Decolonial Poetics :: Decolonial Rhetorics

This course is a reading- and writing-intensive course with a focus on race and ethnicity in the Américas, in particular Canada, the U.S., and its colonies. We’ll be reading the work of writers of color in the Américas, in particular queer poets of color and women of color poets, reading and writing critical and autobiographical essays in regards to their work, as well as writing poems, and workshopping our various compositions in class. Throughout the semester students will be asked to reflect upon their work, that of their peers, and that of the artists and critics we are reading, with the goal of improving their productive and analytical skills through these simultaneous and recursive processes.

Throughout the course we will be grappling with key questions: How are stories told? How are poems and other written texts made? What is being argued in these various texts, and how it is being argued? How can creative works be critical and critical works be creative or artistic? What do race and class, gender and sexuality, writing and language have to do with healing and the project of decolonization? And how can the U.S., Canada, and the Américas as a whole be known differently (and perhaps more accurately) through the lens of these writers and our own writings and discussions?

Recognizing that people of color of multiple sexualities and genders have contributed to the struggle for decolonization, and recognizing that truly effective decolonial efforts must not only address issues of gender and sexuality but see them as integral parts of both the process of colonization and decolonization, this course prioritizes the perspectives, experiences, voices, and critical and creative work of women of color and queer people of color. Within this, we will be focusing on queer and womanist poetics of color and the process of decolonization with the hope of understanding and articulating what decolonial poetics are, how they function, and how they support and embody decolonial movement. As such, in this course we will be focusing on the contributions of queer/female poets, writers, artists, theorists, and activists of mono- and multiracial Pacific Islander, Arab/Middle Eastern, Native, Asian, Latina/o, and African descent living within the colonial reaches/territorial confines of the U.S. and Canada.

In addition to reading books and excerpts of books, we will also be listening to CDs, watching relevant videos, checking out websites and online sound files and interviews, and engaging with visual art and the space of museums as both stimuli/sources of inspiration and other forms with which to dialogue creatively/critically.
Throughout the course we will be looking at the following topics and issues: colonization and decolonization; racism and white supremacy; womanisms and queerness; (trans)gender (identity); heterosexism and queerphobia; misogyny and patriarchy; classism; capitalism; poor/working class lives; women of color realities; queer people of color realities; multiraciality and mixed-race identities; notions of the U.S. and Canada; dis/ability; ableism; decolonial erotics; the role and place of the body (and issues of corporeality in general); healing; slavery; genocide; war; imperialism; violence; spirituality and religion; land; diaspora; im/migration; Indigeneity; memory; the use of culturally-specific images and allusions; eth(n)ics; multilinguality; non-European forms; history/herstory; and individual and collective liberation.

Further, we will examine how the above intersect with issues of writing, reading, analysis, and production, such as: the role of language; argumentation and persuasion; diction; editing, craft, and revision; how to give public readings; submitting work for publication; research skills; narrative structure and sequencing; repetition and innovation; invention; audience (analysis and resistance); distribution, circulation, and delivery; the audio/oral/spoken qualities of the written and performed word; mixed compositions and learning across/through genres; (rethinking) grammar, syntax, and punctuation; how to do critical readings of texts (written and otherwise); visual poetics; pedagogy; digital and electronic interfaces; humour; improv; movement; sound; the visual (more broadly); the somatic; and the connections between poetry and prose, text and context, page and performance, the individual and the collective/historical/herstorial.

The course's pedagogy is informed by traditions in grassroots social justice organizing, decolonial theatre and performance, and Ethnic and Women’s Studies. As part of this work, we will be engaged with the prioritization of oppressed voices, interruption of oppression, application of our work to the larger world for the purposes of social justice, integration of our own personal and collective/histor-herstorial narratives, and utilization of movement and performance as means of both producing and critiquing texts.

**Class Schedule**

Class meets on Mondays and Wednesdays from 8-9:50am in North Kedzie 134. We will not meet on Monday, January 17, 2005 as it is a campus holiday, nor will we have class on Monday, March 7, 2005 and Wednesday, March 9, 2005 due to spring break. The last regularly scheduled class will be on Wednesday, April 27, 2005. The final session of the course will be on Wednesday, May 4, 2005 from 7:45-9:45am.

**Office Hours**

I am available to meet with students on Mondays from 10am-12pm in my office in Bessey 281. I can also meet with students outside these hours by appointment. Students can also email me or leave messages for me in my mailbox in the Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures Department mailroom in Bessey 229.
Accessibility

Michigan State University complies with all federal and state laws and regulations regarding discrimination, including the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. If you have a disability that may affect your performance in the class, you should register with the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities to receive assistance.

Class Participation

Students are expected to attend all class sessions and be on time. Excessive tardiness or leaving early will lower your grade; each instance constitutes a partial absence. Two partial absences equal one full absence. Students who miss more than four class sessions will fail the course.

Students are expected to do the reading for each session, complete all assignments, and be ready for class discussion. As cell phones and pagers disrupt class discussion, they must be turned off for the duration of class. Students are expected to complete all drafts and be prepared for peer review. Students are also required to schedule a half-hour conference with the instructor once during the semester to discuss their writing and progress.

Some texts for the course are online; for these texts, students can type the URL listed or go to ANGEL [http://www.angel.msu.edu], an online course site, and click the appropriate hyperlink to take them there. Also on ANGEL are required PDF files for students to read/view. Message boards exist on ANGEL for each of the main assignments, as well as for the course’s texts and classroom discussion. While posting on these message boards is not required, it is one way to improve one’s class participation grade for the course.

Class participation, both in class and online, is a significant portion of the final grade.

Grades

Class participation constitutes 20% of a student’s final grade. There are four main assignments for the course; each constitutes 20% of the final grade. In order to receive full credit, all drafts must be of high quality and be submitted on time, and all peer review sessions must be attended.

Assignments will be marked down 1.0 for each class session they are late. Failure to complete a draft or being absent/unprepared for peer review will result in the assignment being marked down 1.0.

Plagiarism is not allowed. First instances will result in failure for the assignment. Second instances will result in failure for the course.

All grades for the course are on a 4.0 scale.
Assignments

Assignments are due at the beginning of class. Assignments must be typed, double-spaced, stapled, in twelve-point font, and with one-inch margins. The student’s name, course number/name, semester/year, due date, and assignment name should be on the top left-hand side of the first page. (The exceptions to this rule are the portfolio covers and poems, for which only the student’s name is needed.) There are four main assignments for the course:

1. Poems: Poems (12 total, 1 per assigned week)
   Process Paper (12 total, 1 per assigned week)
   [Where is the poem at in its process? How does it achieve the goal(s) of the assignment? Where does it still need work? What does it make you think about writing? How is it connected to and/or influenced by the readings?]

2. Portfolio I: Cover
   Poems (3 revised)
   Process Paper (5 pages)
   [1 page on each revised poem, re-answering the original questions, and also describing the process of revision, + 2 page general review overall of poetic work thus far.]

3. Research Paper: Proposal (2 pages)
   [Why have you chosen these 2 poets? What is your thesis? Is it based on a theme or aesthetic in their work? Who is your audience? Why is your paper important? How is it relevant to the project of decolonization?]
   Annotated Bibliography (6 sources)
   [MLA formatted. 3 from course, 3 from your own research. Provide a brief summary of each. Describe how each is related to your topic and how you plan to use it in your paper.]
   Research Paper (6 pages, excluding the bibliography)
   [MLA formatted. No annotations.]

4. Portfolio II: Cover
   Poems (5 revised)
   Process Paper (8 pages)
   [1 page on each revised poem, re-answering the original questions, and also describing the process of revision, + 3 page general review overall of poetic work thus far.]

Students are required to present three revised poems and process paragraphs to the workshop over the course of the semester. These are due the class session prior to their being workshopped. Sufficient copies must be provided for the class. Students’ peers will take home the student texts, read them, provide written feedback, and be prepared to discuss them the following Wednesday. Poet-writers will be evaluated for the quality of their work/presentation and peers for the quality of feedback given. Grades for this activity will be factored into the class participation grade.
Required Texts


Required supplemental texts are listed beginning on page seven of the syllabus and in the schedule section of the syllabus as assigned. Students are also encouraged, but not required, to purchase dictionaries and thesauri if they do not already have them.

Authors

Lisa D. Chávez was born in Los Angeles and grew up in Fairbanks. A Chicana mestiza poet, mother, and memoirist, she is the author of two books of poetry, Destruction Bay and In an Angry Season. Her work has also appeared in ¡Floricanto, Sí! A Collection of Latina Poetry and The Floating Borderlands: Twenty-five Years of U.S. Hispanic Literature. Currently, she is Associate Professor of Creative Writing in the English Department at the University of New Mexico. Her next book, An Atlas of Desire, is forthcoming.

Michelle Cliff was born in 1946 in Jamaica and grew up there and in New York. A Jamaican lesbian writer of African/European descent, she is the author of two books of poetry, *Claiming an Identity They Taught Me to Despise* and *The Land of Look Behind*, two short story collections, *Bodies of Water* and *The Store of a Million Things*, and three novels, *Abeng*, *No Telephone to Heaven*, and *Free Enterprise*. A new novel, *Into the Interior*, and an essay collection, *Apocalypse*, are forthcoming. Her work has also appeared in *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* and *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color*. She has taught at Trinity College, the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, New School University, and Johannes Gutenberg Universitä t. She currently lives in Santa Cruz.

Sia Figiel was born in 1967 in Sāmoa, where she lives. A Sāmoan/Polish writer, teacher, performance artist, painter, and mother, she is author of the novels, *where we once belonged* and *they who do not grieve*, performance/prose poetry books, *The Girl in the Moon Circle* and *To a Young Artist in Contemplation*, and co-author of the CD, *Terenesia: amplified poetry and songs*.

Joy Harjo was born in 1951 in Tulsa and raised in Oklahoma. A queer Mvskoke, Cherokee, African American, and European poet, fiction writer, editor, musician, and (grand)mother, she is author of seven books of poetry, *What Moon Drove Me to This?*, *She Had Some Horses*, *Secrets from the Center of the World*, *In Mad Love and War*, *The Woman Who Fell from the Sky*, *A Map to the Next World*, and *How We Became Human*, the children’s book, *The Good Luck Cat*, as well as editor of *Reinventing the Enemy’s Language: Contemporary Native Women’s Writing of North America*. Her CDs include *Letter from the End of the Twentieth Century* and *Native Joy for Real*. She lives in Honolulu and teaches at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Akilah Oliver was born in St. Louis and raised in South Central Los Angeles. A queer African American poet, prose writer, parent, and teacher, she is the author of two books of poetry, *the she said dialogues: flesh memory* and *An Arriving Guard of Angels: Thusly Coming to Greet*. Her work has also appeared in *Invocation L.A.: Urban Multicultural Poetry*, *Blood Whispers: L.A. Writers on AIDS, Volume 2*, *High Risk 2: Writings on Sex, Death, and Subversion*, and *Civil Disobediences: Poetics and Politics in Action*. Oliver was a member of The Sacred Naked Nature Girls, a multicultural women’s performance group, and has taught elementary, middle, and high school, as well as at Naropa University and the University of Colorado at Boulder. She lives in Boulder.


Rita Wong was born in 1968, grew up in Calgary, and lives in Vancouver. A queer/bi Chinese poet, she is the author of the book of poetry, *monkeypuzzle*, and a graduate student in the English Department at Simon Fraser University. Her work has appeared in *The Other Woman: Women of Colour in Contemporary Canadian Literature*, *Swallowing Clouds: An Anthology of Chinese-Canadian Poetry*, and *Millennium Messages: An Anthology of New Asian Canadian Expressions*. 
Required Supplemental Texts


Brant (Degonwadonti), Beth. “From the Inside — Looking at You.” *Writing as Witness.* Toronto: Women’s, 1994. 49-54.


---. “To Be or Not To Be Has Never Been the Question.” *Writing as Witness.* Toronto: Women’s, 1994. 75-82.


View online: [http://www.mujerarte.org/jpg/mayitas-gde.jpg](http://www.mujerarte.org/jpg/mayitas-gde.jpg)


View online: http://www.lanikaahumanu.com/thatnakedplace.shtml


Schedule

Week One
M 1/10  Read: Joy Harjo *A Map to the Next World* pp. 1-53
W 1/12  Read: Joy Harjo *A Map to the Next World* pp. 54-138

Week Two
M 1/17  No Class
W 1/19  Poem 1: Due for Instructor
Read: ANGEL Gamba Adisa/Audre Lorde “A Litany for Survival,” “The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action,” “Poetry Is Not a Luxury,” and Introduction and bell hooks “talking back” and “‘when i was a young soldier for the revolution’: coming to voice”

Week Three
M 1/24  Poem 1: Returned
In Class: Writing Center Orientation / Peer Review Workshop, 300 Bessey
W 1/26  Poem 2: Due for Instructor
In Class: Writing Workshop
Read: Lisa D. Chávez *In an Angry Season* pp. 1-33; ANGEL Cherríe Moraga “Art in América con Acento” and Beth Brant (Degonwadonti) “From the Inside — Looking at You”

Week Four
M 1/31  Poem 2: Returned
In Class: Library Research Workshop / Tour, Red Cedar Lobby
Read: Lisa D. Chávez *In an Angry Season* pp. 34-90
W 2/2  Poem 3: Due for Instructor
In Class: Writing Workshop
Read: Chrystos *Not Vanishing* pp. 1-55

Week Five
M 2/7  Poem 3: Returned
Research Paper: Proposal Due for Peer Review
Read: ANGEL Beth Brant (Degonwadonti) “To Be or Not To Be Has Never Been the Question,” “Recovery and Transformation,” and “Physical Prayers”
W 2/9  Research Paper: Proposal Due for Instructor
Poem 4: Due for Instructor
In Class: Writing Workshop
Read: Chrystos *Not Vanishing* pp. 56-105; ANGEL Chrystos “Gathering Words”
Week Six

M 2/14 **Research Paper:** Proposal Returned
Poem 4: Returned
Read: *ANGEL* Alice Walker “Womanist” and “In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens”
Joanna Kadi “Writing as Resistance, Writing as Love” and Preface, and June Jordan
“A Far Stretch Well Worth the Effort”

W 2/16 **Poem 5:** Due for Instructor
In Class: Writing Workshop and Ruth Forman “Stoplight Politics”
Read: *ANGEL* Mohja Kahf “My Grandmother Washes Her Feet in the Sink of the
Bathroom at Sears,” Joanna Kadi “Working-Class Culture: not an oxymoron” and
“Stupidity ‘Deconstructed,’” and Aurora Levins Morales “Certified Organic
Intellectual: On Not Being Postmodern”

Week Seven

M 2/21 **Poem 5:** Returned
**Portfolio I:** Due for Peer Review
**Research Paper:** Annotated Bibliography Due for Peer Review
Read: Rita Wong *monkeypuzzle* pp. 1-64; *ANGEL* Janice Gould “History Lesson” and
Beth Brant (Degonwadonti) “A Long Story”

W 2/23 **Portfolio I:** Due for Instructor
**Poem 6:** Due for Instructor
In Class: Writing Workshop
Read: *ANGEL* Aurora Levins Morales “False Memories: Trauma and Liberation”;
Rita Wong *monkeypuzzle* pp. 65-109 and Larissa Lai “An E-mail Interview with Rita
Wong”

Week Eight

M 2/28 **Portfolio I:** Returned
**Poem 6:** Returned
**Research Paper:** Annotated Bibliography Due for Instructor
Read: *ANGEL* Gamba Adisa/Audre Lorde “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power, ”
Aurora Levins Morales “Radical Pleasure: Sex and the End of Victimhood,” and
Haunani-Kay Trask “Waimānalo Morning” and “Into Our Light I Will Go Forever”

W 3/2 **Research Paper:** Annotated Bibliography Returned
**Poem 7:** Due for Instructor
In Class: Writing Workshop
Read: *ANGEL* Francisco X. Alarcón “Dialéctica del amor / Dialectics of Love” and
Gregory Scofield “Divided,” “Call Me Brother,” and “Ayahkwêw’s Lodge”; Gregory
Scofield *Love Medicine and One Song/Sâkihtowin-Maskihkiy Ékwa Pêyak-Nikamowin* and Linda Richards “An Interview with Gregory Scofield”

Spring Break

M 3/7 No Class
W 3/9 No Class
Week Nine
M 3/14  Poem 7: Returned
Research Paper: 1st Draft Due for Peer Review
Read: ANGEL Cherríe Moraga “Queer Aztlan: the Re-formation of Chicano Tribe,”
bell hooks “homophobia in black communities,” lawrence dewyatt abrams “Rise,”
and Essex Hemphill “Does Your Mama Know about Me?” and “In an Afternoon Light”
W 3/16  Poem 8: Due for Instructor
Read: Lani Ka’ahumanu “Hapa Haole Wahine” and “That Naked Place”

Week Ten
M 3/21  Poem 8: Returned
Research Paper: 2nd Draft Due for Instructor
In Class: Keali’i Reichel Kawaiipunahele, Lei Hali’a, E Ö Mai, meleleana, and
Ke’alaokamaile and Qwo-Li Driskill – Poetry Reading and Discussion
Read: Akiolah Oliver the she said dialogues: flesh memory pp. 1-39
W 3/23  Research Paper: 2nd Draft Returned
Poem 9: Due for Instructor
In Class: Writing Workshop
Read/View: Akiolah Oliver the she said dialogues: flesh memory pp. 40-85; ANGEL
Marvin K. White “what you mixed with?” and “making black history” and Alice
Walker “Everyday Use”; Yan María Castro MIS KA’AN Ú (“Claridad en el horizonte
cuando va saliendo la luna”)

Week Eleven
M 3/28  Poem 9: Returned
In Class: Kresge Art Museum
Read: ANGEL Emanuel Xavier “Risk,” “Magdalena,” and “Deliverance,” and
Michiyo Fukaya “For Men Who Want to Know,” “Untitled,” “It’s Really Welfare,”
“The Rapist,” and “Mayumi”
W 3/30  Research Paper: 3rd Draft Due for Peer Review
Poem 10: Due for Instructor
In Class: Writing Workshop and Michèlle T. Clinton “Solitude Ain’t Loneliness” and
Naomi Shihab Nye “Blood”
Read: ANGEL Elmaz Abinader “Preparing for Occupation”; Hanan Masri “untitled
poem” and jim saliba “memory” and “today i do such simple things”; ANGEL Shailja
Patel “Death And Other Lovers” and “What We Keep,” R. Zamora Linmark “They
Like You Because You Eat Dog;” Janice Mirikitani “Recipe,” Suheir Hammad “first
writing since;” and Naomi Shihab Nye “Making a Fist”

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Week Twelve
M 4/4 Research Paper: Final Draft Due for Instructor
Poem 10: Returned
Read: Michelle Cliff *The Land of Look Behind* pp. 1-56
W 4/6 Research Paper: Final Draft Returned
Poem 11: Due for Instructor
In Class: Writing Workshop
Read: Michelle Cliff *The Land of Look Behind* pp. 57-119

Week Thirteen
M 4/11 Poem 11: Returned
Read: Sia Figiel *The Girl in the Moon Circle* pp. vii-40
W 4/13 Poem 12: Due for Instructor
Portfolio II: Due for Peer Review
Read: Sia Figiel *The Girl in the Moon Circle* pp. 41-89

Week Fourteen
M 4/18 Poem 12: Returned
Read: Sia Figiel *The Girl in the Moon Circle* pp. 90-132
W 4/20 Portfolio II: Due for Instructor
Read: ANGEL Beth Brant (Degonwadonti) “Writing Life” and Aurora Levins Morales “Walking the Talk, Dancing to the Music: The Sustainable Activist Life”

Week Fifteen
M 4/25 Portfolio II: Returned
W 4/27 Last Day of Class

Finals Week
W 5/4 Final Session