English 2335.001: Themes and Genres in the Literatures of the Americas: Writing Border Histories

Class Meeting Time: TR: 12:30-1:45
Class Location: CI 107
Instructor: Kevin Concannon
Office: FC 262
Office Hours: TR: 2:00-4:00; W: 10-11
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Semester: Fall 2012

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Course Description: Many of the texts we will read this semester have a historical focus, with authors struggling to come to terms with a familial past or identity that remains underrepresented or unrecognized by the mainstream. This struggle takes on many different forms, from Clare Kendry’s efforts to deflect attention from her familial past in Passing, to Marisol’s desire to re-tell her past as a fiction in The Line of the Sun. Both Ruins and The Line of the Sun also help to sensitize one to how the past can be manipulated, and how those on the social margin struggle for a sense of presence within the historical narratives of the nation. Ultimately, the majority of the texts we will read seek to present alternative histories, ones that will run counter to a dominant history that looks to marginalize otherness. We will look closely at these alternative histories and examine how (or if) they provide better pathways towards participation in the US.

Since literature involves more than reading texts, but involves history, the environment, culture, gender and politics, we will take the time to explore the larger context of many of the works we are reading. In other words, we will explore the various ideas, historical occurrences, and political changes that help to inform the production of the material we explore in class. To this end, the exams and worksheets will be more than “reading tests,” but will also include questions about a work’s context, seeking to place a text in a larger flow of ideas and historical changes.

Required Texts:
Acosta, Oscar Zeta. The Revolt of the Cockroach People
Cofer, Judith Ortiz. The Line of the Sun
King, Thomas, Truth and Bright Water
Larsen, Nella. Passing
Obejas, Achy. Ruins

Major Course Requirements:

Class Participation: 10 Points (5%)
Midterm and Final Exam: 50 points each (50%)
Collaborative Teaching Activity: 20 points (10%)
Creative Essay: 10 points (5%)
Analytical Essays: 30 points (20%)
In-Class Writing (including quizzes and homework): 30 points (15%)

1. Participation and Attendance Policy: Much of this class will be conducted as a mixture of discussion and lecture, so you should come to class every day and be prepared to talk about the assigned readings. You can miss two classes without penalty. After that three points will be deducted for each missed class.
2. Midterm and Final Exam: The exams will include essay questions and identifications of quotes and terms taken from the readings and class discussions. The final exam will not be cumulative but will include an essay question that addresses some of the readings throughout the semester.

3. Collaborative Teaching Activity: Working with other students in class, your group will spend a total of 10-15 minutes discussing/analyzing the assigned topic in front of the class. Your presentation should make clear the historical context of the topic as well as explain or identify important terms, themes or ideas. Please do not read from a prepared essay or from a PowerPoint presentation (though PowerPoint may be used). You should encourage class involvement by asking questions, providing handouts etc. Please feel free to meet with me before your presentation. Every student will be required to provide an evaluation of the other group members.

4. Analytical Essays: There will be four short essays that will be due this semester. Each essay will be worth ten points and will be graded based on how well you organize your ideas around a specific argument; your careful analysis of evidence from the text; and the clarity of your prose. No late papers will be accepted.

5. In-class Writing: There will be frequent in-class writing and occasionally some of these writings will be collected and graded. In-class writing cannot be made up if you are absent.

**Student Learning Outcomes:**

Upon successful completion of this course, students will:

1) Recognize the connections between literary works and their social, historical, and cultural contexts;
2) Respond critically to literary works.

**Course Evaluation:**

180-200: A
160-179: B
140-159: C
120-139: D
119 and below: F

*One or more of your assignments for this course may be selected for program assessment purposes.

**Academic Advising:** The College of Liberal Arts requires that students meet with an Academic Advisor as soon as they are ready to declare a major. The Academic Advisor will set up a degree plan, which must be signed by the student, a faculty mentor, and the department chair. The College's Academic Advising Center is located in Driftwood 203E, and can be reached at 825-3466.

**Grade Appeal Process.** As stated in University Rule 13.02.99.C2, Student Grade Appeals, a student who believes that he or she has not been held to appropriate academic standards as outlined in the class syllabus, equitable evaluation procedures, or appropriate grading, may appeal the final grade given in the course. The burden of proof is upon the student to demonstrate the appropriateness of the appeal. A student with a complaint about a grade is encouraged to first discuss the matter with the instructor. For complete details, including the responsibilities of the parties involved in the process and the number of days allowed for completing the steps in the process, see University Rule 13.02.99.C2, Student Grade Appeals, and University Procedure 13.02.99.C2.01, Student Grade Appeal Procedures. These documents are accessible through the University Rules Web site at http://www.tamuc.edu/provost/university_rules/index.html. For assistance and/or guidance in the grade appeal process, students may contact the Office of Student Affairs.
Notice to Students with Disabilities: The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please call or visit Disability Services at (361) 825-5816 in Corpus Christi Hall 116. If you are a returning veteran and are experiencing cognitive and/or physical access issues in the classroom, or on campus, please contact the Disability Services office for assistance.

Course Schedule

*Small changes might be made to the syllabus during the course of the semester.

Unit 1: “Passing” as Another: Violence, Repression and Expression

Week 1: Introductions and Class Overview (August 23)

Week 2: Violence and Expression (August 28-August 30)
*Readings: Charles Chesnutt “The Wife of His Youth” and “Po’ Sandy” (handouts), Claude McKay, “If We Must Die” and Alice Walker, “Elethia” (handouts). Start reading Nella Larsen’s *Passing.*

Week 3: Passing and the Harlem Renaissance (September 4-6)
*Readings: *Passing

Week 4: African-American Modernism (September 11-13)
Quiz #1: September 13
1st Analytical Essay due: September 13

Unit 2: Gender and Familial/National Boundaries

Week 5: La Llorona Myth (September 18-20)
*Readings: Sandra Cisneros, “Woman Hollering Creek” (handout) and Helena María Viramontes, “The Cariboo Café” (handout). Start reading *The Revolt of the Cockroach People*

Week 6: Patriarchy and the Chicano Movement (September 25-27)
*Readings: Oscar Zeta Acosta, *The Revolt of the Cockroach People*

Week 7: Patriarchy con’t. (October 2-October 4)
Quiz #2: October 4
Creative Essay due: October 4

Unit 3: Imaginary Crossings

Week 8: Identity and Belonging in Puerto Rican Literature (October 9-11)
Midterm: October 11
Week 9: Manifest Destiny (October 16-18)
*Readings: Begin reading Judith Ortiz Cofer’s *The Line of the Sun*

Week 10: Puerto Rican Literature (October 23-25)
*Readings: Continue reading *The Line of the Sun*

Week 11: Puerto Rican Literature (October 30-November 1)
*Readings: Finish reading *The Line of the Sun* and begin reading Achy Obejas’ *Ruins*
Quiz #3: November 1
2nd Analytical Essay due November 1

Unit 4: (Re)Writing on the Margins

Week 12 con’t: The Cuban Revolution (November 6-8)
*Readings: Continue reading Achy Obejas’ *Ruins*

Week 13: The Cuban Revolution con’t (October 13-November 15)
*Readings: Finish reading *Ruins*. Begin reading *Truth and Bright Water*
Quiz #4: November 15

Unit 5: Storytelling along the Border

Week 14: Native American Literature (November 20)
*Readings: “Borders” (handout) and continue reading Thomas King’s *Truth and Bright Water.*

Week 15: Native American Literature con’t (November 27-November 29)
*Readings: Finish reading *Truth and Bright Water*
Quiz #5: November 29

Week 16: Final Exam: December 4