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LIT 521.02: Seminar in American Literature - Empire and Resistance

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LIT 521-02:

EMPIRE & RESISTANCE

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

LIT 521 explores the literatures of U.S. slavery, continental expansionism, overseas adventurism, and environmental degradation. Drawing on primary texts from the 19th century to the present (and one or two that look to the future), the course explores the growth of the U.S. from a republic to an empire and reads works that confront the human and environmental costs of the expansion of U.S. power across the continent and around the globe. In addition to the primary texts, the course also includes critical readings in fields ranging from Native American Studies, Marxism, Postcolonial and Race Studies, and more. **Fair warning:** this course includes works that depict scenes of catastrophic, visceral violence.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Atwood, Margaret. *Oryx and Crake*. (Anchor.)
Bao Ninh. *The Sorrow of War*. (Anchor.)
Benedict, Helen. *Sand Queen*. (Soho.)
Davis, Richard Harding. *Soldiers of Fortune*. (Broadview.)
Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. (Signet Classics.)
Erdrich, Louise. *The Round House*. (Harper Perennial.)
McCarthy, Cormac. *Blood Meridian*.
Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. (Vintage.)
Powers, Richard. *The Overstory*. (Norton.)
Snyder, Timothy. *On Tyranny*. (Tim Duggan Books.)
Wallace-Wells, David. *The Uninhabitable Earth*. (Tim Duggan Books.)
Welch, James. *Fools Crow*. (Penguin Classics.)
Whitehead, Colson. *The Underground Railroad*. (Anchor.)

There will also be a supplementary packet of critical readings.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Each seminar participant will be responsible for the following:

1. Bring to each class, either in paper form or on screen, at least **THREE** observations, comments, questions, or critiques about each week's reading. Keep your observations brief and pithy—one or two sentences at most. You will EMAIL (pasted in the body, and

NOT as attachments) the THREE observations, etc., to me BEFORE class. (You may, of course, *supplement* these three notes during class—and email me your supplementary observations if you wish—but you must come to class already armed with three killer insights/questions/comments/somethings.)

2. Submit, at the end of the semester (specific due date TBA), a 15-20+ page scholarly essay that analyzes or critiques one (or perhaps, though rarely, more) of the course's primary texts. Your essay must display a working knowledge of (that is, include directly) such secondary sources as may be available (including reviews, interviews, and scholarly articles and books, etc.). Strong, smart-as-hell theoretical readings are especially welcome (depending, of course, upon your interests, investments, and backgrounds in literary and cultural theory).

Covid

Adapted from the Office of the Provost, University of Montana (and, as always, subject to change as the pandemic warrants); in short, we will all do our best in the face of these challenging times:

1. Mask use is REQUIRED with the classroom or laboratory;
2. If you feel ill and/or are exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms, please DO NOT come to class and contact the Curry Health Center at (406) 243-4330;
3. If you are required to isolate or quarantine, instructors will do their best to support your continued academic progress;
4. UM recommends students get the COVID-19 vaccine. Please direct your questions or concerns about vaccines to the Curry Health Center;
5. Where social distancing (maintaining a consistent 6 feet between individuals) is not possible, specific seating arrangements will be used to support contact tracing efforts;
6. Class attendance will be taken in order to support contact tracing efforts; and,
7. Drinking liquids and eating food is DISCOURAGED within the classroom.

SYLLABUS

W Sept 1: Introduction/Semester Plan

W Sept 8: Snyder
Reading Packet

Unit 1: The Literatures of Slavery

W Sept 15: Douglass

W Sept 22: Morrison

W Sept 29: Whitehead

Unit 2: The Literatures of Continental Expansion

W Oct 6: McCarthy

W Oct 13: Welch

W Oct 20: Erdrich

Unit 3: Overseas Adventurism

W Oct 27: Davis

W Nov 3: Bao

W Nov 10: Benedict

Unit 4: Global Warming (& Other Apocalypses)

W Nov 17: Atwood

W Nov 24: **No Class: Travel Day**

W Dec 1: Powers

W Dec 8: Wallace-Wells