

English 4230/8236 (sections 001)

Spring 2012

Latino Literature

2:30-3:45 p.m., T & R, Arts & Sciences Hall 390

Instructor: Dr. Ramón Guerra

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“Latino Literature”
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#### TEXTS REQUIRED

*The Squatter and the Don* (1885) by Maria Amparo Ruiz de Burton

*George Washington Gomez* (Paredes wrote this novel in the 1940s and 1950s but it wasn't published until 1990) by Américo Paredes

*Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987) by Gloria Anzaldúa

*Zoot Suit and Other Plays* (1978) Luis Valdez

*Dreaming in Cuban* (1992) Cristina Garcia

*When I was Puerto Rican* (1994) Esmeralda Santiago

*Caramelo* (2002) Sandra Cisneros

*The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) Junot Díaz

\*Various articles posted on Blackboard

#### SUGGESTED TEXTS FOR SUPPLEMENTAL READING

Acuña, Rudolfo: *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos*

Aranda Jr., Jose: *When We Arrive: A New Literary History of Mexican America Extinct Lands*,

Brady, Mary Pat: *Temporal Geographies: Chicana Literature and the Urgency of Space*

Paredes, Américo: *Folklore and Culture on the Texas Mexican Border*

Paz, Octavio: *The Labyrinth of Solitude*

Saldívar, Ramón: *Chicano Narrative: The Dialectics of Difference*

Torres, Eden: *Chicana Without Apology*

#### COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will put Latino and Latina literature at the center of our developed space—both in the classroom and in our discussion. We will explore important aspects of the works through a mostly historical approach but will draw from other components including folklore, memory, social issues, and identity development. We will read mostly fictional pieces beginning with the 1885 novel *The Squatter and the Don* and ending with *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, which was just published in 2007. We will also look at some critical pieces, some historical writing, and a few other readings that are non-fiction and instructional. This course has been designed to help you learn more about Latina/o culture and its representation in and through literature. To engage with this material you must be willing to allow for new ways of thinking about issues in the world and to recognize power, privilege and cultural perspectives. We will learn about Latina/o literature and culture and how they are important to determine identity and conflict in the

world, particularly in a contemporary world that simultaneously is embracing and rejecting the “differences” in cultures. Not only will we study these literary texts in comparison to one another but also in relation to their specific theme or contribution to the overall world of Latina/o literature.

In the end, I hope and expect that you will learn a variety of things about Latino cultures and history as well as some valuable approaches to addressing some specific, important themes about a resistance narrative both in discussions and in writing. This class should be exciting, interesting, and always open to discussion—all students should feel welcome and not afraid to raise honest questions or comments in our conversation.

#### COURSE STRUCTURE

The format that the class sessions will take will vary throughout the summer. **The majority of the atmosphere will be based on “all-class conversation.”** In this way, everyone should feel responsible for contributing to the subject matter of the class. We will also do small group work or work in pairs to create smaller areas of discussion before addressing specific topics as an entire class. There will also be some lectures, sharing of your writing, and question and answer sessions.

#### CLASS REQUIREMENTS

***All written assignments should be submitted electronically through our class Blackboard Assignment tab function, unless otherwise specified by me. I will employ this function to eliminate the amount of paper used. If there are any potential problems with this requirement, please make arrangements with me as soon as possible.***

Reading: You should come to class prepared to talk about the readings that are listed on that day on the schedule at the back of this syllabus. Read actively—begin to formulate questions or discussion topics as you read. Write them down, underline or highlight them. Part of your responsibility is to come *prepared* to engage in our conversation. **There will be several moments throughout the course where I will instruct a student or students to come prepared to start the class discussion for the next period.**

Author Essays (Undergraduates ONLY): (4-5 pages) This short project should be thought of as “Critical” and “Exploratory” analysis of a one of the authors from our list (either required or supplemental). You are expected to do some research into the lives (biographical information) and the writing careers (production, contributions, criticism, etc.) of your selected author. Your essay should examine *more than* the biographical highlights of the author’s life but should review other writers’ and critics’ portrayals of their life and work as well as begin to develop your own perspective as to the significance of the writer’s life as it is connected to their work. Pose meaningful questions about what you find. You can (and might find it useful to) use these shorter essays to look forward to the longer researched essays. ***These essays will be due at the beginning of class on the first day of discussion of each author.*** You will have an opportunity to sign up for an author of your choosing during our second class session.

**Short Essays (*Graduates ONLY*): (6-8 pages)** This project should be thought of as “Critical” analysis of a significant theme, theory, or movement within the literature. You are expected to take a stand on some issue of importance in the literature and classroom discussions and be prepared to cite specific examples from the texts in support. Your essay should examine *more than* differences or comparisons and open questions about the *whys* of that difference or comparison is significant, etc. Begin to pose meaningful questions about what we’ve read, leading to more in depth discussion and examination of important topics; you can (and should) use these shorter essays to look forward to the longer researched essays. I recommend meeting with me to discuss selection of an issue, theory, question, etc. that you would like to investigate in this critical short essay. ***These essays will be due Tuesday, March 27 at the beginning of class.***

**Research Essays: (10-12 pages for Undergraduates; 15-20 pages for Graduates)** This project is the primary component of the course and should engage the works on the list in a distinctly unique manner as well as incorporating a variety of cultural theory perspectives from within the course and in your research. This project should take shape throughout the semester and could take a variety of forms, from combining multiple texts to a focus on one or two of the authors, etc. You should have a clear method of analysis laid out in the project and credible, appropriate research components that add to your own approach. We will reference this longer essay throughout the semester and you will be given direction towards ideas and approaches beginning with the Suggested Readings list at the beginning of the syllabus. ***\*\*\*Research Essays Due\*\*\*Tuesday, May 1 by 2:30pm through Blackboard Assignment Tab.***

**Research Presentations (*Graduate Students only*):**

**15-20 minutes for Graduates:** Students will make a presentation on their semester-long research project. Visual aids are required (handouts, pictures, power point slides, etc.). You should use the library’s various sources to find good, critical, peer reviewed essays: JSTOR, MLA Bibliography, WorldCAT, Project Muse, etc. The approach should be instructional as well as a representation of your final essay—not just a *reading of your essay*. You should envision the presentation as an opportunity to demonstrate to undergraduate students the depth and process of research and you should integrate them into the presentation in some (Q&A, project handouts, small in-class assignment, etc.).

**The final presentations for Graduate Students will be on Tuesday, April 24. All students will be in attendance on this day.**

**Blackboard Postings:** Every Tuesday there will be 3 or 4 Blackboard postings from students meant to jumpstart the class discussion for that week. I will create a forum every week for the assigned students to post their contributions **by noon on the preceding Monday**, which should allow everyone else time to read them before the next day’s class. Each posting should strive to be about the equivalent of three double spaced pages. You should critically analyze the reading for that section (as opposed to “summarize” or “review”) and pose meaningful interpretations, connections and questions. Everyone else should fully read their peers’ postings and come ready to discuss them in class. Each student will write one posting during the semester. The rest of the class should respond and react to other

postings, on Blackboard or during class discussion. **There will be an opportunity to sign up for a date at the beginning of the second-class meeting.**

***\*\*Undergraduates should choose a different author than the subject of their Author Essay for their Blackboard posting assignment.***

Participation: This class should feel like an open exchange of students' ideas and suggestions. I expect that you will each be an actively involved member of the small community that our class and small groups will represent. This means being prepared for all aspects of class including discussion of readings, small group work, and all other class activities. This class will depend on your participation; to earn your participation grade you should expect to do more than simply show up for class. Participation represents 20% of the final grade for Undergraduates; if you are curious as to your contributions, please feel free to ask me about anything.

GRADING BREAKDOWN			
<i>Undergraduates</i>		<i>Graduates</i>	
Blackboard Posting	15%	Blackboard Posting	10%
Participation	20%	Research Presentation	15%
Author Essay	30%	Short Essay	30%
Research Essay	35%	Research Essay	45%

#### CLASS POLICIES

Attendance: You should strive to come to this class every day. This class depends on the participation and involvement of students—part of your workload for the class can only be done in the classroom; therefore, your attendance is vital to the success of our group. If you are not here, you cannot contribute or receive guidance in the current discussion—think of the class as a “16 week conversation.” Each absence AFTER TWO will result in the final grade being lowered a half letter. IF YOU REACH ABSENCE NUMBER SIX (6), YOU WILL NOT BE ABLE TO PASS THIS COURSE.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is a serious offense and will not be tolerated—it will result in automatic failure of the course and could lead to more serious consequences at the university. Don't do it. I expect you will maintain an honored responsibility to yourself and others by turning in and taking credit for work that is your own original work written specifically for this class and nothing else.

Personal Portable Technology Policy: Unless you have young children or are emergency personnel, ALL cell phones & pagers, etc., must be turned off when you enter the class. Use of laptops, sound and video recorders, etc., is strictly prohibited without clearance from the instructor.

*I do not plan on it but should it be necessary, I reserve the right to alter the syllabus and/or the course schedule at any time.*

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### **Course Schedule**

#### **Tuesday 1/10**

Syllabus review and introductions. Overview of the course authors, themes, and goals. Discussion of history as a means of looking at Latino and Chicano Literature. Discussion of some common terms, labels, and beliefs.  
Film: "Latinos in Nebraska"

#### **Thursday 1/12**

Read: Read Saldívar's "Race, Class, and Gender in the Southwest" available under the Course Documents of our Blackboard site.  
Discussion: "What is foundation of Mexican American or Chicano literature?" History, folklore—what do we know? Look at Saldívar's focus on the history of Mexico and the U.S. and its creation of a "resistant" form of art/literature, etc.  
**Due:** A brief introduction (1 page) explaining why you've been drawn to this particular class, what you hope to get out of it, and what your past experience is with Chicano or Latino literature.

**\*Sign up for Blackboard Posting Dates\***

**\*Sign up for Author Essay assignments (undergraduates only)\***

#### **Tuesday 1/17**

Read: *The Squatter and the Don* 55-133

#### **Student Blackboard Posts**

Introduction to Maria Amparo Ruíz de Burton and her position as a 19<sup>th</sup> century woman writer. Discuss the themes of the novel in relation to history, race, money and social class.

#### **Thursday 1/19**

Read: *The Squatter and the Don* 134-204

Look at Ruíz de Burton's style of writing; how does it compare to other 19<sup>th</sup> century writers and how does it help to set the context for future writing by Chicanos and Latinos?

#### **Tuesday 1/24**

Read: *The Squatter and the Don* 205-280

#### **Student Blackboard Posts**

The novel merges so many components almost seamlessly: politics, class struggles, romance, and allusions to Ruíz de Burton's personal life. How do we deal with each of these issues as a "part" of the novel?

**Thursday 1/26**

Read: *The Squatter and the Don* 280-336

Final Discussion, what themes do we notice in the novel? What do we make of the novel being published as a “recovery project?”

**Tuesday 1/31**

Read: *George Washington Gomez* 9-93

**Student Blackboard Posts**

Introduction to Américo Paredes and some historical background on Texas-Mexico history, the Texas Rangers, and the Mexican Revolution. Begin to look at the ways that the main character is “molded” or draws clues of his identity from his surrounding world. Where do issues such as family, anger, confusion, fate come into play?

**Thursday 2/2**

Read: *George Washington Gomez* 94-163

**Student Blackboard Posts**

Refocus on historical “perspective.” Discuss the ways that Texas history is shaped and related in order to solidify particular versions of historical narratives through time.

**Tuesday 2/7**

Read: *George Washington Gomez* 163-238

**Student Blackboard Posts**

Discuss the fact that the novel is incomplete and a first draft—how might that affect the outcome?

**Thursday 2/9**

Read: *George Washington Gomez* 239-302

What is the question of “success” that Paredes brings up and why might the differences in time between the writing (1930s) and the publication (1990s) make a difference?

**Tuesday 2/14**

Read: *Borderlands/La Frontera* 19-61

**Student Blackboard Posts**

Introduction to Gloria Anzaldúa and a discussion of the monumental nature of her book in this area. What is her definition of the “borderlands” and why is it significant to Chicanos? This is a common theme in Chicano literature: the identity influenced by two worlds. Discuss the ways in which her approaches to growing up on the “borderlands” can create new ways for Chicano writers to picture and control some of their identity development.

**Thursday 2/16**

Read: *Borderlands/La Frontera* 62-113

How does Anzaldúa go about setting up her message—first through history and on into memory? What is the difference between the two? How is the nature of living “in between,”

or “not one but both” dealt with and how does Anzaldúa come to terms with any emotions (anger, confusion, inspiration) that she feels from that existence? How do the messages of the book relate to Chicano literature and the consistent themes that it deals with?

### **Tuesday 2/21**

Read: In *Zoot Suit and Other Plays* “Introduction” (7-20) and 23-43 in “Zoot Suit”

#### **Student Blackboard Posts**

Introduction to Luis Valdez and the importance of *Teatro Campesino* in the development of art during the Chicano Movement. What are some of the ways that Valdez’s writing about WWII-era Mexican Americans may have mirrored what he experienced in his own time?

### **Thursday 2/23**

Read: In *Zoot Suit and Other Plays* “Zoot Suit” 43-94

#### **Film clips: Zoot Suit**

Discuss the nature of subcultures, stereotyping, and prejudice (“Zoot Suit Riots”). What ways does the play investigate the prescriptive role of being an American? Can we look at the role of *El Pachuco* as representative of something beyond his manifestation in the play? He is connected to the spirit and soul of the radically awakened Mestizo.

### **Tuesday 2/28**

Read: *Dreaming in Cuban* 3-126

#### **Student Blackboard Posts**

It is important to understand the cultural and familial implications that a monumental event in history (i.e. The Cuban Revolution) can produce. The history of Cuba itself becomes a large component of this novel as it is mapped out on several generations of a family across multiple countries and locales.

### **Thursday 3/1**

Read: *Dreaming in Cuban* 127-245

A large focus of the narration and plot lines come from the women in the novel. To what might Garcia be pointing in terms of “carriers of history?” Does the fragmented narration of the novel (switching views, moving from letters to narration, etc.) serve to reconstruct anything in particular in regards to the familial existence? How does the spirituality of the novel represent cultural ties and invoke trends of “magical realism” in literature?

### **Tuesday 3/6**

Read: *When I Was Puerto Rican* 3-104

#### **Student Blackboard Posts**

The structure of memoir allows us to have a firsthand testimony of the author’s experiences, reactions, and internal states of mind in relation to her growing up in Puerto Rico, leaving home, and encountering the United States—all from the unique perspective of a young girl.

### **Thursday 3/8**

Read: *When I Was Puerto Rican* 107-196

Are there central issues that drive her writing based on location, romantic versions of home, language, identity development, etc.? How does her focus on strongly depicting marks of culture create a picture of her identity?

### **Tuesday 3/13**

Read: *When I Was Puerto Rican* 196-270

#### **Student Blackboard Posts**

Does the personal (almost “journal-like” or “diary”) style of her voice in this book draw from readers an empathetic reaction or does it allow us to share, in a limited sense, her revisionist feelings of the past? What effect does the glossary at the back of the book have on this text? Do we feel like an “invited stranger” into a foreign world or something similar because of it? What specific issues of girlhood/womanhood does she combine with a Latino sense of identity?

**Thursday 3/15      NO CLASS**

**March 18-25      SPRING BREAK**

### **Tuesday 3/27**

Read: *Caramelo* 3-110

#### **Student Blackboard Posts**

Introduction to Sandra Cisneros and her writing style. Discuss some early themes including the lives of Chicana women and the transfer of legacy from mother to daughter. How does history and memory help them create a bond and what obstacles can intrude upon those bonds?

### **Thursday 3/29**

Read: *Caramelo* 111-221

Discuss the significance of “family” in the novel. What ways is it portrayed and how can it be viewed as a measure of life? How does Cisneros’s humorous style effect the situations that she discusses? Also, discuss the nature of healing power and spirituality as cultural markers of tradition, history, and heritage, etc.

### **Tuesday 4/3**

Read: *Caramelo* 222-330

#### **Student Blackboard Posts**

What ways does Cisneros challenge some existing stereotypes of Chicana or Latina women and how does her multiple perspective-based narrative reflect her challenge to dominant narratives?

### **Thursday 4/5**

Read: *Caramelo* 331-434

Final discussion on Cisneros. Compare this novel and its elements to a soap opera or a *telenovela*. Look back at some others’ writing for a similar approach to how some Chicanas’ lives are seen and often how they portray them.

### **Tuesday 4/10**

Read: *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* 1-94



### **Student Blackboard Posts**

The novel is very loosely based on Diaz's growing up in the Dominican Republic as well as his youth in a tough neighborhood in New Jersey. What areas does he focus on to merge his twentieth century Latino experience with a larger, multitudinous "American" experience?

#### **Thursday 4/12**

Read: *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* 95-181

His topics include poverty, young male *macho* obligations and deviations, American and Latino pop culture, etc.; in what ways can we transfer these topics to Diaz's own perspectives of his life and other young Latinos in our contemporary world?

#### **Tuesday 4/17**

Read: *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* 182-270

### **Student Blackboard Posts**

Debatably, of all the authors we have read, Diaz book is most "current," arguably depicting the most up to date representation of young Latino experience—do we see it this way and if so, how?

#### **Thursday 4/19**

Read: *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* 270-335

How can we compare the themes of movement, identity, assimilation, and transnationalism to earlier works we have investigated this summer?

#### **Tuesday 4/24**

1. Course wrap-up and final discussion/questions about Research Essays
2. Course Evaluations
3. Graduate Student Research Presentations

**Thursday 4/26      Research/Writing Release Day**

**April 28-May 4      FINALS WEEK**

**\*\*\*Research Essays Due\*\*\***

**Tuesday, May 1 by 2:30pm through Blackboard Assignment Tab**

**(If you would like your final Research Essay returned to you, please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope and I will gladly mail them to you later this summer. Alternatively, you could pick them up in the fall.)**