

English 3387:  
**Multicultural Literatures of America**  
Texas Tech University  
Fall 2019

**Section 01: MWF 1:00pm-1:50pm**

**Note: This course fulfills the university's Multicultural Requirement.**

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In this course we will read contemporary American literature from a variety of perspectives, in a range of genres, and with an eye to loosening the American canon from its historically white heterosexual male point of view. What does it mean to read American literature only through the example of women writers or queer writers or writers of color? Our class will consider the different picture of American literature and history we walk away with when reading exclusively from these historically marginalized vantage points. As well, we will also consider at length the intersections between ideology, identity, aesthetic criteria, and literary form. In contemplating these juxtapositions we will look to understand the situated quality of cultural production, and reflect on the implicit politics of conventional ideas about beauty or aesthetic value in American literature.

English 3387, which helps students develop an awareness and knowledge of cultural production across different American identities, fulfills Texas Tech University's multicultural requirement. Students graduating from Texas Tech University should be able to demonstrate awareness and knowledge of distinctive cultures or subcultures, including but not limited to ethnicity, gender, class, political systems, religions, languages, or human geography.

**TTU MULTICULTURAL STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:**

- *Students will demonstrate intercultural awareness, knowledge and skills in written, verbal, and behavioral activities (e.g., service-learning, co-curricular and similar experiences).*
- *Students will exhibit the ability to engage constructively with individuals and groups, across diverse social contexts.*
- *Students will appraise privilege relationships at different levels (interpersonal, local, regional, national, and international) and explain how these relationships affect the sociocultural status of individuals and groups.*

Assessments used:

*For Outcome 1:* Multimodal interpretive assignments and in-class discussion in which students are tasked with understanding American literature as composed across a range of identities and in conversation with various ideas about the American canon.

*For Outcome 2:* Ongoing in-class discussion about how a multicultural American literature narrates experiential differences between different citizens in line with racial, class, gender, and sexual difference.

*For Outcome 3:* Multimodal interpretive assignments and in-class discussion in which students are tasked with explaining the various ways that a multicultural American literature engages sexism, white supremacy, and homophobia across a range of political, economic, and cultural contexts.

### **Course Goals, Expected Outcomes, and Methods of Assessments:**

The objective of the humanities in a core curriculum is to expand the students' knowledge of the human condition and human cultures, especially in relation to behaviors, ideas, and values expressed in works of human imagination and thought. Through study in disciplines such as literature and philosophy, students will engage in critical analysis and develop an appreciation of the humanities as fundamental to the health and survival of any society.

With that in mind, our course goals are:

To study contemporary multicultural American writing across various genres, with attention to the varied experiences these works narrate, the social inequalities they critique, and the ways they decenter whiteness, maleness, or straightness as the default perspectives through which Americans understand their own national culture. As well, we will be attentive to experiments with language and literary form, especially as means for interrogating dominant standards for "good" literature or valuable art.

Students who satisfactorily complete this course should be able **to demonstrate** a thorough understanding of a variety of contemporary American writers, as well as the critical discussions we will use to contextualize these writers' work. More specifically, students should be able **to integrate** course readings with course lectures and discussions **to understand** contemporary multicultural American literature *in context*—**to articulate** how texts relate to other texts, how works narrate and complicate American culture and history, and how, in total, course readings question canonicity and the practice of assembling a national literature that aspires to speak for all Americans.

The methods of assessment for this course are various. The most weight will be given to four multimodal assignments: a short essay on popular culture, a creative assignment on literary form, a self-reflexive statement about personal identity and critical criteria, and a longer personal-critical essay on one of the major works. Students should be able **to articulate** their understanding of American literature in straightforward prose that bears evidence of critical thinking about course issues and topics, and is always organized around **clear thesis statements, direct topic sentences and self-aware rhetorical goals**. Students should know the difference between "observation" and "interpretation," between "reportorial" writing and "analytical" writing. While students should be able **to identify** notable stylistic characteristics in each text, they should also be able **to explain** how those stylistic qualities are meaningful: how they suggest connections to other texts, how they relate to historical and political context, and how they operate symbolically.

Students will also be assessed on short reading surveys for major works and contributions to course discussions. For reading surveys, students should be able **to demonstrate** a

complete reading of each major work in the course by answering, for each, a number of questions about the reader's personal relationship to the text. In classroom discussions, students should exhibit a willingness **to discuss** topics that arise out of our readings and lectures. Students are not expected to show mastery of each work, or offer fully-formed interpretations of works, but simply **to work through** ideas about readings and topics in conversation.

**Required Texts:**

Hanif Abdurraqib, *They Can't Kill Us Until They Kill Us*  
Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home*  
Eve L. Ewing, *Electric Arches*  
Layli Long Soldier, *Whereas*  
Maggie Nelson, *The Argonauts*  
Claudia Rankine, *Citizen*  
Erika L. Sanchez, *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*  
Solmaz Sharif, *Look*  
Ocean Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*

**Course Work and Distribution of Term Marks:**

Literary Form Assignment	10%	<b>due 25 September</b>
Statement of Aesthetic Criteria Assignment	10%	<b>due 28 October</b>
Popular Culture Assignment	20%	<b>due 13 November</b>
Final Paper (1500 words)	20%	<b>due 2 December</b>
In-class leading of discussion	10%	<b>sign up for date</b>
Reading surveys on major works	10%	<b>see reading list for dates</b>
Informed participation in class discussion	20%	

**Extra credit assignments, see attached page.**

You are required to complete four formal assignments for this class: **a creative assignment that asks you to engage questions of literary form, a 750-word assignment that asks you to write about popular culture, a 750-word statement of aesthetic criteria, and a 1500-word final paper that asks you to write personally about your relationship to one of our major texts.** In addition, you can expect to do many informal, reflective writing exercises in class for which individual grades will not be assigned. These informal writing exercises will hopefully stimulate your contributions to class discussions, though, and so might be considered as figuring into your participation grade.

For each of the nine major works on the class you are required to complete a **five question reading survey** that you will submit on the day we begin discussing that text. See the attached page for the five questions you will be required to answer in complete sentences for each work.

Beginning with our consideration of *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* on 16 September, each of you will be expected **to lead a brief discussion on a class text** once during the semester. (You may sign up for the texts for which you want to lead on a first-come, first-served basis.) My expectation is that on the date for which you sign up you will a) offer a five-minute, informal discussion of your own interpretation and understanding of the text;

and b) present to the class 3-4 questions for discussion by your peers. **All students must sign up for discussion sessions by 6 September.**

**Informed participation** assumes that you will not only read all assigned texts in time for their discussion in class, but also consider that material carefully and be prepared to contribute to our collective contemplation of them. I suggest that you take notes as you read each text, and be careful to record your observations as you move through material. Pay attention to connections between texts. Take note of how works correspond to contextual issues that I introduce in class. Make a list of questions that arise when you read the material. All of these approaches will be beneficial to our discussions as a group.

### **Course Policies:**

#### *Grades and Assignments:*

1. Grades will be assigned as percentage scores (0-100) throughout the term. Ultimately, your final grade will be converted to the university's letter grade system using this scale:

A+= 97-100	A=94-96	A-=90-93
B+=87-89	B=84-86	B-=80-83
C+=77-79	C=74-76	C-=70-73
D+=67-69	D=63-66	F=62 or below

**Please note that I reserve A-range marks for work of superior quality. Marks in the A-range are by no means the default grade for completing all the assignments in this course.**

2. You must complete **all** of the assignments to pass this course.
3. Assignments are to be handed in by the beginning of the class on which they are due.
4. Late assignments will be penalized with a **10%** deduction for each day they are handed in after the due date, including weekend days. Even after deductions have guaranteed that an assignment will receive a failing grade, you **must** still submit that work to pass the course.
5. If extenuating circumstances will prevent you from handing an assignment in on time, talk to me **before** the work is due. I am not likely to make allowances after the deadline has come and gone.
6. Any papers are to be typed (in a font no bigger than 12-point), double-spaced, and printed on one side of the paper. Please adhere to MLA guidelines for formatting and bibliographical citations. Creative assignments that involve images may be submitted to me digitally over email if you are concerned about losing resolution by printing it.
7. I do **not** accept email submissions of written assignments.

#### *Plagiarism and Cheating:*

I expect you to adhere to the highest standard of honesty and academic integrity. All work that you complete in this course **must** be your own.

All assignments must be organized around your own ideas and arguments. (In the interest of aiding the resolution of any potential disputes about plagiarism, I encourage you to retain all drafts of your work until the completion of the course.) When you introduce any ideas or

quotations that are not your own in an essay, you must **cite explicitly** the source of that material according to MLA citation practice. To repeat, **any** material that is not your own—including verbatim quotations from outside work or paraphrases of other writers' ideas or arguments—must be referenced explicitly. If you have any questions about whether or not you have used a source properly on a given assignment, I encourage you to discuss the issue with me **before** you hand that assignment in. Because academic dishonesty constitutes a grave breach of trust between instructor and student, and diminishes the value of honest students' work, I take all plagiarism cases very seriously. Plagiarizing materials will warrant a failure on, at least, the plagiarized assignment, and, potentially, the course overall.

#### *Absences:*

I will allow each student **four** absences without penalty. Each class that you miss after four absences will warrant a reduction of your **overall** course grade by 10%. I do not designate between excused or unexcused absences, except for those designated as excused according to university policy. **That is, if you miss a class because of illness or a car accident or a job interview or a hangover or anything else, you have used up one of your four absences. (Do not bring me documentation, as I will not remove the absence from your record.)** Because you only have four classes you can afford to miss without penalty, I encourage you to manage your attendance wisely, reserving those four absences for emergencies when you need them. For an explanation of university-approved absences, consult your student handbook. **Also, I expect you to know how many classes you have missed throughout the term. You may confer with me at various points in the term about how many absences I have recorded, but please also manage your own attendance record.**

#### *Withdrawal Policy:*

Students may drop a class online on or prior to **11 September**. The full regulation appears in OP 34.05 and can be viewed at <http://www.depts.ttu.edu/opmanual/OP34.05.pdf> and page 49-50 of the 2008-2009 Undergraduate and Graduate Catalog and can be viewed at <http://www.depts.ttu.edu/officialpublications/catalog/>

The grade of "I" is given only when a student's work is satisfactory but due to reasons beyond his or her control, cannot not be completed. It is not given in lieu of an "F" or "W". The instructor assigning the grade will stipulate in writing at the time the grade is given the conditions under which the "I" may be removed. The assigned work and a change of grade must be recorded within one calendar year from the date of the "I". Failure to do so results in an "F" for that course.

#### *Classroom Civility and Access:*

I expect each of you to assist in creating and maintaining a classroom environment that is conducive to learning. At the bottom level, this assumes that you will always be respectful to me and to your fellow classmates. Our classroom space will be open to differences of opinion and ideology, and accessible to all students without regard to gender, race, ethnicity, creed, sexual orientation, or physical limitation. I will **not tolerate** the use of any derogatory or demeaning language. Always extend the same courtesy to other members of the class that you wish to see extended to you. Listen quietly when others are speaking; raise your hand to ask questions or introduce new points; do not have side conversations apart from our main discussion. I encourage dissent in discussion, but insist that you articulate your ideas in a

respectful manner. You are welcome to bring food and drink to class provided that your consumption of them is not a distraction. (Watch those crunchy foods and noisy wrappers.) If you are a cellular phone user, always **make sure** that your phone is turned off before class begins.

Any student who because of a disability may require special arrangements in order to meet course requirements should contact me as soon as possible to make necessary accommodations. Students should provide appropriate verification from Student Disability Services.

### **Tentative Schedule of Readings and Lectures:**

#### WEEK ONE:

26 August: Introduction to the course

28 August: Class discussion: "How do we narrate our own history?"

30 August: Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege and Male Privilege" (available here: <https://nationalseedproject.org/Key-SEED-Texts/white-privilege-and-male-privilege>)

#### WEEK TWO:

2 September: **No class, Labor Day**

4 September: Gloria Anzaldúa, "Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to 3<sup>rd</sup> World Women Writers" (available on Blackboard)

6 September: Audre Lorde, "Poetry is Not a Luxury" (available on Blackboard)

#### WEEK THREE:

9 September: Paula Gunn Allen, "Who's Telling This Story, Anyway?" (available on Blackboard)

11 September: Toni Morrison, "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature" (available on Blackboard)

13 September: Helen Klonaris, "If I Tell These Stories: Notes on Racism and the White Imaginary" (available on Blackboard)

#### WEEK FOUR:

16 September: Erika L. Sanchez, *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*

18 September: Sanchez, *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*

20 September: Sanchez, *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*

#### WEEK FIVE:

23 September: Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home*

25 September: **Literary Form Assignment due**; Bechdel, *Fun Home*

27 September: **No class, instructor away**

#### WEEK SIX:

30 September: **No class, instructor away**

2 October: Bechdel, *Fun Home*

4 October: Eve L. Ewing, *Electric Arches*

#### WEEK SEVEN:

7 October: Ewing, *Electric Arches*  
9 October: Ewing, *Electric Arches*  
11 October: Ocean Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*

WEEK EIGHT:

14 October: Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*  
16 October: Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*  
18 October: Claudia Rankine, *Citizen*

WEEK NINE:

21 October: Rankine, *Citizen*  
23 October: Rankine, *Citizen*  
25 October: Layli Long Soldier, *Whereas*

WEEK TEN:

28 October: **Statement of Aesthetic Criteria Due;** Long Soldier, *Whereas*  
30 October: Long Soldier, *Whereas*  
1 November: Maggie Nelson, *The Argonauts*

WEEK ELEVEN:

4 November: Nelson, *The Argonauts*  
6 November: Nelson, *The Argonauts*  
8 November: Nelson, *The Argonauts*

WEEK TWELVE:

11 November: **No class, instructor away**  
13 November: **Popular Culture Assignment;** Hanif Abdurraqib, *They Can't Kill Us Until They Kill Us*  
15 November: Abdurraqib, *They Can't Kill Us Until They Kill Us*

WEEK THIRTEEN:

18 November: Abdurraqib, *They Can't Kill Us Until They Kill Us*  
20 November: Solmaz Sharif, *Look*  
22 November: Sharif, *Look*

WEEK FOURTEEN:

25 November: Sharif, *Look*  
27 November: **No class, Thanksgiving**  
29 November: **No class, Thanksgiving**

WEEK FIFTEEN:

2 December: **Final Paper due;** Discussion: Where are we at?  
4 December: Discussion: Where are we at?

**Note:** You are responsible for finding out about any changes that I make to this schedule of readings while you are away from class.

### **English 3387 Reading Survey for Major Works:**

*For each of the nine book-length works on the course, you are required to complete and turn in the following brief survey on the day we begin talking about the book in class. Please answer each question in complete sentences. You may not have answers for all questions every time but do your best to answer all five.*

1. Name at least one thing that you learned from this text. (Of course, you may list more than one.) Differentiate between objective information (e.g. “Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar”) and more nuanced epiphanies (e.g. “The narrator of this novel dramatized the stress of being a representative for an entire ethnic population when interacting with white characters”).
2. Name any vocabulary or cultural references you attained from this reading, with an definition or explanation for each.
3. Name something you found stylistically difficult about this text.
4. Name at least one thing you already thought or believed that this text confirmed for you.
5. Name something about this text that opposed something you believe or challenged an idea fundamental to how you see the world.



## Extra Credit Assignments:

If you are interested in earning extra credit, you may attend any of the following events or view or read or listen to (on your own time) any of the following films or supplementary texts or recordings, and **write a one page, single-spaced response paper** that offers a brief summary of the event/film/text/recording, and two or three personal observations from you explaining how you understand the event/film/text/recording's relationship to ideas we are discussing in this course. You may complete **two** of these response papers throughout the term, for **2.5% extra credit each**.

### EVENTS:

*Sexism* | Cinema Film Series at Alamo Drafthouse (tickets are available from the Alamo website):

- *Middle of Nowhere* (4 September);
- *Blockers* (2 October); *The*
- *Miseducation of Cameron Post* (6 November);
- *Desperately Seeking Susan* (4 December)

Reginald Dwayne Betts campus reading (November)

francine j. harris campus reading (TBA)

LHUCA Literary Series Reading (8 November at Louis Hopkins Underwood Center for the Arts, 511 Ave K)

### FILMS:

(**Note:** You need to obtain/rent/stream and view these films on your own time.)

*Pariah*, dir. Dee Rees

*The Farewell*, dir. Lulu Wang

*The Death and Life of Marsha P. Johnson*, dir. David France

### RECORDINGS:

(**Note:** You need to obtain/stream these on your own time.)

Kevin Abstract, *ARIZONA BABY*

Mitski, *Puberty 2*

Gyasi Ross, *Iskootsik (Before Here Was Here)*

Generación Suicida, *Reflejos*

Vijay Iyer Sextet, *Far From Over*

**READINGS (Note:** Since these are longer, and require more time, one paper on any of the following books will count as two extra credit papers and receive a 5% addition):

Reginald Dwayne Betts, *Bastards of the Reagan Era*

Franny Choi, *Soft Science*

francine j. harris, *Play Dead*

Kathleen Winter, *I Will Not Kick My Friends*

Ibram X. Kendi, *How to Be An Antiracist*