

'AMERICANITY': LITERATURES OF POSTCOLONIAL AMERICA

We can hear in American literature a tenor that echoes literatures we typically think of as postcolonial, like for instance those emerging in Africa and parts of Asia after the 1960s. In brief, the explanation for such resemblance is that, "[w]hile the U.S. defined itself as the world's first independent and anti-colonial nation state it simultaneously incorporated many of the defining features of European colonial networks – including the color-line – into its economic and cultural life" (Singh and Schmidt 5).

In this course we will read a selection of texts, some well known, others lesser known, with a view to the ambiguity embedded in the history of the U.S. as being simultaneously postcolony and neocolony. From this perspective "Sutpen's design" in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* attains an urgency that carries the story of an ante-bellum monomaniac into our own present; the same may be said of the peculiar universe Jones creates in his *The Known World*. As a colonialist 'entrepreneur' the U.S. critically affected the Mexicans and the Native Americans, whose subsequent trajectories would be defined by imperial schemes. The dramatic life of Díaz' Oscar Wao, the musings of essayist Richard Rodriguez, the complexities in Alexie's short stories, and the eerie, futuristic vista of Rivera's *Sleep Dealer* all speak to the aftershocks of internal colonization.

We will read these texts in the company both of classical, critical texts (Césaire, Du Bois, McClintock) and more topic-specific ones (Quijano and Wallerstein, Massey, Stegner), thus inviting reflections that may broaden our understanding of both the postcolonial and of 'America.'

Students are expected to participate actively in the seminar. Part of this involves preparing and leading seminar discussions, and do in-class writing.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Note: All *primary* texts except Whitman's "Song of the Redwood-Tree") and Sherman Alexie's short stories will be available at Studia
Other required course readings (critical and theoretical texts) can be downloaded from the File Storage on My Page.

Secondary readings may be added in the course of the semester.

1 sem. 29 Jan "Postcolonial America," Introduction:

Walt Whitman, "Song of the Redwood-Tree"

Anne McClintock, "The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term
"post-Colonialism"

Peter Hulme, "Postcolonial Theory and the Representation of Culture
in the Americas"

Aimé Césaire, from *Discourse on Colonialism*

2 sem. 5 Feb

William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*

Doreen Massey, from *On Space*

Aníbal Quijano and Immanuel Wallerstein, "Americanity as a
Concept, or the Americas in the Modern World System"

3 sem. 12 Feb **Edward Jones, *The Known World***

W. E. B. DuBois, "Forethought," "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," from
The Souls of Black Folk.

Thomas Jefferson, "Laws," from *Notes on the State of Virginia*

4 sem. 19 Feb

Junot Díaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*

José David Saldívar, "Conjectures on 'Americanity' and Junot Díaz's

'Fukú Americanus' in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*

5 sem. 5 March **Sherman Alexie, selected short stories from *The Toughest Indian in the World***

Texts to be announced

6 sem. 9 April **Richard Rodriguez, *Brown: The Last Discovery of America***
Wallace Stegner, "The Sense of Place"

7 sem. 23 April **Alex Rivera, *Sleep Dealer* [film]**
revisit "Americanity," Césaire, Rodriguez

8 sem. 30 April Conclusions

EXAM - 13 May: **Six-hour school exam (place tba)**

Required Reading:

Díaz, Junot. *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, Penguin, 2008

Hulme, Peter. "Postcolonial Theory and the Representation of Culture in the Americas," *Coloniality at Large*, Moraña, Dussel and Jauregui, eds, Duke UP, 2008, 388-395.

Faulkner, William. *Absalom, Absalom!*

DuBois, W. E .B. "Forethought," "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," from *The Souls of Black Folk*, Norton Anthology of American Literature, Vol II, ed Nina Baym, 2013.

Jefferson, Thomas. "Laws," from *Notes on the State of Virginia*, in *Race and the Enlightenment: A Reader*, ed Emanuel Chukwudi Eze, Cambridge, Blackwell, 1997, 97-103.

Jones, Edward. *The Known World*, HarperCollins, 2003

McClintock, Anne. "The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term "post-Colonialism", *Social Text*, 31/32, 1992, 84-98

Quijano, Aníbal and Immanuel Wallerstein. "Americanity as a Concept, or the Americas in the Modern World System"

Rivera, Alex. *Sleep Dealer*, Likely Story, 2009

Rodriguez, Richard. *Brown: The Last Discovery of America*, Viking, 2002.

Saldívar, José David. "Conjectures on 'Americanity' and Junot Díaz's 'Fukú Americanus' in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*," *The Global South*, 5:1, 2011, 120-136.

Stegner, Wallace. "The Sense of Place," offset, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Silver Buckle Press, 1986.

Whitman, Walt, "Song of the Redwood-Tree," *Leaves of Grass*, ed. David McKay, Philadelphia, Sherman & Co., 1900.