-190.
Orrin Williams, “Food and Justice: The Critical Link to Healthy Communities,” in *Power, Justice, and the Environment: A Critical Appraisal of the Environmental Justice Movement*, edited by David Naguib Pellow and Robert J. Brulle (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), 117-130.
Excerpt from *King Corn*, Earl Butz interview, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lp2_xAhRrkY
- 11/8-11/10 Toxic Burdens
Robert Bullard and Glenn S. Johnson, “Environmental Justice: Grassroots Activism and Its Impact on Public Policy Decision Making,” *Journal of Social Issues* 56 (2000): 555-578.
Judith Helfand, Interviewed by Adina Back and Pennee Bender, “Connecting the Dots: Workers, Families, and Toxic Exposure, Past and Present,” *Radical History Review* 80 (2001): 121-133.
Commission for Racial Justice, *Toxic Waste and Race in the United States* (New York: United Church of Christ, 1987).
Antonia Juhasz, “[Louisiana’s ‘Cancer Alley’ Is Getting Even More Toxic—But Residents Are Fighting Back](#),” *Rolling Stone* (October 30, 2019).
- 11/15-11/17 Energy, Extraction, and Infrastructure
Nick Estes, *Our History Is the Future: Standing Rock versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the long traditions of Indigenous Resistance* (New York: Verso Books, 2019), 1-65.
Rob Nixon, “Pipedreams,” in *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 103-127.
Further background: Nick Estes, “Our History is the Future: Standing Rock Versus the Dakota Access Pipeline,” New Books Network podcast, <https://www.podchaser.com/podcasts/new-books-network-103904/episodes/nick-estes-our-history-is-the-77753447>

- 11/22 Spillovers, Pandemics, and the Ecology of Disease
 Gregg Mitman, "The Unruliness of a Virus," *Environmental History* 25 (October 2020): 640-644.
 Alice Rudge, "[Thinking Beyond the 'Wild' Pandemic](#)," *Edge Effects*, March 25, 2021.

Environmental Futures

- 11/29-12/1 Facing a Warming Planet
 Ann McClintock, "[Monster: A Fugue in Fire and Ice](#)," *E-Flux Architecture*, June 1, 2020.
 Christian Parenti, *Tropic of Chaos: Climate Change and the New Geography of Violence* (New York: Nation Books, 2011), 3-20.
 Laura Pulido, "Racism and the Anthropocene," in *Future Remains: A Cabinet of Curiosities for the Anthropocene*, edited by Gregg Mitman, Marco Armiero, and Robert S. Emmett (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 116-128.
- 12/6-12/8 Border Ecologies
 Giovanna Di Chiro, "Beyond Ecoliberal 'Common Futures': Environmental Justice, Toxic Touring, and a Transcommunal Politics of Place," in *Race, Nature, and the Politics of Difference*, ed. by Donald S. Moore, Jake Kosek, and Anand Pandian (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 204-232.
 Sharada Balachandran Orihuela & Andrew Carl Hageman, "The Virtual Realities of US/Mexico Border Ecologies in *Maquilapolis* and *Sleep Dealer*," *Environmental Communication* 5 (2011): 166-186.
 Paris Marx & Alex Rivera, "*Sleep Dealer* and the Border Politics of 'Tech,'" *Tech Won't Save Us* podcast. https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/sleep-dealer-and-the-border-politics-of-tech-w-alex-rivera/id1507621076?i=1000528949367&fbclid=IwAR1Hx3TvSTBXQ_kWx-FY0JKA7VzvAt3RfNQf6g9Wlt6lfnp_xy8MVssQe4
- 12/13-12/15 Afrofuturisms
 Achille Mbembe, "Planetary Entanglement," in *Out of the Dark Night: Essays on Decolonization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), 7-41.
 Mariama Sow and Amadou Sy, "[Lessons from Marvel's Black Panther: Nature resource management and increased openness in Africa](#)," *Brookings*, February 23, 2018.
 Binyavanga Wainaina, "How To Write About Africa," *Granta* (2005)
<https://granta.com/how-to-write-about-africa/>

SCREENINGS

- Wednesdays, 4:00 pm, 5206 Social Sciences
- Sept. 15 *My Octopus Teacher* (2020, 85 min)
- Sept. 22 *King Kong* (1933, 100 min)
- Sept. 29 *Nanook of the North* (1922, 79 min.)
- Oct. 6 *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940, 129 min.)
- Oct. 13 *Nature's Half-Acre* (1951, 33 min.); *Bambi* (1942, 70 min.)

Oct. 20	<i>Soylent Green</i> (1973, 70 min.)
Oct. 27	<i>Imagining Indians</i> (1992, 60 min.); <i>Lighting the Seventh Fire</i> (1995, 47 min.)
Nov. 3	<i>Cesar's Last Fast</i> (2014, 93 min.)
Nov. 10	<i>Blue Vinyl</i> (2002, 97 min.)
Nov. 17	<i>Awake, A Dream From Standing Rock</i> (2017, 89 min.)
Nov. 24	NO SCREENING
Dec. 1	<i>That Which Once Was</i> (2011, 21 min), <i>Age of Consequences</i> (2016, 80 min.)
Dec. 8	<i>Sleep Dealer</i> (2008, 90 min.)
Dec. 15	<i>Black Panther</i> (2018, 135 min.)

Optional Digital Short Assignment

Digital Short Option (30%): Working with your assigned TA, Professor Mitman, and the DesignLab, you will produce a 3-5 minute short video that challenges viewers to see the environment in a new way or offers a mashup of a previous film, challenging us to see its content in a completely different light.

Those interested in the Digital Short Option must submit a one-page maximum request answering the question why producing a short video would enhance your academic goals and enrich your experience in this course. Please also indicate how you would like to use this exercise to broaden your perspective on what constitutes an environmental issue or problem.

Finally please indicate if you have any experience using these applications:

iMovie, Final Cut Pro X, Final Cut Pro, Premiere Pro

(Training for these applications is available through DoIT and explained in detail below.)

Submit this request to Professor Mitman or your assigned TA by Friday, September 24th.

Outline of semester:

Submit one page request by September 24th

Submit outline/sketch of story ideas by October 8th

First Critique –

Submit first video draft

Second Critique

Final video due: December 15th