Standing on Sacred Ground – OLLI Course Outline    7/20/16
Christopher McLeod

David Brower Center — Goldman Theater

Five 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.

Native American guests will attend two or three classes for discussion, including (invited, not yet confirmed): Winnemem Wintu Chief Caleen Sisk, Ohlone elder Ann Marie Sayers, Ohlone leaders Corrina Gould and Vincent Medina, and local activist Pennie Opal Plant. Other possible guests include Atossa Soltani, founder of Amazon Watch, 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://www.sacredland.org/home/resources/tools-for-action/reports-and-guidelines/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 – 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 (invited): Winnemem Wintu Chief Caleen Sisk

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

Discuss water issues, California drought, status of plans to raise Shasta Dam.

Class 3 – 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 (invited): local native activist Pennie Opal Plant

Post-film discussion re tar sands, explore grief and sadness we all feel in the face of environmental destruction.
Class 4 – 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.

Class 5 – 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:


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