

English/History 6610: Seminar in the American West: Cultural Border Crossings
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Office Hours: TTH 9:30-11:45 and by appointment

[T]he border between the United States and Mexico is one of the most unreal borders in the world; it unites rather than separates two peoples. Carey McWilliams, *Brothers Under the Skin*

The geopolitical wound called “border” cannot stop the cultural undercurrents. . . The “artistic border” is artificial. It shouldn’t be there, and it is up to us to erase it. Guillermo Gómez-Péna

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Enrique Chagoya, “The Governor’s Nightmare” (1994), a response to California Governor Pete Wilson’s support of the anti-immigrant “Proposition 187”

With *Borderlands or La Frontera*, Gloria Anzaldúa initiated a new field, borderlands studies, focusing on the territorial and metaphorical intersections between the U.S. and Mexico. Instead of remaining in the borderlands, we will explore a variety of texts, images, lives, and cultural traditions shaped by crossing the border between the U.S. and Mexico. In addition to the required texts listed below, we will examine the lives and art of Diego Rivera, Frieda Kahlo, Edward Weston, Tina Modotti, and Elizabeth Catlett. And we will view and discuss a number of classic films, as well as several documentaries by Paul Espinosa, who will speak at the Tanner Symposium.

The class is offered in conjunction with the Tanner Symposium (April 2-4), Latino Contributions to U.S. Culture, during which several of the authors included will speak. Students in this course will be invited to all Tanner events and expected to attend as many as they can.

TEXTS:

Américo Paredes, *‘With a Pistol in His Hand’: A Border Ballad and its Hero*

Cormac McCarthy, *The Crossing*

Norma Cantú, *Canicula: Snapshots of a Girlhood en la Frontera*

Anita Brenner, *The Wind that Swept Mexico*

Luis Valdez, *Zoot Suit*

Carlos Fuentes, *The Old Gringo*

Richard Rodriguez, *Days of Obligation: An Argument with My Mexican Father*

Sonia Nazario, *Enrique’s Journey*

Helen Delpar, *The Enormous Vogue of Things Mexican: Cultural Relations between the U.S. and Mexico, 1920-1935*

John-Michael Rivera, *The Emergence of Mexican America: Recovering Stories of Mexican Peoplehood in U.S. Culture*
Melanie Anne Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett: An American Artist in Mexico*
Readings on electronic reserve [denoted reserve]

SCHEDULE:

[unless otherwise noted, all films should be viewed **before** the class for which they are scheduled]

- 1/8: Surveying the Scar: the John Russell Bartlett border survey and the Bartlett/García Conde compromise
- 1/10: Gloria Anzaldúa, excerpt from *Borderlands or La Frontera* [reserve]
Annette Kolodny, “Letting Go Our Grand Obsessions” [reserve]
- 1/15: *Lone Star*, dir. John Sayles (1996)
Arreola, Daniel D. “Forget the Alamo: The Border as Place in John Sayles’ *Lone Star*.” *Journal of Cultural Geography* Fall/Winter 2005. [reserve]
- 1/17: John Reed, excerpts from *Insurgent Mexico* [reserve]
Anita Brenner, *The Wind that Swept Mexico*
- 1/22: Espinosa, “The Hunt for Pancho Villa” (shown in class)
Watch at home before class, *And Starring Pancho Villa as Himself*
- 1/24: Carlos Fuentes, *The Old Gringo*
7 pm: Lois Rudnick talk in Old Main
- 1/29: Fuentes, *The Old Gringo*
- 1/31: Mena, selections from *The Collected Stories of María Christina Mena*
Amy Doherty, “Introduction,” “The Gold Vanity Set,” “The Education of Popo,”
“Doña Rita’s Rivals,” and “Marriage by Miracle” [reserve]
John-Michael Rivera, Chapter 2 of *The Emergence of Mexican America*
- 2/5: Delpar, *The Enormous Vogue of Things Mexican* [oral reports]
- 2/7: Delpar, *The Enormous Vogue of Things Mexican* [oral reports]
- 2/12: Katherine Anne Porter, “Why I Write about Mexico,” “La Conquistadora,” “Children of Xochitl,” “Flowering Judas,” and “Hacienda” [reserve]
- 2/14: *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, dir. Walter Houston (1948)
Read this website after watching film—
http://www.moviediva.com/MD_root/reviewpages/MDTreasureSierraMadre.htm

- 2/19: Go figure: Tuesday is Monday
- 2/21: Américo Paredes, *'With a Pistil in His Hand': A Border Ballad and its Hero*
- 2/26: Américo Paredes, *'With a Pistil in His Hand': A Border Ballad and its Hero*
Rivera, "Introduction" and Chapter 5 of *The Emergence of Mexican America*
- 2/28: *The Wild Bunch*, dir. Sam Peckinpah (1969)
- 3/4: Cormac McCarthy, *The Crossing*
- 3/6: McCarthy, *The Crossing* **Short paper due**
- 3/11: SPRING BREAK
- 3/ 13: SPRING BREAK
- 3/18: *Touch of Evil*, dir. Orson Wells (1958)
- 3/20: Luis Valdez, *Zoot Suit*
Rachel Rubin and Jeffrey Melnick, "Los Angeles, 1943: Zoot Suit Style, Immigrant Politics,"
from *Immigration and American Popular Culture*
- 3/25: Norma Cantú, *Canícula*
- 3/27: Norma Cantú, *Canícula*
- 4/1: *A Day without a Mexican*, dir. Sergio Arau (2004)
- 4/3: **Tanner Symposium**
Sonia Nazario, *Enrique's Journey*
- 4/8: Diego Rivera and Frieda Kahlo **abstract and bibliography due**
- 4/10: Melanie Anne Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett: An American Artist In Mexico*
- 4/15: Sarah M. Lowe, "Modotti and Weston: The Mexico Years" [reserve]
Rivera, "Conclusion" from *The Emergence of Mexican America*
- 4/17: Richard Rodriguez, *Days of Obligation*
- 4/22: Rodriguez, *Days of Obligation* **draft of final paper due**
- 4/24: *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada*, dir. Tommy Lee Jones (2006)
- 4/28: **Final draft due by 2 pm in Melody's dept. mailbox.**

REQUIREMENTS:

Class Attendance and Active Participation. No more than two unexcused absences. Always bring book or printouts to class.

Oral Presentations:

Each student will do two 15 minute oral presentations. One will be on a figure from Helen Delpar's *The Enormous Vogue of Things Mexican* and will be presented on either 2/5 or 2/7. The other is up to you.

Each student will also take responsibility for opening up and leading discussion on either a book or a film, on a date after 2/21.

On 1/17, please bring to class your preferences for oral reports. List in order of preference three choices from Delpar, three choices from "other oral presentations" and three choices of a film or book you'd like to lead discussion on. Remember to spread them out throughout the semester. [If you are interested in John Reed, who we will read on 1/17, please let me know ahead of time.]

Writing Assignments:

1/ For the day you lead discussion, write a two-page essay focusing on a single key passage or scene from the book or film. Email it to your classmates by 6pm the day before class. Use it as a way to initiate discussion. Include in your email five questions you'd like your classmates to consider.

2/ Find a critical, historical, or theoretical essay on anything we've read or talked about before Spring break. Write a five-page essay on what you found useful about the essay. Be sure you have a thesis.

3/ Final seminar paper. 15-20 analytical essay based on research. One-page abstract plus bibliography due on April 8. At least 10-page draft due April 22. Final essay due April 28. No late papers accepted.

Possibilities for oral reports from Delpar

All of the following figures are discussed, generally not in detail, in Delpar. The purpose of your oral report: provide more colorful and interesting information about your figure and his/her work, focusing specifically on how his/her sojourn in Mexico or the U.S. influenced the life and work. Also keep that question in mind as you read when you encounter one of the many other figures we will study this term. The bolded names are figures I'd like to know more about.

Carlton Beals or **Alma Reed** or Frank Tannenbaum (journalists)

Miguel Covarrubias (artist)

José Vasconcelos (philosopher/educator)

Julián Carrillo or **Carlos Chávez** (musicians)

Ramón Novarro or **Dolores del Río** (actors)

Moisés Sáenz (educator)
Witter Bynner (poet)
Will Rogers (humorist)
Dwight Morrow and Elizabeth Cutter Morrow (ambassadors)
Waldo Frank or Stuart Chase or **Bertram Wolfe** (writers)
Ione Robinson or Carlos Mérida or Rufino Tamayo or Maxine Albro (painters)
José Clemente Orozco (muralist)
Aaron Copland (composer)
Oliver LaFarge (anthropologist/writer)
Elsie Clews Parsons (anthropologist)
John Collier (reformer)
Frances Flynn Payne (reformer/advocate for arts exchanges)

Possibilities for oral reports throughout the term, with dates on which they will be presented:

Your report should provide **only useful information** for the readings we are doing that day. It should **not** be a biographical summary. It should have a thesis, which you support with relevant information. Because there is no assigned reading on Rivera and Kahlo, I'm very interested in having two of you work together on those figures.

John Reed (1/17)
Katherine Anne Porter (2/12)
John Houston (2/14)
Sam Peckinpah (2/28)
Cormac McCarthy's Border Trilogy (3/4)
Diego Rivera (4/8)
Frido Kahlo (4/8)
Tina Modotti (4/15)
Edward Weston (4/15)
Richard Rodriguez (4/17)