Sovereign Bodies: Decolonization and Indigeneity

Course Description

This course focuses on the writing and revision of critical essays, using Modern Language Association (MLA) formatting and style. Students will write multiple papers throughout the semester as well as one longer, substantial academic paper (to be preceded by a formal proposal and annotated bibliography), based on the topics covered in class and students’ own independent research, and engaged with issues of ethics and positionality.

We will be looking at the work of Indigenous writers of color, in particular the work of five Native North American and Pacific Islander novelists and theorists. Focusing on issues of sovereignty and sexuality, gender and geography, nation and narration, we will examine transnational critical and creative frameworks for decolonization both on Turtle Island (Oklahoma, Alta California) and in the Pacific (Hawai‘i, Aotearoa).

We will examine both the impact of European Christianity, imperialism, capitalism, and heteropatriarchies on the lives, lands, and bodies of Native peoples, and how intimacy, identity, activism/organizing, and genealogies/history/herstory play a role in the reconstituting of self, family, tribe, and nation. In addition to analyzing national projects of revitalization and revivification, we will look at how memory and language are interwoven, how bloodlines and tribal identities are tied to chants and oral traditions, how writers intentionally structure their narratives and situate their characters in terms of kinship, and how competing conceptions of time and space, stewardship and ownership, race and mixed race, exist with and compete against one another. Lastly, we will examine the ways in which corporeal territories, both human and geographic, are mapped and then remapped by the European colonizer and by Indigenous decolonial subjects.

Using ecowomanist, indigenist, and queer of color lenses, we will ask ourselves the following: What are the connections between land and body? Between the past, the present, and the possible future? How are time and place/space/distance and nearness negotiated in Aboriginal texts? How are the bodies of women of color and queer people of color gendered in relation to European patriarchy? How are they classed, raced, and sexualized? At the core of these works are issues of language and memory. How are the histories and herstories of the Pacific and North América connected with one another? How do narratives compete? How do they interweave and mutually interform? And how are artistic and academic endeavours made by queer and womanist artists of color crucial to the project of decolonization? By situating Indigenous cultural production within First Nations frameworks of analysis and reception, we will see how writing can serve as a form of resistance and reclamation, a means of decolonization. Imaginative and material declarations of sovereignty.
Class Participation

Class meets on Mondays and Wednesdays from 2-3:15pm in Boylan 3153. Students are expected to attend all class sessions and be on time. Excessive tardiness will lower your grade. Two lates equal one absence. Students who miss more than four class sessions will not pass the course. Students are expected to have done the reading for each session, completed their assignments for the week, and be ready to discuss the literature. Students are actively encouraged to participate in classroom discussions. We will not meet on Wednesday, February 12, 2003 and Monday, February 17, 2003 as they are campus holidays. We will also not meet on Wednesday, April 16, 2003, Monday, April 21, 2003, and Wednesday, April 23, 2003 as all three days are during Spring Break. We will, however, be meeting on Tuesday, April 15, 2003 as classes will be following a Wednesday schedule. The last regularly scheduled class will be on Wednesday, May 14, 2003. A final session will be held on Friday, May 23, 2003 from 1-3pm in a location to be disclosed later.

Office Hours

I am available to meet with students on Mondays from 12-2pm in my office, Boylan 2311. Students can also leave messages in my mailbox in the English Department, Boylan 2308.

Written Assignments

Students will be expected to complete written assignments for each week of the course. Papers are due at the beginning of class. All assignments must be typed, double-spaced, and stapled, in twelve-point font and with one-inch margins. The student’s name, course name/number, the instructor’s name, the semester/year, the number of the assignment, and the date due should be on the top left-hand side of the first page. The four short essays and the final research paper should be, respectively, 3-5 pages and 8-10 pages (excluding the bibliography) in length. Late papers will be penalized and marked down one letter grade for each day they are late.

Grading

Class participation will constitute 25% of a student’s grade, four short essays 50%, and the final research paper an additional 25%. Students must receive passing marks in all three areas in order to pass the class. Grades for the course will range from A+ to C-, NC (No Credit), and F. Students who successfully complete all requirements for the course will receive a grade between A+ to C-. Students who complete all requirements, but who earn below a C- average, will receive a grade of NC. These students will be allowed to repeat English 2 the following semester. Students who do not complete all requirements for the course will receive an F. Therefore, it is in students’ best interest to complete all requirements for the course even if they are not currently receiving a grade of C- or higher.
Required Texts

The following books are available at Shakespeare & Co., located off-campus at 14 Hillel Place, between Campus Road and Flatbush Avenue. Their phone number is (718) 434-5326.


Suggested Reading

The following texts are suggested for those students interested in reading additional work by Indigenous authors, and for those who could benefit from studying more fully critical approaches to First Nations/Pacific Islander literatures. Students are also encouraged to look at other books, critical and creative, by the required authors, as it will aid them in their research and writing.


Authors

Kiana Davenport was raised in the Kalihi district of Honolulu, Hawai‘i. A Kanaka Maoli and Anglo fiction writer, she is author of two novels, *Shark Dialogues* and *Song of the Exile*. Her writing has appeared in *Intersecting Circles: The Voices of Hapa Women in Poetry and Prose*. She has been a Visiting Writer at Wesleyan University, as well as a Fiction Fellow at Harvard-Radcliffe’s Bunting Institute. Previously New York-based, she lives in Boston and Hawai‘i.

Cathie Dunsford was born in 1953 in Aotearoa. A queer Maori (Nga Puhii), Hawai‘ian, and European poet and novelist, she is director of Dunsford Publishing Consultants and teaches Writing/Publishing at Auckland University. Currently on the editorial board of *International Lesbian Review of Books*, she is the editor of five women’s anthologies, and the author of four novels, *Cowrie, The Journey Home/Te Haerenga Kainga, Manawa Toa/Heart Warrior*, and *Song of the Selkies*, as well as a poetry collection, *Survivors/Überlebende*. Her work has also appeared in *Bamboo Ridge, Nga Uri a Papatuanuku/The Descendants of the Earth Mother/Die Nachkommen der Erdmutter: Poems and Short Stories by Maori Women Writers*, and *Te Ao Marama: Contemporary Maori Writing, Volume V*. A new book of poetry, *Dreamcatcher/Dichter Träumerisch*, as well as *Ao Toa/Earth Warriors*, her next novel, are both forthcoming.

Greg Sarris grew up in and around Santa Rosa, California. A queer Pomo, Miwok, Pilipino, and Ashkenazi Jewish theorist, fiction writer, memoirist, and playwright, he is Professor of English at University of California, Los Angeles, and currently teaches at the Institute for Diversity in the Arts at Stanford University. He is the author of *Watermelon Nights, Grand Avenue, Mabel McKay: Weaving the Dream*, and *Keeping Slug Woman Alive: A Holistic Approach to American Indian Texts*, as well as the editor of *The Sound of Rattles and Clappers: A Collection of New California Indian Writing*. His plays include *Mission Indians and Seagulls*, and his work has also appeared in the anthology, *Contemporary Fiction by Filipinos in America*. He is currently serving his fifth term as Chairman of his tribe, the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria.

Linda Tuhiwai Te Rina Smith is a Maori writer, mother, and researcher of Ngati Awa and Ngati Porou descent. Currently an Associate Professor in Education and Director of the International Research Institute for Maori and Indigenous Education at the University of Auckland in Aotearoa, she is the author of *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, and the co-editor of *Myths and Realities: Schooling in New Zealand* and *A Civilising Mission?: Perceptions and Representations of the New Zealand Native Schools System*. The editor of *Te Pua: Journal of Maori Women’s Writing* for over a decade, her work has also appeared in *Mānoa* and the anthologies, *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision* and *Te Ao Marama: Contemporary Maori Writing, Volume V*. She is a member of Te Matawhanui: National Organisation of Maori University Teachers.

Craig S. Womack was born in 1960 and grew up in Martínez, California. A queer Mvskoke/Cherokee poet, essayist, novelist, and theorist, he is Associate Professor of English at the University of Oklahoma, and the author of *Drowning in Fire* and *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism*. His work has also appeared in *Earth Song, Sky Spirit, As We Are Now: Mixblood Essays on Race and Identity, News from Indian Country, Studies in American Indian Literatures, Callaloo, Christopher Street*, and *The James White Review*. 
Schedule

M 1/27  In Class: Introduction / Syllabus Review
Read: LTS pp. 1-18 Introduction


M 2/3  Read: CD pp. 1-64

W 2/5  Read: CD pp. 65-123
Essay 1: How is Cowrie’s journey of coming into her lesbianism tied to that of reclaiming her heritage? How are land and body connected in Dunsford’s work?

M 2/10  Essay 1: 1st Draft Due for Peer Review Session

W 2/12  No Class (Campus Holiday)

M 2/17  No Class (Campus Holiday)
Note: Tomorrow is the last day to drop a class.

W 2/19  Essay 1: 2nd Draft Due for Instructor
Read: KD pp. 105-179

M 2/24  Essay 1: 2nd Draft Returned
Read: KD pp. 180-232

W 2/26  Essay 1: Final Draft Due for Instructor
Read: KD pp. 233-331

M 3/3  Essay 1: Final Draft Returned
Read: KD pp. 332-377

W 3/5  Read: KD pp. 378-480
Essay 2: What is Kiana Davenport saying about history/herstory, mixed heritage, and blood? Elders and descendents?

M 3/10  Essay 2: 1st Draft Due for Peer Review Session
W 3/12  Essay 2: 2nd Draft Due for Instructor  
    Read: CW pp. 1-79

M 3/17  Essay 2: 2nd Draft Returned  
    Read: CW pp. 80-133

W 3/19  Essay 2: Final Draft Due for Instructor  
    Read: CW pp. 134-218

M 3/24  Essay 2: Final Draft Returned  
        Research Paper: Proposal Due for Peer Review Session  
    Read: CW pp. 219-247

W 3/26  Research Paper: Proposal Due for Instructor  
    Read: CW pp. 248-294  
        Essay 3: How is Josh’s story dependent on his Aunt Lucille’s? What are the antecedents for his relationship with Jimmy? And how does Womack place them within the larger context of Mvskoke history/herstory?

M 3/31  Research Paper: Proposal Returned  
        Essay 3: 1st Draft Due for Peer Review Session  

W 4/2  Essay 3: Final Draft Due for Instructor  
    Read: GS pp. 1-92

M 4/7  Essay 3: Final Draft Returned  
        Research Paper: Annotated Bibliography Due for Instructor  
    Read: GS pp. 93-142  
        Note: Tomorrow is the last day to withdraw from a class.

W 4/9  Read: GS pp. 143-224

M 4/14  Research Paper: Annotated Bibliography Returned  
    Read: GS pp. 225-249

T 4/15  Read: GS pp. 250-425  
        Essay 4: What is wished for at the end of Watermelon Nights? What does Sarris suggest might be an antidote to centuries and generations of poison?

W 4/16  No Class (Spring Break)

M 4/21  No Class (Spring Break)
W 4/23  No Class (Spring Break)
M 4/28  Essay 4: 1st Draft Due for Peer Review Session
W 4/30  Essay 4: Final Draft Due for Instructor
M 5/5   Essay 4: Final Draft Returned
W 5/7   Research Paper: Final Draft Due for Instructor
M 5/12  Research Paper: Final Draft Returned
W 5/14  Last Day of Class
         In Class: Course Review and Feedback
F 5/23  Final Session