

## Literary Criticism and Theory: The University and the Prison

ENG 448, Spring 2018, University of Southern Indiana, 3.0 Credit Hours

TR 10:30am-11:45am | Orr Center 2036

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Office Hours: Wednesdays 12pm-2:30pm or by an appointment; schedule an office hours appointment via <https://appoint.ly/s/andyhines/officehours>



Chris Burden, *L.A.P.D. Uniform*, 1993

In their essay, “The University and the Undercommons,” Fred Moten and Stefano Harney write, “The slogan on the left... ‘universities, not jails,’ marks a choice that may not be possible. In other words, perhaps more universities promote more jails” (41). This course dwells on the impossibility of choosing between the collegiate and the carceral and in the process, invites students into the challenge of literary criticism and theory at present. In other words, we will survey literary criticism and theory by studying contemporary theorists who question the ways in which academic knowledge has been part of a colonial and carceral impulse. Reading and interpreting literature, critics argue, cannot be separated from ongoing shifts in the world political order, the development of racial capitalism, and the related devaluation of human lives that do not conform to what Sylvia Wynter calls “Man.” Most of our readings will be drawn from contemporary critical sources, but since these readings demand a reconsideration of long-held patterns of critical thought, students will also gain familiarity with historical efforts in interpretation, including New Critical, psychoanalytical, and Marxist approaches. To further hone these critical concerns, we will work through theorizations proposed in several literary texts about the entanglement of the university and the prison based on urban development activities some higher education institutions undertake and the borders around language and imagination constructed by certain ways of knowing the world. Finally, we will examine how the course readings ask us to imagine the world otherwise, even if such imaginings have been made to feel impossible. Requirements include two papers, a book review, ongoing written engagement with course readings, and a sincere desire to do justice to the material assigned.

## Catalog Description

A study of literary criticism and aesthetic theory. Consists of a survey of literary theories, and an introduction to current critical approaches to literature. Prerequisites: ENG 201 and junior standing.

## Course Goals

In this class students will:

- Develop expertise in contemporary modes of literary theoretical inquiry, critical ethnic studies and critical university studies.
- Gain working competency with the history of literary criticism and theory.
- Engage in meaningful discussion about complex and, at times, politically contentious topics about racism, sexism, capitalism, mass incarceration, and colonialism.
- Hone skills and techniques in comparative analysis, interpretation, reasoned argument, and other modes of inquiry.

## Required Texts

Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, *Dictee* (University of California Press, 2009) ISBN: 9780520261297

John Edgar Wideman, *Philadelphia Fire: A Novel* (Mariner, 2005) ISBN: 9780618509645

William Shakespeare, *The Tempest* (Penguin, 2016) ISBN: 9780143128632

These books are available for purchase at the USI Campus Store located on the first floor of University Center West. You can also buy these books elsewhere, but make sure you're buying the same edition that is listed above.

Other readings will be posted to our Blackboard site, accessible through MyUSI.

## REQUIREMENTS AND ASSIGNMENTS

### Grade Distribution

Participation	15%
Reading Journal	10%
Midterm Paper	25%
Final Paper	25%
Book Review	15%
Presentation	10%

### Participation

You are expected to come to class prepared to be an active member of discussion. To do so, you'll need to have a firm grasp of the assigned readings, to be equipped with questions you have about the material, and to respect the comments and questions of your classmates. Your contributions are not just to serve the interests of the professor, but the *entire classroom community*. This policy applies to me, as it does to you.

### **Reading Journal**

You will each set up a journal on Blackboard where you must log at least one entry per week on assigned readings. These informal posts should be between 250-500 words each. The reading journal is designed to help you prepare for class with questions that you have about the assigned reading. It is also a place for you to explore passages that are interesting to you and to for you to make connections to other course readings, as well as other courses. You must complete your weekly journal entry by 11:59pm each Friday, unless otherwise instructed. I am primarily grading this assignment for completion, but exceptional posts will be rewarded.

### **Midterm Paper**

Near the middle of the semester you will write a formal paper of 5-7 pages that either takes up a topic of your own choosing or responds to one of several prompts I will provide. Either way, the midterm paper requires you to analyze intensively one or two course texts. I will provide more details about this assignment as it approaches. For now, know that you will be graded on your ability to develop a coherent argument that is related to course texts and topics. By coherent argument, I mean that your major claims are well supported with textual evidence and that your writing is easily understood. You may use material from your reading journals and your class presentation in your midterm paper.

### **Final Paper**

The course will culminate with a formal paper of 5-7 pages on a topic of your own design. Most broadly, the paper should consider an aesthetic, historical, and/or political relationship between several works of literature and/or theory related to the course. You must be in conversation with scholarly sources in your paper.

We will discuss the final paper assignment in greater depth after midterm. In the meantime, you may want to consider using your reading journal and presentation to help lead you toward a topic, or to be fluent in the area that you would like to write on.

### **Book Review**

This assignment asks you to write a book review on one of the works we have read in the course for a publication such as *Los Angeles Review of Books*, *Public Books*, *Boston Review*, *n+1*, etc.. Your review will be relatively short, approximately 1000 words, but, like a piece of writing for the publications listed above, it should attempt to situate the relevance of the work to a broader audience. You may write your book review on the same works on which you present, should you wish.

### **Presentation**

Each student will sign up to give one 5-7 minute presentation at the beginning of a class of her choosing. The presentation should provoke and invite a robust class discussion and I expect you to be creative in developing a method to do so. Some tactics include highlighting a particularly inventive reading of the text, contextualizing historical events that a text engages, or theorizing how your topic relates to any number of issues on campus, in Evansville, Indiana, and beyond. Your presentation must end with one or two open-ended questions that we can discuss as a class. As part of this assignment, you are required to turn in a brief summary of your plans, including your discussion questions and citations for any sources referenced by 8pm the evening before you are to present.

## **COURSE POLICIES**

### **Attendance**

Come to every class on time with the assigned readings and note-taking materials. More than two unexcused absences will adversely affect your overall course grade. Arriving late or not bringing your text to class will also count against you. If you know you will be absent in advance for a university sanctioned reason, contact me ahead of time.

### **Deadlines**

All assignments must be turned in by announced deadlines. If this does not seem possible for a particular assignment, you should contact me well in advance so we can come up with a solution.

### **Screens**

Unless the course reading is posted on Blackboard, I ask that you not use computers, tablets, or any other electronic devices during class. Please put away your phones.

### **Email**

Email is the best way to schedule an appointment with me or to ask me questions about course material. Sometimes – especially around paper deadlines – it may take me more than 24 hours to get back to you, so plan accordingly. I prefer you to use professional email etiquette, meaning that you use salutations, punctuation, and complete sentences. An emoji now and again won't hurt anyone, though.

### **The Writers' Room**

The Writers' Room (ED 1102) is an on-campus resource that provides peer-feedback on writing assignments at any stage of the writing process. They also offer an online feedback resource in case it is difficult to manage an appointment with your schedule. Find more information at [www.usi.edu/university-division/academic-skills/tutoring/writers-room](http://www.usi.edu/university-division/academic-skills/tutoring/writers-room).

### **Disability Support Services**

If you have a disability for which you may require academic accommodations for this class, please register with Disability Resources (DR) as soon as possible. Students who have an accommodation letter from DR are encouraged to meet privately with course faculty to discuss the provisions of those accommodations as early in the semester as possible. To qualify for accommodation assistance, students must first register to use the disability resources in DR, Science Center Rm. 2206, 812-464-1961, [www.usi.edu/disabilities](http://www.usi.edu/disabilities). To help ensure that accommodations will be available when needed, students are encouraged to meet with course faculty at least 7 days prior to the actual need for the accommodation. However, if you will be in an internship, field, clinical, student teaching, or other off-campus setting this semester please note that approved academic accommodations may not apply. Please contact Disability Resources as soon as possible to discuss accommodations needed for access while in this setting.

### **Title IX – Sexual Misconduct**

USI does not tolerate acts of sexual misconduct, including sexual harassment and all forms of sexual violence. If you have experienced sexual misconduct, or know someone who has, the University can help. It is important to know that federal regulations and University policy require faculty to promptly report incidences of potential sexual misconduct known to them to the Title IX

Coordinator to ensure that appropriate measures are taken and resources are made available. The University will work with you to protect your privacy by sharing information with only those who need to know to ensure we can respond and assist. If you are seeking help and would like to speak to someone confidentially, you can make an appointment with a counselor in the University Counseling Center. Find more information about sexual violence, including campus and community resources at [www.usi.edu/stopsexualassault](http://www.usi.edu/stopsexualassault).

### **Academic Integrity**

Plagiarism is a serious transgression and, as such, can be subject to a formal resolution process through the College of Liberal Arts. That said, plagiarism can be difficult to define. Be rigorous about citing any sources you consult while working on assignments for this class. If you have questions about what is and isn't plagiarism, please don't hesitate to ask me. For more about academic integrity at USI visit [www.usi.edu/deanofstudents/academic-integrity](http://www.usi.edu/deanofstudents/academic-integrity).

### **SCHEDULE:**

Week 1

T, 1/9: Introduction

R, 1/11: Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, "The University and the Undercommons" [Blackboard]

### **How did we get here?**

Week 2

T, 1/16: Jodi Melamed, "Producing Discourses of Certainty with Official Antiracisms" [Blackboard]

R, 1/18: Roderick A. Ferguson, "The Proliferation of Minority Difference" [Blackboard]

Week 3

T, 1/23: Lisa Lowe, "The Intimacies of Four Continents" [Blackboard]

R, 1/25: Nikhil Pal Singh, "On Race, Violence, and So-Called Primitive Accumulation" [Blackboard]

### **Border Crossing and the "Prisonhouse" of Language**

Week 4

T, 1/30: Gloria Anzaldúa, "How to Tame a Wild Tongue" from *Borderlands/La Frontera* [Blackboard]

R, 2/1: Anzaldúa, "La conciencia de la mestiza/ Towards a New Consciousness" *Borderlands/La Frontera* [Blackboard]

Week 5

T, 2/6: Heriberto Yépez, "Pseudo-Patriarchy Pantopia" from *The Empire of Neomemory* [Blackboard]

R, 2/8: "Pseudo-Patriarchy Pantopia" from *The Empire of Neomemory* (cont.) [Blackboard]

Week 6

T, 2/13: C.L.R. James, "Introduction" to *Mariners, Renegades, & Castaways* and "The Crisis" [Blackboard]

R, 2/15: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, *Dictee*

Week 7

T, 2/20: *Dictee* (cont.)

R, 2/22: *Dictee* (cont.)

Week 8

T, 2/27: *Dictée* (cont.)

R, 3/1: Dorothy Wang, "Introduction: Aesthetics Contra "Identity" in Contemporary Poetry Studies" [Blackboard]; **Midterm Paper Due**

SPRING BREAK

### **The University, the Prison, and the Making of Man**

Week 9

T, 3/13: John Edgar Wideman, *Philadelphia Fire*

R, 3/15: *Philadelphia Fire* (cont.)

Week 10

T, 3/20: *Philadelphia Fire* (cont.)

R, 3/22 *Philadelphia Fire* (cont.)

Week 11

T, 3/27: William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*

R, 3/29: *The Tempest* (cont.)

Week 12

T, 4/3: Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics" [Blackboard]

R, 4/5: Katherine McKittrick, "Plantation Futures" [Blackboard]

Week 13

T, 4/10: Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe" [Blackboard]

R, 4/12: Lisa Marie Cacho, "The Violence of Value" [Blackboard]

Week 14

T, 4/17: Sylvia Wynter, "On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory, and Re-Imprisoned Ourselves in Our Unbearable Wrongness of Being, of *Désêtre*: Black Studies Toward the Human Project" [Blackboard]

R, 4/19: "On How We Mistook the Map" (cont.)

Week 15

T, 4/24: Wrap-Up

**Final Paper and Book Review due by 12:30pm on April 26.**