

TRANSCENDENTAL VISIONS: Re-Imagining The American Dream
SPRING QUARTER: 2005 **THE EVERGREEN STATE COLLEGE**



I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to confront only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.

-- Henry David Thoreau: *Walden*

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Meeting Times:

Location Seminar 2, C 2109

Thursday 6-10 p.m.

(additional meetings arranged for 8 credits)

Upper Division: 4 quarter hours

Reference #: (30461)

Upper Division: 8 quarter hours (faculty signature required)

Reference #: (30462)

Description:

This course will explore the vision of American transcendentalists, poets, naturalists, and Native American writers. What are the competing visions of the American Dream? Is it Manifest Destiny or primeval garden? Capitalist success or sustainable community? Horatio Alger or Henry David Thoreau? What is the split in the American psyche that is both deeply connected to and conflicted about the connection to the natural world? What conditions sparked the genius of the transcendentalists, and what forces shape our world today? We will work as writers, poets and storytellers as we explore the development of an alternative dream of America that embraces the natural world, social justice, community, and creativity.

We are taught by great actions that the universe is the property of every individual in it.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

Required Texts:

Atkinson, Brooks (ed.). *Henry David Thoreau: Walden and Other Writings*, Modern Library: 2000. (ISBN: 0679783342) Introductions by Ralph Waldo Emerson and Peter Matthiessen.
 _____). *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Modern Library: 2000. (ISBN: 0679783229) Introduction by Mary Oliver.
 Transcendental Visions: Re-Imagining the American Dream, Class Anthology.
 Van Doren, Mark (ed.) and Malcolm Crowley. *The Portable Walt Whitman*, Penguin Books: 1997. (ISBN: 0140150781)

Transcendental Visions: Re-Imagining the American Dream, Class Anthology.
 Three copies of these materials will be on reserve in the library for students to check out or xerox from. They include required readings for seminars and workshops. You can also make arrangements to purchase a copy from the bookstore. Please see the instructor for details.

Optional Texts: These texts will be on reserve with other resources in the library.

Baym, Nina. The Norton Anthology of American Literature, Sixth Edition, Volume B: 1820-1865 W. W. Norton & Company: 2002. (ISBN: 0393979059)
 Miller, Perry. *Transcendentalists: An Anthology*, MJF Books, 1997. (ISBN: 1567312152)

I wish to speak a word for Nature, for absolute freedom and wildness, as contrasted with a freedom and culture merely civil, - to regard man as an inhabitant, or a part and parcel of Nature, rather than a member of society. I wish to make an extreme statement, if so I may make an emphatic one, for there are enough champions of civilization: the minister and the school-committee and every one of you will take care of that.

-- Henry David Thoreau: *Walking*

Expectations:

- Faithful attendance and full participation at meetings, workshops, films, and seminars.
- Read and write weekly responses to the texts.
- Participate in class workshops and writing groups.
- Maintain a portfolio and journal of class handouts, notes, workshops, papers, research, and cumulative work for the quarter. These will be reviewed at fifth week and final evaluation conferences.
- Successful completion of individual and group projects, papers, presentations, workshops, or assignments on time.

To the dull mind nature is leaden. To the illumined mind the whole world burns and sparkles with light.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

Course Equivalencies: Students can receive a total of four or eight quarter hours credit for college level work in the following areas: American Literature and writing.

A bard is to be commensurate with a people...His spirit responds to the country's spirit...he incarnates its geography and natural life and rivers and lakes....To him enter the essences of real things and past and present events...

--Walt Whitman, 'Preface' to *Leaves of Grass*

In any weather, at any hour of the day or night, I have been anxious to improve the nick of time, and notch it on my stick too; to stand on the meeting of two eternities, the past and future, which is precisely the present moment; to toe that line.

--Henry David Thoreau, "Economy" in *Walden*

Assignments:

Four and Eight Credit Options

1. Response papers on each of the readings turned in promptly at the beginning of seminar (1-2 pages, typed). These papers will allow you to: 1) comment upon the readings, lectures, workshops, and films, 2) summarize, reflect upon, and integrate program topics, themes, and issues, 3) serve as a springboard for discussion.

2. A research project that explores an author, topic, theme or issue that intrigues you. Your final project will include an oral presentation and a handout that you will copy for each member of the class. You will present your research findings in a short five-minute presentation during weeks 7 or 8.

As you begin, you will work in groups to share your research ideas and explore some aspect of interpretation and meaning, literary criticism, background material, historic information, parallel texts, and other material. You may also go into depth in exploring a particular author or text that interests you. The idea is to press forward into the work of interpretation. This is an opportunity to develop your research skills along with a deeper understanding of the influence of the American Transcendentalists. See handouts for additional ideas and suggestions.

You may continue to work in groups, if you wish, to combine your research efforts and give a group presentation on a topic of mutual or overlapping interest. Each of you will have 5 minutes to present your part of the research, so a group of four would have 20 minutes. Each individual is responsible for creating, editing, and copying their own handout. However, in special circumstances, handouts can also be created as a group.

3. Your choice of one of the following: 1) an academic essay or research paper (3-7 p.) that explores an author, topic, theme or issue that intrigues you, 2) a personal essay (3-7 p.) on some aspect of life, nature, culture, etc. inspired by the readings, 3) several poems (3-7 p.). You will develop, edit, and revise this paper or essay in a series of scheduled writing workshops. There are specific due dates that you must meet, throughout the quarter, in order to participate in editing workshops.

4. A final performance or presentation to synthesize program ideas. This can include performance of a section from a personal essay, a story, song, poem, or visual art piece that you create over the quarter. You might create an audio or visual piece that brings to life the texts of Emerson or Thoreau. This is your time to be creative in interpreting program ideas and themes. It is also possible to work with someone in the class to create a collaborative piece. Again, you will have 5-10 min. per person, to present your work during weeks 9 or 10 of the quarter.

Eight Credits:

In addition to doing the regular coursework for the four-credit class, students taking the class for eight credits will also:

1. Meet at mutually agreed upon time, for five additional seminars (every other week). During this time you are expected to prepare a supplemental group reading list and discuss additional authors and works. Submit responses to your readings and post them in your portfolio.

2. Meet and develop your creative writing or academic essays in at least two workshops outside of class. This can include work on academic writing, poetry or personal essays, and can include in-depth sessions at the writing center.

3. Complete both 1) an academic essay or research paper (3-7 p.) that explores an author, topic, theme or issue that intrigues you, and 2) a piece of creative writing that can be a personal essay (3-7 p.) or several poems (3-7 p.). One of the papers can be substituted for a substantial creative piece that synthesizes the themes of the quarter, either in the form of a story or performance piece, visual art work, or audio/visual production.

To the poet, to the philosopher, to the saint, all things are friendly and sacred, all events profitable, all days holy, all men divine.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

Disobedience is the true foundation of liberty. The obedient must be slaves.

--Henry David Thoreau

Class Portfolio

Each student is required to keep a class portfolio throughout the quarter. This will be turned in during the fifth week and during week nine of the quarter for evaluation conferences. Include your name and a table of contents. **Record the topic and date of each item** in your portfolio. Each section should be arranged chronologically. The portfolio must be kept in a loose-leaf three ring binder with dividers and should contain the following:

Note: Date and chronologically order each entry.

- 1) Table of contents, course syllabus, covenant, and all class handouts
- 2) Reading responses and assignments for required texts and readings. Follow format on reading response handout. (A section of reading notes is strongly recommended.)
- 3) Class notes: lectures, speakers, and films.
- 4) Seminar notes In-class workshops. (Date each entry)
- 5) Research projects: research notes, hand-outs, and notes for oral presentations.
- 6) Writing Workshops : In-class writing workshops and notes (date each entry). Final drafts, early drafts, and peer-editing workshop notes or your creative writing or research paper.
- 7) Self and Faculty evaluations (Three signed copies on official forms at the end of the quarter.)

Eight Credit Option:

Students taking the class for eight credits must also include a section for:

- 1) Five extra seminars
- 2) Extra Readings and seminar notes
- 3) Academic/research paper and creative writing (personal essay/poetry) or creative project notes.

What's the use of a fine house if you haven't got a tolerable planet to put it on?

--Henry David Thoreau