

ENGL 3396: The Nature of Houston

10-11:30 TTH, #21144

Instructor: Dr. Dixon



Our subject is Houston, the nation's fourth largest city and an interesting, complex urban area. Our approach involves fiction, non-fiction and some poetry; it focuses on two definitions of the "nature" of Houston.

We look first at the intersection of place and human activity in the shaping of the city. How have Houstonians, past and present, responded to the opportunities and the challenges that *this particular place*—its geography, topography, geology, climate, etc.—offers?? We will learn in part by comparing Houston to other major American cities. How are we similar to and different from other American urban areas in this state and region and elsewhere in the country?

Our second major line of inquiry will examine the 'nature' of Houston in a more narrow sense. How does our city choose to deal with the natural world? Is it true, as many national (and some local) observers argue, that the nature of Houston is wholly unpleasant, manifest solely in its flatness, heat, and humidity, that the place is notable only as a (disagreeable) backdrop for the business of earning a living? Is Houston, in other words, mostly a site for individuals to enact economic prosperity? Or is it possible to argue that Houston nature affords some quality of life benefits for its citizens?