

Writing the Latino Experience, Winter 2019

Chicano/Latino Studies 129
Literary Journalism 103
English 105

Mon-Wed-Fri 12-1250 pm
Classroom: **SSL 290**

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Office hours,
Mon-Wed 3:15-5:15pm
And by appointment
Office: SST 365

This course is a survey of writing about the Latino experience, as tackled by authors based in the United States of America, from the mid twentieth century to the present. We will consider how these writers have examined issues of ethnic identity, discrimination, resistance, and creative expression in Latinx communities, making use of Spanish, Spanglish, barrio slang, and, of course, English. We will see how these writers have constructed narratives centered on the lives of Latinx people in various genres, including: journalism, investigative reporting, essays, criticism, documentary film, poetry, fiction, and memoir.

Students will produce their own work of cultural reportage or criticism, and will submit this work as a final project. They will work on this project in several stages throughout the quarter, producing a 2,000-word piece by finals' week. Part of the aim of this class is to study the craft of writing as a tool of social engagement and change. How do writers construct works that cut through the falsehoods of prejudice and ignorance? How do they work to defend the humanity of those who have been marginalized or oppressed by dominant cultures? How do they express the joy and fortitude unseen or unknown by outsiders?

Readings will include works by Octavio Paz, Luis Rodriguez, Valeria Luiselli, Achy Obejas, Luis Alberto Urrea, and others. Students will produce four, 300-word "responses" to the readings and screenings.

Lecture, reading, and assignment schedule:

All assignments are due at **10 a.m.** on the days listed here.

Week 1. Jan 7-11: Course introduction. Read: Jesse Katz on Cockfighting; Ana Pérez, "Dust Angels;" Kasey Cordell on the life and death of a U.S. Army veteran. What is a story idea?

Week 2. Jan 14-18: Readings: Octavio Paz, Carey McWilliams, Andrea Penman-Lomeli.

Week 3. Jan 21-23 No class Monday, MLK day. **Reading response # 1 due Jan 22.** Read: Luis Rodriguez. How do I make a good story pitch?

Week 4. Jan 28-Feb 1: **Story idea due Jan 28.** Read: Achy Obejas/Cherrie Moraga/Dagoberto Gilb

Week 5. Feb 4-8: **Reading response #2 due Feb. 4** Read: Rubén Martínez. Screening: *The Sentence*.

Week 6. Feb 11-15: **Story pitch due Feb 11.** Read: Luis Alberto Urrea. Screening: *Las Marthas*, by Cristina Ibarra

Week 7. Feb 18-22: No class Monday, President's Day. **Reading response #3** due Feb. 19. Read: Susan Noheми Aguilar-Marcelo, Krys Méndez-Ramirez

Week 8: Feb 25-March 1: **Draft or riff due Feb 25.** Listen to: Border trilogy podcast.

Week 9: March 4-8 **Reading/listening response #4 due March 4.** Read: Valeria Luiselli. Screening: *Sleepdealer*.

Week 10: March 11-15: Luiselli, and Javier Zamora

Finals week: **Final paper due: Wed., March 19.**

Student requirements/grading scheme (100 points total):

Reading responses will be due Week 3, 5, 7 and 9 (10 points each). The idea here is to write your own, very brief work of criticism in response to the readings. Those responses that show an original engagement with, or criticism of a given set of reading will be graded higher; those that merely summarize the material will be graded lower. Each reading response **can be no longer than 300 words**. (Writing well, and achieving gravitas and depth in a short length is a great writing challenge).

Final **project idea** due Week 4: 100 words or less. (10 points) I'll grade these on originality and potential. (These are admittedly subjective criteria: so it goes in the literary world.) Also, if your project idea changes during the course of the quarter, that's okay.

A **story pitch** due Week 6: 200 words or less. (15 points) Tell me what the story is about, how it's original and why it will rock my world.

A **draft or riff** due Week 8 (pass/fail): 600 words or less. Give me 600 awesome words from your final project, as a work-progress. And when I say 'riff' I mean that what you write doesn't necessarily have to fit the structure of a work of journalism: I'll expand on this idea in class.

Final paper due finals week (25 points): 2,000 words. Or less.

Class participation: (10 points).

Readings:

*"The Sport of Exiles," Jesse Katz, *Los Angeles Times*, Dec. 5, 1999.

*"Dust Angels," Ana Pérez, in *The Wandering Song: Central American Writing in the United States*, pgs. 282-287

"A Daughter Lost Sets a Family Adrift," Kasey Cordell, *New York Times*, Sept. 23, 2018
Available online @ <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/09/23/magazine/those-who-cant-forget-sarandrea.html>

**Labyrinth of Solitude*, Octavio Paz: "The Pachuco and Other Extremes," pgs 12-20; "Mexican Masks," pgs. 29-32, "Day of the Dead," pgs. 47-61; and "Sons of La Malinche," 8 page handout.

**North from Mexico*, Carey McWilliams, Chapter 12 "The Pattern of Violence" and Chapter 13, "Blood on the Pavements," pgs, 227-258

"Consuming la Malinche, Destroying the Myth," by Andrea Penman-Lomeli, in *The New Inquiry*, Feb. 9, 2017.

**Always Running: La Vida Loca, Gang Days in L.A.*: Luis Rodriguez, Chapters 2-4, pgs 35-108

**Desert America: Boom and Bust in the New Old West*, by Rubén Martínez; "Mornings in New Mexico," pgs. 9-59

* *Across the Wire: Life and Hard Times on the Mexican Border*, by Luis Alberto Urrea, Chapter One, pgs 31-56, "Sifting Through the Trash."

*"Slam" by Susana Nohemi Aguilar-Marcelo in *The Wandering Song: Central American Writing in the United States*

*"The Banana Files," by Kryz Méndez-Ramírez, in *The Wandering Song: Central American Writing in the United States*

**Loving in the War Years: Lo Que Nunca Pasó por Sus Labios*, by Cherrie Moraga, pgs i.-31.

"Volver," by Achy Obejas, from *Bridges to Cuba*, available at:
<https://bridgestocuba.com/2016/08/volver/>

*“I Knew She Was Beautiful,” by Dagoberto Gilb, in *The New Yorker*, March 13, 2000

“Border Trilogy,” a podcast by Radiolab, 2018: Part One: “Hole in the Fence;” Part Two “Hold the Line;” Part Three, “What Remains.” Available on Spotify, iTunes, and @

<https://www.wnycstudios.org/story/border-trilogy-part-1>

<https://www.wnycstudios.org/story/border-trilogy-part-2-hold-line>

<https://www.wnycstudios.org/story/border-trilogy-part-3-what-remains>

* indicates a reading that will be available on the Canvas website

Assignment deadlines:

All assignments are due at 10 a.m. on the days listed above, except for...

Final paper, due Tuesday, June 12, 11:59 p.m.

Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes

At the end of this course, students will:

- Have a deeper understanding of the scope and variety of non-fiction writing about the Latino experience through space and time.
- Be able to articulate how writers have responded, throughout history, to racial inequality and ethnic prejudice throughout history.
- Understand the relationship between cultural observation, cultural criticism and cultural creation.
- Articulate and understand how Latino writers, and other writers tackling Latino issues, have helped to shape U.S. cultural identity.
- Understand the basic challenges faced in creating a compelling and intelligent work of nonfiction criticism or reportage.
- Make a strong analysis and comparison between various forms of nonfiction expression.

Ethics, student conduct

Plagiarism in student work is unacceptable. Don't cut-and-paste information into your paper. If you copy more than a name, you run the risk of plagiarism. Also, you should be aware, that your instructor has an eagle eye for prose; he will not only be able to tell when something you are writing is not in your voice, he also will likely be able (thanks to Google) to find where it came from.

And finally

Students with disabilities who believe that they may need accommodations in this course are encouraged to contact the Disability Services Center at (949) 824-7494 as soon as possible to better ensure that such accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion.