

Latino Literature
(The Diversity of Identities and Experience)
ENGL 268
Fall 2008
Meeting: TR 10:30-11:45 in LIB 209

Professor Michael Garcia
304 Root Hall
Phone: 859-4612
Office Hours: TR 11:45-12:15 and 1:00-2:00

Course Description from the Registration Catalog

This course will explore issues, themes, and social positions common to U.S. Latino and Latina literature. We will also consider the great diversity within that shared literary rubric. As a class, we will reflect on and connect personal experiences, assumptions, and thoughts to the larger social conversations and relevant social, historical, and political contexts in which Latino literature and identity are situated. The course will involve writing, close readings, literary analysis, and participation in class discussions.

Expanded Course Description

Your race, class, and gender are three of the things that people most notice when meeting you for the first time. The high visibility of this holy (or unholy) trinity of traits in American society makes race, class, and gender major themes in Latino literature in America. This course will explore these and other common themes but it will also consider the many differences among works that are commonly placed together under the umbrella term or genre of Latino literature. Through works of fiction and nonfiction this course will address issues of Latino identity and experience from different perspectives and backgrounds: Cuban, Mexican, Dominican, and Puerto Rican.

We will start the semester with readings from historical, journalistic, academic, and other sources that will help us to ground the literary texts in social and historical context. For the texts in this class cannot, without great loss, be decontextualized from the sociohistorical, economic, and occupational backgrounds of the persons and characters that they are written by and about. In addition to situating texts in their relevant social, historical, political, and other critical contexts, we will pay particular attention to rhetorical and stylistic choices made at the prose level.

Course Objectives

In this course you will:

- Gain familiarity with key texts and themes in Latino Literature.
- Disrupt monolithic expectations about Latino Literature, embracing the diversity of ethnic authors and experience.
- Read texts closely.
- Consider the multiple levels of context in which words and texts are meaningful.
- Improve critical thinking and writing skills.

In this course you will refine your writing skills. Strive to:

- Read all writing closely, including as the toughest reader of your own work.
- Develop a clear, precise, and well-defined thesis statement.
- Develop and support your thesis with evidence and persuasive reasoning.
- Subordinate additional ideas and commentary to your main argument.
- Structure your paragraphs optimally with clear and smooth transitions.
- Appreciate the nuances of diction.
- Mind the mechanics and grammar of formal written English.
- Revise as re-vision—writing as a process of discovery and critical thinking.

Course Requirements and Grading Breakdown

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| Paper #1 | 20% |
| Midterm Exam | 20% |
| Reading Response Journals | 20% |
| Final Paper | 20% |
| Class participation, pop quizzes, and attendance | 20% |

Required Texts

ENGL 268 Course Packet (Available at Campus Bookstore). Instructor, Michael Garcia
The Elements of Style by Strunk and White
Understanding and Writing about Literature by Aimee Pozorski

Latino Boom eds. John S. Christie and José B. Gonzalez (Pearson, 2006)
Chican@s in the Conversations eds. Elizabeth Rodriguez Kessler and Anne Perrin
 (Pearson, 2008).
Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America by Juan Gonzalez

House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros (Mexican) (Vintage, 1991)
Dreaming in Cuban by Cristina Garcia (Cuban) (Random House, 1992; Ballantine, 1993)
The Latin Deli by Judith Ortiz Cofer (Puerto Rican) (Norton, 1993, 1995)
Under the Feet of Jesus by Helena María Viramontes (Mexican) (Dutton, 1995; Plume,
 1996)
Drown by Junto Díaz (Dominican) (Riverhead, 1996, 1997)

Optional Texts

The Everyday Writer by Andrea A. Lunsford (Third Edition)

A Note on Text Editions

You must purchase all Required Texts for the course. Unfortunately, I cannot allow anyone to use (exclusively) an online version of any course text as this would leave you with no hard copy of the text with which to follow along in class. For the same reason—the alternate page numbering alone can impair your ability to follow along and fully participate in class discussion—it is important that you make every attempt to purchase the particular edition of each text that I have indicated above. That said, if you

have an alternate edition of the text, bringing it as a supplement to the edition that we are using in the class is a great idea and can greatly enrich our discussion of the text.

Film

Mi Familia

Books on Course Reserve

I have placed the following texts on two-hour reserve at the Daniel Burke Library. You will find the first group of titles on this course reserve list helpful for improving your writing and critical thinking skills.

WRITING BOOKS:

Writing without Teachers by Peter Elbow. 1998.

They Say/I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing by Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein

LATINO LITERATURE AND THEORY:

Identities: Race, Class, Gender, and Nationality eds. Linda Martín Alcoff and Eduardo Mendieta

Borderlands/La Frontera by Gloria Anzaldúa (Aunt Lute Books, 1987; 2nd ed. 1999)

Bridging Cultures: An Introduction to Chicano/Latino Studies, ed. Mario T. García

Hunger of Memory by Richard Rodriguez

A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America by Ronald Takaki. 1993.

Translation Nation by Héctor Tobar (Riverhead, 2005)

POSSIBLE FILMS ON RESERVE:

Mi Familia

Mambo Kings

Selena

A Day without a Mexican

Electronic Course Reserves

Over the course of the semester I may place materials on electronic course reserve through the campus library. These materials will be required reading.

Course Website

No course website is available at this time. If one is made available later in the semester, you will be given instructions on how to enroll in the site.

Writing Assignments

Paper 1: literary criticism on the first novel we read in class (4 pages).

Midterm Exam: **bring Blue Books** to class that day.

Reading Journal: staple together and submit all Reading Responses (10-20 pages).

Final Paper: literary criticism; choose one of the remaining full-length literary texts that we read in class and write on the topic of your choice (6 pages).

Reading Responses (later collected as Reading Response Journal)

Dated and double-spaced Reading Responses are due at the beginning of class each Monday. Each Response is to be one to two pages in length. (For the Reading Responses only [do *not* do this with other written assignments], print page two—if there is one—on the back side of page one. This way weekly Responses will consist of a single sheet of paper and there will be no stapling involved.) Hand in one copy to me and keep a second copy handy for your own consultation during class. Be prepared to read aloud from your Reading Responses during class. You will hand in a total of 10 Reading Responses. Nearer the end of the semester you will collect your Reading Responses into a single Reading Response Journal, assembled in chronological order (stapled, no binders).

Each week, you are to write about whatever literary text is on the syllabus (or announced in class) for that Monday. On occasion we may be reading a nonfiction text on that day, in which case—unless otherwise directed—that is what you will write about. Start by thinking deeply about the text yourself, and writing down the most insightful of those thoughts. Whenever you have space remaining, make an effort to respond to comments made during the previous week within the community of scholars that this class constitutes. That is, think of your Reading Responses as a way to both engage directly with the text itself and to also join the critical conversations (starting with those initiating in our own classroom) about that text.

To this end, I may at some point in the semester ask that weekly Reading Responses be submitted to a blog, chat group, or other online forum.

Note that I will not typically hand back weekly Reading Response entries. If handed in on time you will automatically receive half credit. Thus, if you have handed in all ten of your weekly Reading Response entries on time over the course of the semester, you will already have earned 50 percent of the total Reading Response Journal grade. Late Reading Response entries will not be accepted—**so, as with all assignments, turn in your Response the class day prior if you will be unavoidably absent on the due date**—and you will automatically lose the half credit that the Reading Response entry would have earned you.

Reading Response entries need not have the narrative and logical flow of an essay or other assigned paper. In fact, use this more informal venue to write more honestly and colloquially than you would when using the more elevated and aloof register of a formal paper. Refrain from plot summaries in your Reading Responses. Instead, get right to the pith of your own reactions to and insights about these texts. Why do these texts matter? (Why do they matter in our society? Why do they matter to you?) Try to express how you think and feel about these texts at the most intellectual and visceral levels. Which ones do you love, and which generate personal antipathy? And why?

Paper Formatting

All assignments handed in are to be in 12 point font, double-spaced, and paginated. As should go without saying, use normal margins. In the upper left-hand corner should appear, single-spaced, your name, the course number (ENGL 268), and the date—each having its own line. (For an illustration of how this format is laid out in the upper left-hand corner of the paper see page 27 in the Pozorski booklet.) Each paper should have a title. Center the title so that it will stand out better.

Buy a stapler. Any paper that you hand in should be stapled together in the upper left hand corner. Unstapled sheets get lost, and this may cause me to assume that you have only written half a paper.

Use MLA style citation: (<http://www.hamilton.edu/writing/printsources.html>). MLA style is compatible with the Hamilton College Style Sheet, which provides additional, indispensable information: (<http://www.hamilton.edu/writing/style>). All papers must have a Works Cited.

Assignments must be handed in *in class* on the day that they are due. Late assignments lose one letter grade for each day that they are late. Keep copies of all your work.

Expect papers to be shared with other class members for peer editing, group projects, and class discussion. Student papers might also be shown to other instructors, writing advisors, and the like. I will ask your permission first if using your work as a model paper to show students in other courses.

A word about content: your paper should offer your own unique ideas, insights, and arguments. Don't just repeat what we discussed in class. You can start with a topic that we discussed in class but your thesis must be your own. It should present the reader with *your* argument. This is one of the key ways in which a formal paper is different from your Reading Responses. In your Reading Responses, as less formal writing, I encourage you to engage with what has been said in previous class discussions. In a formal paper, the way to engage with larger scholarly and other conversations about the text is through citation. And in literary criticism, written sources are usually privileged over oral ones.

In your formal papers you will want to cite and interpret primarily passages from the literary text that you are writing about, and secondarily from sources such as academic journals in the field. Thus, the most compelling—not to mention most original—papers tend to explore topics and themes beyond those covered in class. That said, bear in mind that in this class you will always be writing about a particular literary text, and this will impose some natural boundaries on both the scope of the paper and your choice of paper topic.

As experienced writers, you already know that the secret to writing success is to start early. If you wait until the night before a paper is due before committing anything to paper, it will invariably not be a very good paper. Also know that you do not have to wait until we finish discussing a text in class before you can start writing about it. Indeed, this would be a disastrous strategy when writing Paper One, which is necessarily due early in the semester. Rather than relying on class lecture for your ideas, read the text on your own and start writing about it early. You can then use class discussion of the text as a tool to refine your thinking about what you have already written in drafts of your paper.

A Note on Evaluation

It is sometimes assumed that merely fulfilling the requirements for the course, or a particular assignment, merits a default grade of A. This is not the case. Simply fulfilling the minimum requirements for the course is likely to get you an average grade, which would be in the C range. Higher grades are based on the exceptional quality of your work. I also reward the development of your thought and writing whenever this is

apparent. Papers that offer particularly unique, compelling, or insightful arguments are almost certain to earn higher grades than most, as are papers that evince an exceptional degree of research and thought.

Particularly in the case of Reading Response Journals, which involve less formal writing, do NOT think of a grade of B or C (or whatever) on a Journal as having been derived by the “deducting” of points from what “began”—by virtue of merely having been handed in—as an A. This may be the case with a multiple choice test in, say, an introductory physics course, but it is not how writing is evaluated in most humanities courses. You might find the following breakdown helpful in orienting your expectations about what letter grades represent on all assignments in this course:

A—excellent overall

B—good with some excellent aspects

C—adequate

D—mostly adequate with some unacceptable aspects

F—unacceptable overall

Class Participation

This is a reading, writing, and discussion course, not a lecture course. Come to class prepared to talk about the text. Read the text closely, engaging in mock dialogue with the text as you read. Asking questions of the text as you go through it will bring you to class with many questions, observations, and arguments about the reading to share with the community of literary critics, readers, and writers that the class will provide.

Note that the model of class discussion that we are striving for is one in which you engage not only with the readings, but also with each other’s ideas. Keep in mind that mere volubility is no substitute for apt, substantive, and well thought out comments. In fact, since there is seldom enough time to do justice to each text or topic, brevity is often as important as clarity and precision whenever speaking to the rest of the class. That said, most students speak too little rather than too much. What we will strive for in this course is vibrant and robust class discussion in which everyone is fully engaged and participating.

I may occasionally require that you write 150-200 word pre-discussion notes to hand in before class. Or I may ask you to bring to class one or two discussion questions about the reading. In-class writing might also be assigned. And sometimes you may be asked to prepare a presentation, either individually or in small groups, for a subsequent class.

Pop quizzes may be given at any time. As long as you have read the text the quiz will be easy. Any detailed questions that I might ask will be readily answerable if you have read the text carefully. If, on the other hand, you are relying on Spark Notes, a website summary, the film version of the book, or someone else telling you the plot—instead of reading the text for yourself—you will expect to find the questions well beyond your grasp.

As a discussion course, attendance is critical. The first two absences will not be counted against you but all subsequent absences will negatively impact your grade in the course. The **two free absences should** easily cover medical, family, or other emergencies in most cases, so there is no need to present the instructor with “sick notes” or to make excuses for absences after the fact, though I may inquire about the nature of

prolonged absences. *Missing a total (cumulative, not just consecutive) of **three weeks** or more of class constitutes a failing grade in the course.* All students are responsible for announcements made in class as well as material covered in class. So if an absence is unavoidable, make arrangements with another student to find out what you missed in class.

Tardiness and leaving class early are disruptive to your fellow students. Realize that either may be counted as a full absence, particularly if the problem becomes excessive over the course of the semester. If you absolutely cannot complete the class without leaving for a drink of water, to use the restroom, or whatever, I only ask one thing of you: don't re-enter the classroom. Instead, in consideration of your fellow students, quietly collect all of your things and take them with you when you leave. This will likely be counted as an absence.

As a discussion class, open laptops are not allowed. Cell phones should be silenced and put away before class and may be confiscated for the duration of the class if used (including for texting) during class.

Office Hours and Email

I'd much rather see you and get to know you in person than as an email. As such, I encourage you to take full advantage of my office hours, whether for simple queries or more substantive questions and discussion. Email is a poor substitute for live interactions, which are both more fun and more productive. (And of the two, only office hours are appropriate for discussing paper ideas and thesis statements.) Feel free to drop by without an appointment anytime during scheduled office hours.

Documentation and Plagiarism

Obvious cases of academic misconduct such as plagiarism, cheating, or collusion constitute violations of the Hamilton Honor Code. In such cases the student will be referred to the Dean of Students.

A few words about plagiarism and documentation might be instructive. Though there are gray areas as to when one should cite and when a paraphrase is adequate, we all recognize blatant plagiarism when we see it. As for the gray areas, cite your sources. That is the simplest advice I can give you, and the hallmark of scholarly work. We all stand on the shoulders of giants; we all benefit from the ideas of others. Many of our best ideas are common knowledge, societally and globally shared. It is hard to imagine an idea that does not owe something to someone else's brilliant thoughts too. A class like this is partly about finding your own voice. When you write down the great ideas that others have undoubtedly thought before you, you should do so in your unique voice. If your great idea (or your agreement with some great idea, or the realization that somebody else has stolen your idea before you even thought of it) was inspired by a passage in a book you just read two days ago you will have to be more mindful of your wording. Your thinking and writing should be your own: make sure it hasn't been supplanted by the thought and phrasing of the book's author. **When in doubt, cite.** If your paraphrase is not clearly in your own words and voice—perhaps because the kernel of truth you wish to glean gets lost as you deviate from the original wording—then cite your source.

Documentation is particularly important when using online sources. Academic journals accessed online need to be cited. Ideas taken from other online sources also

need to be cited, particularly given the wide-ranging reliability of online sources. Papers that rely excessively on superficial web searches (such as simply paraphrasing websites that come up on a Google Search) are likely to receive a very low grade. Papers that engage in such shoddy scholarship without citing their sources are even more at risk.

Writing Center and Writing Resources

The Nesbitt-Johnston Writing Center is an academic support service available to all Hamilton College students. Check their website (<http://www.hamilton.edu/writing>) for hours, policies, and contact information. The Writing Center website is an indispensable resource whenever writing papers for this course. Here is one good starting point on their website: (http://www.hamilton.edu/writing/tips_guides.html). In addition to a library of helpful writing books, the writing center offers one-on-one assistance with writing.

Even if you do not visit the writing center, I encourage you to take advantage of the extensive writing resources available on their website.

Another indispensable resource is the Hamilton College Library. In addition to print resources, many literary resources are available online. To explore some of these you can click on “Academic Search Premier” or “LexisNexis Academic” from the library’s homepage (<http://onthehill.hamilton.edu/library/home.html>).

Special Accommodations

If you have a documented disability requiring academic adjustments or accommodations please bring me your documentation and speak with me during the first two weeks of class.

Course Schedule

The date that an item appears on the syllabus is the date that it is **due in class**. *Email submissions are not accepted without the prior approval of the instructor*, which will only be granted in extenuating circumstances. Reading assignments are usually listed first on each day. “CP” designates readings in the Course Packet. Readings are sometimes referred to by their title, and sometimes just by author name.

Lengthier readings will be spread out over several days but informed class discussion requires familiarity with the entire text from the first day that it appears on the syllabus. The syllabus sometimes indicates when we will be focusing class discussion on a particular section of text. I may periodically announce in class a chapter or section to pay particular attention to for the next class. As you have probably already discovered in your academic careers, staying ahead of the readings is much more productive and less stressful than falling behind on them.

Week 1 THE FUN BEGINS: INTRO TO EL MUNDO LATINO

8/26

8/28 First Day of Class. Course Intro; (CP): Student Questionnaire

Week 2 OVERVIEW

9/2 (CP): Grossenbacher, Dunbar-Odom, Lye. **Quiz on Syllabus**

9/4 *Boom* (Intro) 1-43; Pozorski chapters 1-4; (CP): Ramage, Colomb

Week 3 CUBANOS

9/9 *Dreaming in Cuban* 1-104; Gonzalez 108-16. First Reading Response due.

9/11 *Dreaming in Cuban* 105-212; (CP): Baker, Sowards, Trimble

Week 4 HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS

9/16 *Dreaming in Cuban* 213-245

(CP): “Peer Evaluation Sheet,” “Self-Evaluation,” “Instructor’s Symbols and Abbreviations on Essays,” “Symbols for Common Errors” (Baker), “Academic Standards for Analytical and Evaluative Writing.”

[Possible Peer Editing Session, bring **2 copies of your Thesis Paragraph.**]

9/18 Gonzalez (Part I) ix-78;

Paper 1 Due (4 pages; literary criticism of *Dreaming in Cuban*—topic of your choice)

Week 5 IDENTITIES

9/23 *Dreaming in Cuban* (Including class sharing and discussion of what each of us has written about the text: be prepared to summarize and/or discuss the argument you made in your paper.)

9/25 *Chican@s*: (Acuña) 1-9, (Rodriguez) 9-16;

Boom: (Cervantes) 230-33, (Piñero) 250-52, (Mora) 369-71

Week 6 IMMIGRATION AND WORK

9/30 *Boom*: (Rodriguez) 110-16, (Intro and Cantú) 121-25, (Viramontes) 157-68;

Chican@s: (Slevin) 181-85

10/2 *Boom*: (Cofer) 104-5, (López) 459-75

Week 7 GENDER

10/7 *Chican@s*: (Alicia) 24-30, (Delson) 30-34

10/9 *Boom*: (Alvarez) 168-69, (Baca) 169, (Espada) 169-172, (Anzaldúa) 413-25

(CP): “Mid-Semester Check-Up”

Week 8

10/14 **Midterm Exam**, bring **Blue Books**. NO Reading Response due.

10/16 FALL RECESS. No Class.

Week 9 MERICANS

10/21 *House on Mango Street* 1-50; Gonzalez 96-107

10/23 *House on Mango Street* 51-end

Week 10 LANGUAGE

10/28 *House on Mango Street* (Wrap up discussion)

10/30 *Chican@s*: (Cisneros) 105-8, (Cortez) 108-11, (Jordan) 111-15

Week 11 PUERTORIQUEÑOS

11/4 *Latin Deli* 1-92; Gonzalez 81-95

11/6 *Latin Deli* 93-170

Week 12 DOMINICANOS

11/11 *Drown* 1-43; Gonzalez 117-28

11/13 *Drown* 45-117

Week 13 AFFIRMATIVE ACTION DEBATES

11/18 *Drown* 121-208. Final Reading Response due.

11/20 *Chican@s*: (Intro and Rodríguez) 90-98, (González) 99-104;

Supplemental reading (not required) on Central and South Americans: Gonzalez 129-66

Reading Response Journals Due

Week 14

11/25 THANKSGIVING. No Class.

11/27 THANKSGIVING. No Class.

Week 15 LATINOS AS WORKING CLASS MAJORITY: MIGRANT WORKERS

12/2 *Under the Feet of Jesus* 1-100

12/4 *Under the Feet of Jesus* 101-end

[I may ask for the Thesis Paragraph to your final paper.]

Week 16 THE BRONZE SCREEN

12/9 Film: *Mi Familia*; (CP): Barnet, Williams

12/11 Film: *Mi Familia*; Last Day of Class.

Final Exam Date (**12/17/08, 9am-noon**):

Final Paper Due (6 pages; literary criticism, topic of your choice, on any one of the following texts: *House on Mango Street*, *The Latin Deli*, *Drown*, *Under the Feet of Jesus*. The Final Paper is due on the day—and at the beginning of the scheduled hour—of the final exam. The Final Paper can be thought of as a “take home final exam,” and you may hand it in early if you wish. Otherwise, check the Registrar’s schedule for final exam date, time, and location.)