

## **ENG 580: ETHNIC LITERATURE**

**DR. MONICA AYUSO/FALL 2004**

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Office Hours: M-W-F 2:00-3:00 P.M. in the English Advising Office (654-3331. **Do not leave messages**)

On Wednesdays, I will be in my office from 11:00-12:00.

This syllabus and additional materials that I will make available to you are at  
@<http://www.csub.edu/~mayuso/>

**PURPOSE:** ENG 580 centers on the experience of ethnic writers as portrayed in their fiction, non-fiction, poetry and the hybrid genres that have been produced by their creative energy. The course centers on the question of how an author's race and ethnicity influence what she or he writes. At a time when the world is perceived as endlessly diverse and dynamically interactive, we will examine texts from the shelves of Chicano/a, Latino/a, African American, and Native American world libraries. These works are by writers whose descent makes them members of a racial/ethnic group that they willingly or unwillingly identify with. Reading these writings will demand a multicultural approach to what is in some instances an implied rejection of the idea of assimilation into mainstream society. In contrast with those communities, which at least in the United States, severed ties with the homeland to melt in the pot, these groups are caught in a circular migration that sometimes revitalizes—and often makes problematic—the ties with the homeland's language, traditions and culture. In some other instances, writers reject affiliation to an ethnic group and choose universal themes, avoid the markers of ethnicity/race, and reject an essential ethnic identity. It is obvious that writers on both sides of the debate—those embracing and those rejecting race and ethnicity as sites from which to write—produce work with a distinct character that raises distinct questions. Furthermore, the study of race/ethnicity will lead to related considerations of class, gender and sexual orientation as constructs that are culture specific. As it is reductive to view these groups of writers out of their social and cultural contexts, lectures and oral presentations will cover important history chapters concerning multicultural America and the rest of the world. The overarching concern of the class will be to examine "race" as "a social construction that historically sets apart minorities from European immigrant groups." One of the main aims of the course is to whet your intellectual appetites and encourage your detailed study of the cultures we examine.

**REQUIREMENTS** the requirements for evaluation are:

- A) to read and comprehend all the assigned works in significant ways;
- B) to come to class and discuss those works in significant ways;
- C) to produce two papers that engage interpretation and research;
- D) to prepare one oral presentation;
- E) to pass a final exam. For a detailed description of the components of your grade, refer to page two of this syllabus.

### **REQUIRED TEXTS:**

1. Alexie, Sherman. *The Lone Ranger and Tonto FistFight in Heaven* (1993)
2. Erdrich, Louise. *Tracks* (1988)
3. Zora Neale Hurston. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937)
4. Morrison, Toni. *Jazz* (1992)
5. Rodríguez, Richard. *Brown* (2002)
6. Dove, Rita. *Thomas and Beulah* (1986)
7. Readings from Electronic Reserves as scheduled and needed (Handouts)

### **TENTATIVE SCHEDULE**

01/08: (WEEK 1) Introduction to the course. Questions raised by ethnic texts. Definitions of key terms.

01/13: Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (chapters I-X) Foreword by Edwidge Danticat and Afterword by Henry Louis Gates.

01/15: (WEEK 2) Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (chapters XI-XX); E.B.W. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*: "Of Our Spiritual Strivings" (Handout)

01/20: Morrison, "Recitatif" (Handout); Appiah, "Race" (Handout) From *Jazz* (1-90); "Unspeakable Things Unspoken" (Handout)

01/22: (WEEK 3) Morrison, *Jazz* (91-162); "Playing in the Dark" (Handout)

01/27: Morrison, *Jazz* (162-end) Pici, "Trading Meanings: The Breath of Music in Toni Morrison's *Jazz*" (Handout)

01/29: (WEEK 4) Rodríguez, *Brown* (Parts I,II,III,IV)

02/03: Rodríguez, *Brown* (Parts V,VI,VII,VIII,IX)

02/05: (WEEK 5) Rodríguez, "A Bilingual Childhood" (Handout). Anzaldúa, "How to Tame a Wild Tongue" (Handout)

02/10: Rosario, *Song of the Water Saints* (Song I) David, "Migratory Subjectivities" (Handout)  
**SHORT PAPER DUE**

02/12: (WEEK 6) Rosario, *Song of the Water Saints* (Song II) Walker, "Womanism" (Handout)

02/17: Erdrich, *Tracks* (Chapters 1-5)

02/19: (WEEK 7) *Tracks* (Chapters 6-end)

02/24: Vizenor, "Manifest Manners: Postindian Warriors of Survivance" (Handout)

02/26: (WEEK 8) "Tracing the Trickster: Nananpush, Ojibwe Oral Tradition, and *Tracks*" (Handout)  
"Beneath Creaking Oaks: Spirits and Animals in *Tracks*" (Handout)

03/03: (WEEK 9) Alexie, *The Lone Ranger* (1- 100)

03/05: Alexie, *The Lone Ranger* (100-end)

03/10: (WEEK 10) *Thomas and Beulah* (I. Mandolin)

03/12: *Thomas and Beulah* (II. Canary in Bloom) **LONG PAPER DUE** Show and Tell: Brief report on the final research project

03/17: **LAST DAY OF CLASSES** concluding remarks

#### **EXPLANATION OF REQUIREMENTS:**

**ORAL PRESENTATION (20%)** Your polished, well-organized, well-rehearsed presentation (not to exceed 15 minutes, if individual, or 20 minutes if group) will illuminate for the class in interesting and innovative ways some aspect of the field of ethnic studies by providing information on a given text. It may also provide the opportunity to expand on ethnic groups not represented in the syllabus at all. Your goal is to contribute to your audience's knowledge and critical thinking.

Guidelines: the material you present should a) be of essay-, not book-length; b) be contextualized, related, made relevant to material you have read very carefully and (in most instances) your audience has not read at all; c) have a practical application. In other words, part of your presentation will have to be applied, or show theory in practice. Any of the following writers and theoreticians can be the subject of your presentation: Paula Gunn Allen, Gloria Anzaldúa; Alicia Castillo, Barbara Hill Collins, W.E.B. Du Bois, Franz Fanon, Henry Louis Gates, Paul Gilroy, Abdul JanMohamed, Cherrie Moraga, Paulo Freire, Henry A. Giroux, bell hooks, Norma Alarcón, Carla Trujillo, Barbara Christian. Claim a critic and commit to a date as soon as you know what you want to do. Notice that I have not scheduled full classes for these presentations. Under the best of circumstances, we will give our undivided attention to two presentations

per class, starting tentatively by the third week of the term. You may want to plan a handout (which we will post for the rest) with the gist of the material you review. Not only will a schematic sheet make your audience more alert to what you are presenting (consider the proliferation of foreign names in the literature we will study) but it will make the information you share available later as a possible reference for the long paper.

**SHORT PAPER (20%)** Read W. Sollors “Who is Ethnic?” (Handout); it will be useful for this assignment. Short paper will be approximately 5-7 pages in length and double-spaced. Topic: Examine the factors that you consider collaborate to give you a sense of your identity. First: **think** about your socialization as a member of a racial/ ethnic group from a particular class, as a female /male with a sexual orientation. How has your class background shaped your basic assumptions and beliefs about ethnicity? How has your economic status influenced the way you regard your ethnicity? How does your sexual orientation contribute to the formation of your many “identities” in a postmodern sense? Second: After giving plenty of thought to these preliminary questions and using the analytical tools that you have learned so far in the class and elsewhere, **give voice** to your response in a creative way—essay, autobiography, poetry, creative writing of any imaginable kind—coherent or fragmentary. Third: Look back at your creative expression and, in traditional college-essay fashion, **examine** the material theoretically to the tune of 3-4 pages. The point of parts two and three is to place yourself as object and subject of your own scrutiny respectively. You may decide to divide the paper into two parts corresponding to the two distinct modes of thinking or you may want to achieve both processes concurrently, whichever you prefer.

**LONG PAPER (30%)** This paper will be 7-12 pages and will follow the formal graduate college essay format with all the requirements that such a form entails. It will require evidence of strong personal input and a minimum of five very current scholarly sources. Topic: Choose and research a literary convention (e.g. the Bildungsroman, figurative language, etc.). Think of the ways you have seen it used in canonized works in the English tradition. Depending on your interests and your knowledge, you may want to read poetry and choose a sonnet; non-fiction and choose autobiography; fiction and choose theme, point of view, allusion, cultural context, tradition. Then, you will examine the way in which a writer of ethnic/racial aspirations subverts/embraces/defies/adapts/modifies the convention you researched. You will engage in a thorough description of the alteration. Then, based on the result of your research, you will construct an argument in which you will try to answer some of the following questions: What motivates the adaptation? Is the author working with a political agenda? Is this agenda the result of, for example, a feminist/womanist, gay/lesbian, racial/ethnic aspiration? Have you found testimony of the author’s motivations in interviews, biography, background, and Internet sites? Analyze the possibility that such license be motivated by a desire to adapt form to suit oppositional/contestatory content.

This paper will also include an annotated bibliography in which the main argument and critical approach of each of the sources you cite is explained with a brief abstract.

**FINAL EXAM (15%)** will be a take-home.

**CLASS PARTICIPATION (15%)** I will reward positive, enthusiastic, and productive class participation

I reserve the right to modify this syllabus, should the need arise.

### **GRADING CRITERIA AS DEFINED BY THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT, CSUB**

An “A” paper—unusually competent

1. Avoids the obvious and thus gains insights on an analytical level that are illuminating and stimulating to the educated reader.
2. Develops ideas effectively and purposefully with appropriate evidence, examples, and illustrations.
3. Progresses by clearly ordered and necessary stages with paragraphs that are coherent and unified.
4. Uses a variety of punctuation conventionally and purposefully.
5. Has sentences that are skillfully constructed, concise, forceful, effective, and varied.

6. Demonstrates a concern with the right word and a willingness to be inventive with words and structures in order to produce a clearly identified style, even though at times the efforts may be too deliberate or fall short of the writer's intentions.

A "B" paper—demonstrably competent

1. Usually avoids the obvious and offers interesting interpretations, but lacks the imaginative insights of the A paper.
2. Develops an idea with a clear and effective sense of order.
3. Progresses by ordered stages with paragraphs that are coherent and unified.
4. Uses mechanics and punctuation to help communicate the meaning and effect of the prose.
5. Has sentences that are correctly constructed with efficient use of coordination and subordination; demonstrates an understanding of variety.
6. Draws upon words adequate to express the writer's thoughts and feelings and demonstrates an understanding of alternate ways of expression as a means of making stylistic choices.

A "C" paper—competent

1. Functions on a literal level, often depending on the self-evident.
2. Develops ideas minimally, often leaving the reader with unanswered questions.
3. Has a discernible, if mechanical, organization.
4. Conforms to conventional grammar, mechanics, and punctuation.
5. Has sentences which are correctly constructed, though perhaps tending towards repetitious patterns with minimal or mechanical use of coordination and subordination.
6. Works with a limited range of words and thus becomes dependent on cliches and colloquialisms most available; is also generally unaware of choices that affect style and thus is unable to control the effects a writer may seek.

A "D" paper—lacking competence

1. Exploits the obvious either because of a lack of understanding, an inability to read, a failure to grapple with the topic, or, in many cases, a lack of interest.
2. Wanders aimlessly because of a lack of overall conception or, in some instances, has a semblance form without the development that makes the parts a whole.
3. Has a plan or method that is characterized by irrelevance, redundancy, or inconsistency.
4. Frequently lacks careful mechanical and grammatical distinctions although some papers contain correct (if simple) sentences.
5. Has sentences which are not correctly constructed or which are monotonous or repetitious.
6. Is characterized by convoluted sentences that are close to the rapid associations of thought or "safe" words (ones that the writer ordinarily speaks or can spell) and by excessively simple sentence structure.

An "F" paper—incompetent

1. Doesn't fulfill the assignment.
2. Lacks specific development; tends to wander aimlessly.
3. Lacks logical and coherent progression.
4. Consistently lacks conventional grammar and mechanics so that communication is unclear.