

## LITT 2109-001 Spring 2006

### Contemporary American Fiction—(Post)Colonial American Fiction

T/TH 12:30-2:20pm, K101

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**Instructor:** Dr. Kristin Jacobson

**Office phone:** (609) 626-5581

**Office Location:** J-236

**Email:** Please use our WebCT email

**Office Hours:** Tuesdays and Thursdays 10:30am-12noon; and by appointment

**Mailbox:** Arts and Humanities, K-150

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**Course Description:** This course explores what constitutes the contemporary American experience by surveying fiction (novels and short stories) written in the last 10 years. Specifically we will be reading and analyzing fiction that (re)considers American colonial, global, and/or transnational powers. Like much American literature before it, these fictions are deeply concerned with what it means to be American. In doing so, they engage key concepts such as home, family, community, nation, security, borders, race, ethnicity, and sexuality. They also frequently employ experimental, genre-blurring techniques. They may challenge our conventional notions of high and low cultural forms and our understanding of what it means to be American. Our tasks will include reading, discussing, researching, and writing about these texts in order to better characterize and understand their literary, historical, and cultural significance. This is a reading, writing, and discussion intensive course.

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#### **Email Policy:**

1. Use WebCT email for all course-related correspondence.
  2. I check my email each day in the morning. Please plan your email questions accordingly.
  3. Visit my office hours with specific questions about course material. I will not respond to email questions about class content if you were absent; contact a classmate with these queries and then visit office hours if you have questions.
  4. I will not discuss grades over email. Grades should be discussed in person during office hours or other arranged meetings.
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#### **Required Texts:**

- ***The Poisonwood Bible***, Barbara Kingsolver
- ***The Dew Breaker***, Edwidge Danticat
- ***Indian Killer***, Sherman Alexie
- ***In the Shadow of No Towers***, Art Spiegelman
- ***Empire Falls***, Richard Russo
- ***Bodega Dreams***, Ernesto Quiñonez
- ***Monkey Bridge***, Lan Cao
- **WebCT:** If you have questions about using WebCT, consult a lab assistant or your instructor during office hours. See also: <http://gannet.stockton.edu/cts/publish/WebCT.pdf>
- **MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 6<sup>th</sup> Edition**

#### **Additional Resources:**

- **Stockton Libraries:** <http://library.stockton.edu/>
    - **Periodical Databases:**  
[http://library.stockton.edu/Library\\_Databases/Dbases\\_table.html](http://library.stockton.edu/Library_Databases/Dbases_table.html)
    - **Language and Literature links:**  
[http://library.stockton.edu/Web\\_Resources/lang.html](http://library.stockton.edu/Web_Resources/lang.html)
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**Accommodation for Students with Special Needs:** Stockton College complies with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Students with disabilities who seek accommodations should contact the Learning Access Program located in the West Quad Building, Suite 110 or by call 652-4988. Additional information on the program may be obtained from Stockton web site <http://www2.stockton.edu/wellness/lap.html>.

**Academic Dishonesty:** Dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated in this course. Dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarizing, fabricating information or citations, facilitating acts of academic dishonesty by others, having unauthorized possession of examinations, submitting work of another person or work previously used without informing the instructor, or tampering with the academic work of other students. Students who are found to be dishonest will receive academic sanctions and risk failing the course. Other sanctions may also apply.

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**Course Requirements:** You will be expected to:

- (1) **Attend class meetings and be prepared.** That means DO THE READING; this is a discussion-based class and if you haven't done the reading, you won't be able to contribute and the class (as well as your grade) will suffer accordingly;
    - a. **Attendance**—you are allotted four absences during the semester for fatigue, illness, burnout, cocktail flu, personal reasons, malfunctioning alarm clocks, etc. (Note: I do not distinguish between excused or unexcused absences. If you miss four days and then get the flu and miss another day, you will lose 5 percentage points for the fifth absence.) For each absence after your first four, your final grade **will be reduced five points per additional absence**, down to and including "F."
  - (2) **Participate in large and small group class discussions.** This course is what you make of it and will work *only* if everyone participates;
  - (3) **Complete all assignments.** Passing the course requires timely completion of ALL of the assignments, long and short, in-class and out-of-class. No assignments will be accepted after the last day of class.
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**Grades:**

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| • Formal Reading Journal         | 400 |
| • Final Paper Draft Work         | 200 |
| • Final Paper (8-10 typed pages) | 300 |
| • Class Presentation             | 100 |

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**Total: 1000**

**Grading Scale**

100-95: A	89.9-87: B+	79.9-77: C+	69.9-67: D+
94.9-90: A-	86.9-83: B	76.9-73: C	66.9-63: D
	82.9-80: B-	72.9-70: C-	62.9-60: D-
			59.9 & below: F

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**Assignments:**

- **Formal Reading Journal** (400 points total): You will keep a reading journal for *each day's assigned reading*. Each entry should be about 1-2 double-spaced, 12-point font, typed pages (approximately 500 words) and specifically respond to some aspect or aspects of the day's assigned reading. While a thesis statement is not required for these entries, each should demonstrate a critical engagement with the assigned day's reading. For example, typical

- **F/D-level responses:** These readings frequently rely too heavily on plot summary or simply list reasons why the author liked/disliked/did not understand the reading. Such responses do not move much beyond summary, praise, or complaint. They frequently do not focus clearly on the assigned reading and may be a jumble of sentences that skip from topic to topic. The responses frequently contain grammatical and spelling errors that inhibit clarity, may be too short, and may be written as large paragraphs without a clear structure. Missing entries will also result in a D-level evaluation. Students missing several entries risk failure.
- **C-level responses:** These readings clearly explain some aspect(s) of the reading. They clearly focus on each day's assigned reading. The author provides evidence for his/her reaction to the readings. The entries use clear topic sentences and employ lucid prose.
- **B-level responses:** These responses not only clearly focus on the assigned reading, but they also craft a clear analysis of the reading that bridges individual and wider audience's concerns. The responses explain or explore significance beyond the author's own individual importance, frequently expanding and developing class discussion. Clear evidence is provided for each piece of the analysis and reflection. The author's prose clear and engaging.
- **A-level responses:** This author consistently goes the extra mile. For example, s/he might not only craft clearly written and persuasive responses to the reading assignments, but s/he also incorporates outside research. Such entries are rarely written "off the cuff." Rather, they demonstrate sustained thought and deep engagement in the course material. They take discussion in new or unexplored directions and do so with grace and eloquence.

I frequently will provide suggested topics in class for your entries; however, you are not required to write on these suggested topics.

Your entries should be complete **before** you arrive to class. You will write 26 entries for a total of about 26 typed pages.

I will collect the journals four times during the course of the semester for formal evaluation. Please label each entry and keep them in a folder or staple them together to pass in on the assigned collection dates. *Journals that are not typed or otherwise collected haphazardly will be penalized 10 percentage points.*

- **Class Participation & Final Paper Draft Assignments** (200 points total): In addition to your daily class participation, this category evaluates your comprehensive approach to the rough draft, peer review, and revision process. *To receive a "C" or better participation grade you are required to attend at least one of the Visiting Writers readings.* (See Syllabus for dates and times.) See Final Paper Assignment Description for more information about each stage in the draft process.
  - **Final Paper** (8-10 typed pages, 300 points): This research paper will focus on some aspect of colonialism or postcolonialism and one or two of the contemporary works from the semester's reading. The paper may, for example, examine economic, domestic, or national issues raised by the fiction. The paper must incorporate at least two peer-reviewed journal articles or books. Peer-reviewed articles and books are available in the library stacks, via the MLA bibliography, and JSTOR. See Assignment Description for more information.
  - **Class Presentation** (100 points): This presentation will inform the class about an assigned literary, historical, or cultural element significant to our understanding of the assigned reading. You may sign up in a group of 2 students or do the presentation by yourself. Each presentation must use some type of visual aide (for example, a PowerPoint presentation and/or handout) and provide to the class and instructor with a bibliography of at least 3 sources on the topic. All group members should speak during the course of the 15-20-minute presentation.
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**Late Assignment Policy:**

I understand that life is full of surprises and sometimes those surprises influence your coursework and your ability to complete assignments. As a community of learners, we also recognize that we have a responsibility to the group, to our instructor, and to ourselves. We understand that every action has a consequence—even when circumstance may limit our power to act. To balance individual and community needs, we have the following guidelines for late assignments.

**Papers:** *Papers are due at the beginning of class.* Late papers will be docked 5 percentage points per day late. So, if a B (85%) paper due on Tuesday at 8:30am is passed in on Monday at 4:30pm, the recorded grade would be B- (80). If it is passed in on Tuesday, the paper would earn a 75. And so on and so forth.

Every student has **one** “but wait, this isn’t real life—it’s college—” card. This “card” can only be used once and must be used before the last day of classes. So say your printer malfunctions, you oversleep, your kids are sick, your car breaks down, your computer explodes, etc. and you come to my office or email me your paper at 4:30pm on Tuesday. You can use your card once and only once to bypass the first day’s grade penalty.

Of course, this card will only help students who have drafted a paper and follow the expected practice of backing up documents. Back up all your files and you will be a much happier and successful individual. You may not be happy when your computer explodes, but at least you will not be despondent. I also strongly encourage all students to keep a personal copy of every assignment and to keep all returned assignments with my feedback until the end of the term.

### **Syllabus—LITT 2109—Spring 2006<sup>1</sup>**

#### **Week 1: Introductions, Themes and Questions**

**Jan 17:** Introduction to course, assignments, students and instructor. Sign up for Group Presentation.

**Jan 19:** *The Poisonwood Bible* (Book 1, pp. 1-82)

- Presentation 1: Definition of Postcolonial Fiction (Model Presentation by Dr. J)
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#### **Week 2: Postcolonial Homemaking**

**Jan 24:** *The Poisonwood Bible* (Book 2, pp. 83-186)

- Presentation 2: Definition of Postmodern Fiction

**Jan 26:** *The Poisonwood Bible* (Book 3, pp. 187-311)

- Presentation 3: The Belgian Congo
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#### **Week 3: Postcolonial Homemaking**

**Jan 31:** *The Poisonwood Bible* (Book 4, pp. 312-375)

- Presentation 4: White Privilege

**Feb 2:** *The Poisonwood Bible* (Book 5, pp. 376-506)

- Presentation 5: Biblical References in *The Poisonwood Bible*
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#### **Week 4: Secrets and Privileges**

**Feb 7:** *The Poisonwood Bible* (Book 6, pp. 507-543)

- Presentation 6: Critical Responses to Barbara Kingsolver’s Work

**Feb 9:** *The Dew Breaker* (pp. 3-68) **Due: 7 Formal Journal Entries (Jan. 19-Feb. 9)**

- Presentation 7: 1960s Haiti
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#### **Week 5: Secrets and Privileges**

**Feb 14:** *The Dew Breaker* (pp. 69-138)

- Presentation 8: Torture

**Feb 16:** *The Dew Breaker* (pp. 139-242)

- Presentation 9: Critical Responses to Edwidge Danticat’s Work

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<sup>1</sup> Class Schedule subject to changes with notice. Readings and assignments are listed on the day they are due.

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**Week 6: Postcolonial Identities****Feb 21:** *Indian Killer* (Part 1, Chapters 1-12, pp. 1-103)

- Presentation 10: The Mystery Novel

**Feb 23:** *Indian Killer* (Part 1, Chapter 13-Part 2, Chapter 9, pp. 105-201)

- Presentation 11: Native American Stereotypes
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**Week 7: Postcolonial Identities****Feb 28:** *Indian Killer* (Part 2, Chapters 10-26, pp. 203-296)

- Presentation 12: Native American Literature

**Mar 2:** *Indian Killer* (Part 3, pp. 297-420)

- Presentation 13: Critical Responses to Sherman Alexie's Work
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**Week 8: Writing Post-9/11****Mar 7:** *In the Shadow of No Towers* (pp. 1-10). Discuss Final Paper

- Presentation 14: Graphic Novel

**Mar 9:** *In the Shadow of No Towers* ("The Comic Supplement") **Due: 8 Formal Journal Entries (Feb. 14-Mar 9) Due: Final Paper Topic**

- Presentation 15: Critical Responses to Art Spiegelman's Work
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**Spring Break**

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**Week 9: Literature of the New American Economy****Mar 21:** *Empire Falls* (Prologue-Chapter 5, pp. 1-100)

- Presentation 16: Post-Industrial American Economy

**Mar 23:** *Empire Falls* (Chapter 6-11, pp. 101-197)

- Presentation 17: Realism and the American Novel
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**Week 10: Literature of the New American Economy****Mar 28: Preceptorial Advising (No Classes)****Mar 30:** *Empire Falls* (Chapter 12-17, pp. 198-295) **Due: Annotated Bibliography**

- Presentation 18: American Masculinity
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**Week 11: Literature of the New American Economy****Apr 4:** *Empire Falls* (Chapter 18-26, pp. 296-399)

- Presentation 19: American Dream

**Apr 6:** *Empire Falls* (Chapter 27-Epilogue, pp. 400-483)

- Presentation 20: Critical Responses to Richard Russo's Work
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**Week 12: Visiting Writer—Tony D'Souza****Apr 11:** **Tony D'Souza Visit.** Handout of D'Souza's *New Yorker* story. Begin *Bodega Dreams***Apr 13: Due: Final Paper Rough Draft Workshop** (Bring 2 copies of your paper to class) **Due: 6 Formal Journal Entries (Mar 21-Apr 13)**

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**Week 13: Postcolonial Ethics****Apr 18:** *Bodega Dreams* (Book 1, pp. 1-82)

- Presentation 21: Spanish Harlem

**Apr 20:** *Bodega Dreams* (Books 2 & 3, pp. 83-213) **Due: Final Paper**

- Presentation 22: Critical Responses to Ernesto Quiñonez's Work
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**Week 14: Bridging Communities****Apr 25:** *Monkey Bridge* (Chapters 1-5, pp. 1-93)

- Presentation 23: American Vietnam War Fiction

**Apr 27:** *Monkey Bridge* (Chapters 6-9, pp. 94-191)

- Presentation 24: Vietnamese Family/Culture
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**Week 15: Bridging Communities****May 2:** *Monkey Bridge* (Chapters 10-13, pp. 192-260) **Due: 5 Formal Journal Entries (Apr 18-May 2)**

- Presentation 25: Critical Responses to Lan Cao's Work

