

Standing on Sacred Ground – OLLI Course Outline 12/12/18 Christopher McLeod

Monday Jan 22 & 29, Feb 5, 12 & 26, Mar 5 — 1pm to 3:15pm
David Brower Center — Goldman Theater

Six classes, one film per class, with introduction and discussion.

Core themes:

- 1) the history of the movement to protect sacred places,
- 2) the personal struggle to blend the political and the spiritual, and
- 3) how to be a good ally in collaboration with indigenous communities.

Key Questions for exploration and discussion:

- What are sacred sites and why are they important to indigenous people?
- What do the values and worldviews of aboriginal cultures hold as lessons for our society in times of ecological collapse and spiritual disconnection?
- What do conflicts over sacred places reveal about cultural values?

We will explore the relationship between nature and culture; how individuals of all cultures yearn for spiritual connection to nature; how and why sacred sites have gone from “invisible” to “visible” in Western culture; and how mining, dams, climate change, New Age appropriation and Christian evangelism conflict with native spiritual practices. The course will take place over six sessions and feature Native American guests including local Ohlone leader Corrina Gould, Winnemem Wintu Chief Caleen Sisk, and activist Pennie Opal Plant.

Native American guests – confirmed unless noted

January 29 — Lisjan Ohlone leader Corrina Gould

February 5 — Winnemem Wintu Chief Caleen Sisk

February 12 — Activist Pennie Opal Plant (Yaqui, Mexican, English, Choctaw, Cherokee & European descent) and Michael Horse (invited)

Other invited guests include Atossa Soltani, founder of Amazon Watch, Ohlone elder Ann Marie Sayers, and Emmett Aluli and/or Davianna McGregor, Native Hawaiian founders of the Protect Kaho`olawe Ohana.

Prep Reading / General Overview: *The Sacred Land Reader*

<http://sacredland.org/the-sacred-land-reader/>

Class 1 – Introduction - Sacred Place Battles in the United States

Film backstory: the genesis of my film work with indigenous people protecting sacred places: first visit to Hopi in 1978.

What is a sacred place?

History of sacred land protection efforts in the United States, with personal reflections on the role of film, journalism and collaboration between native communities and outside allies. Before producing a global film series, I had to focus on the United States, working with friends who lived nearby.

Screening: *In the Light of Reverence* (72 minutes, 2001 – Lakota, Hopi and Winnemem Wintu cultures)

Class 2 – The Lessons of Standing Rock

Starting the class with a slideshow and stories from my 5-day visit to Standing Rock in early December 2016, we will move to discuss the growing international indigenous rights movement, see a film, and then bring it home to the West Berkeley Shellmound controversy in Berkeley.

Screening: *Guardians of the Sacred* (28 minutes, 2017 – 25 sacred site guardians meet in Hawaii for the IUCN World Conservation Congress)

Guest speaker: Lisjan Ohlone leader Corrina Gould

Class 3 – Pilgrimage and Personal Experience

Screening: *Standing on Sacred Ground – Pilgrims and Tourists* (episode one of four from the *Standing on Sacred Ground* series, 56 minutes, 2014 – Altai Republic, Russia and Winnemem Wintu of California)

Film backstory: 25 years of collaboration with the Winnemem.

Guest speaker: Winnemem Wintu Chief Caleen Sisk

Ask class members to share personal pilgrimage experiences and spiritual connection to nature. Discuss.

Discuss water issues, status of plans to raise Shasta Dam, and Governor Brown's Twin Tunnels proposal.

Class 4 – Dealing with Grief in the Face of Eco-Collapse

Film success story: revival of the transcendental flute ceremony in Papua New Guinea's Bosmun village, as a result of filming there.

Screening: *Standing on Sacred Ground – Profit and Loss*

(episode two, 56 minutes, 2014 – Papua New Guinea and tar sands of Alberta, Canada)

Guest speaker(s): Local activist Pennie Opal Plant (Yaqui, Choctaw, Cherokee & European) and actor and artist Michael Horse (invited)

Post-film discussion re tar sands, explore grief and sadness we all feel in the face of environmental destruction.

Class 5 – Value Clash

Film story: The Ethiopians were 100% into telling their story, the Q'eros in Peru were 100% suspicious, hesitant, careful.

Screening: *Standing on Sacred Ground – Fire and Ice*

(episode three, 56 minutes, 2014 – Gamo Highlands of Ethiopia and Q'eros of Andes, Peru)

Digging deeper into what we have seen about sacred places and animistic practices. Detail the key values: generosity, humility, reverence, reciprocity (*ayni* for Q'eros), relationship, and community.

- Are sacred sites psychological projection or inherently powerful places?
- Describe diversity, different ways of being there, variety of ceremony.
- Distill natural laws, common protocols, and diversity of relationships.
- Discuss the history of Christianity in relation to native spirituality/land.
- Systemic solutions to climate change stemming from indigenous values.

Guest speaker (invited): Amazon Watch founder Atossa Soltani

Class 6 – Resistance Wins Indigenous Protected Areas

Film story: complex issues with filming ceremony in Hawaii, how we did it.

Screening: *Standing on Sacred Ground – Islands of Sanctuary*
(episode four, 56 minutes, 2014 – Aboriginal Australia and Hawaii)

Guest speaker (invited): Ohlone elder Ann Marie Sayers

The role of resistance in protecting land, preserving or renewing culture.
What does it look like when indigenous people manage their sacred lands?

What role have IP played in resisting industrial destruction and modeling
an alternative path?

Victory rooted in love for land, *aloha aina*.

Bibliography and Suggested Reading:

Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz: *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States (2014)*

Peter Nabokov: *Where the Lightning Strikes – Lives of American Indian Sacred Places (2006)*

Jerry Mander: *In the Absence of the Sacred (1991)*

Sacred Land Film Project Websites:

<http://www.SacredLand.org/>
<http://StandingOnSacredGround.org/>

Sacred Land Film Channel on YouTube (related short clips):

<https://www.youtube.com/user/sacredlandfilm>

Brief Course Description:

Why are sacred places important to indigenous people? What do the values and worldviews of aboriginal cultures hold as lessons for Western society in times of ecological collapse? How can each of us deepen our connection to nature in an authentic way? Filmmaker Christopher McLeod has spent 40 years collaborating with native people to document conflicts over sacred places. His films explore the relationship between nature and culture, how individuals of all cultures yearn for spiritual connection to

nature, how mining, dams, climate change, New Age appropriation and Christian evangelism conflict with native spiritual practices. We will view McLeod's films *In the Light of Reverence* (2001), the four-part *Standing on Sacred Ground* series (2013), and his new film *Guardians of the Sacred* (2017) in six sessions with Native American guests.