

LT284 (Re-)Writing a Politics of Belonging: Race and Recognition in American Literature

Module: Literary Analysis and Cultural Production
Seminar Leader: Kathy-Ann Tan
Course Times: Tue 17:00 - 18:30, Thu 17:00 - 18:30
Email: k.tan@berlin.bard.edu
Office Hours: to be arranged via email
Credits: 8 ECTS, 4 U.S. credits

Course Description

At the present time, we often hear claims that the United States is riven by intractable divisions of race, class, and gender. The literature of the country has long reflected the conflicts and questions arising from such divisions, and has much to teach us about their historical foundations and development. Above all, literature succeeds in staging a process of recognition, empowerment, and critique. Proponents of the reform and protest movements of nineteenth- and twentieth-century America were aware that the “inalienable rights” of “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” announced by the Declaration of Independence had not from the beginning been envisaged for all Americans, but for a white, propertied, male ruling class. In this seminar, we will read a selection of texts from contemporary American literature that propose a struggle with this uneasy foundation, manifesting kinds of social, psychological, and stylistic predicaments imposed by exclusion and persecution. Our central question will concern the ways in which authors reestablish a sense of belonging and collectivity through the act of writing. We will also look at the way in which contemporary literature connects with and revises a sense of tradition, and generates new traditions and affiliations. Above all, our goal will be to understand the fraught, creative dynamics of “belonging” in America, a country that, as Herman Melville once contended “contradicts all prior notions of human things.”

Requirements

active participation, in-class presentation/chairing of a session, mid-term essay, final essay

Attendance

Attendance at ALL classes is expected. More than two absences (that is absences from two sessions of 90 minutes) in a semester will significantly affect the participation grade for the course.

Please consult the Student Handbook for regulations governing periods of illness or leaves of absence.

Assessment

Your in-class participation grade will be based on your contributions to discussion in class and your in-class presentation/chairing of a session

Writing Assignments

The midterm essay, due in week 8, should have a word range of 2500 to 3500, as should the final essay, due at the end of completion week. See the deadlines below.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Please note the following policy from the Student Handbook on the submission of essays: *essays that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where an instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline and cannot receive a grade of higher than C. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.*

Grade Breakdown

Class participation (comprising contributions to class discussion and in-class presentation/chairing of a session): 30%

Mid-term essay: 35%

Final essay: 35%

The percentage grade allotted to each essay, and to classroom participation and assignments

Schedule

Classes start on Monday, January 30 and run until Friday, May 12 with spring break planned for the week of April 10. Completion week is from May 12 to 19. Students are required to be on campus during completion week. Scheduled class times are available online under the relevant course heading: <http://www.berlin.bard.edu/academics/courses/spring-2017/>

****Please note**:** As I will be substituting a professorship at the JFK Institute of American Studies at the Freie Universität in the summer semester of 2017, class sessions as of March 30, 2017 will be held in “block-seminar” format. We will plan to have 3 compact sessions of 5 hours each (with a coffee break in between). Dates and times to be confirmed once we have a sense of our schedules as a group – Friday mornings would work best for me.

Essay Deadlines

Mid-term essay: Friday March 24, 2017 at 23:59

Final essay: Friday May 19, 2017 at 23:59

All essays are to be submitted electronically by students to me via email (k.tan@berlin.bard.edu).

Course Books

Please purchase and read the following eight titles:

Ta-Nehisi Coates. *Between the World and Me* (2015). ISBN: 978-0812993547

Teju Cole. *Open City* (2011). ISBN-13: 978-1400068098

Junot Diaz. *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007). ISBN: 978-1594483295

Rawi Hage. *Cockroach* (2009). ISBN-13: 978-0141040813

Jhumpa Lahiri. *The Lowland*. ISBN: 978-0804172288

Salvador Plascencia. *People of Paper* (2006): ISBN: 978-0156032117

Claudia Rankine. *Citizen: An American Lyric* (2014). ISBN: 978-1555976903

Ranabir Singh Sidhu. *Deep Singh Blue*. ISBN: 978-1939419682

A course reader (also required for purchase) will be made available by the beginning of the semester. Any additional material will be handed out as xeroxes, and/or be sent around via email.