Migrant America: A Sense of Place in U.S. Migrant Literature and Film

EGL 369.01 Spring 2015
Professor J. Santa Ana Office: 1094 Humanities
Office hours: Thursdays 10:30am – 12:30, 3:00-4:00, and by appointment.
Email: jeffrey.santa.ana@stonybrook.edu

The class meets in 224 Frey Hall at 1:00 – 2:20pm on Tuesday and Thursday.

Course Description:
What does it mean to pair “migrant” with “America” in a time of globalization? How might we understand the United States of America as a country historically shaped and determined by the international migrant? More than a geographical space, “America” has always been affected by global movement, by the transnational migrations of diverse peoples to and from its shores, as well as across and within its changing and contested borders. Migrations involve not only physical journeys but also personal, cultural, and political transformations. They encompass the migrant’s search for a sense of place and belonging in a newly adopted homeland. This course will explore the multiple migrations that shape our collective identity, and the cultural myths that unite Americans with diverse experiences of migration and border crossing. Through six units, we will focus on specific examples of the migrant experience in America and global migrations from the early twentieth century to the present: Unit 1. A primary force causing today’s global migrations of people: environmental crisis and human-induced climate change; Unit 2. The westward movement of dispossessed farmers during the Great Depression; Unit 3. The journeys of African Americans on the East Coast after the Civil War and the abolishment of slavery; Unit 4. The forced removal and migration of Native Americans caused by environmental injustice; Unit 5. Those struggling to survive in the aftermath of a planetary catastrophe; and Unit 6. The international migrations of those from the Caribbean, the Asia-Pacific, and the Global South during the mid-twentieth century to the present. Using literature, films, visual images, and secondary critical sources, we will explore the stories we have come to tell ourselves about the meaning of America as a nation shaped and determined by the migrant in a time of globalization, stories about the migrant’s search for a sense of place—of identity, home, and belonging.

This class is discussion focused. Although I will provide some brief lectures, our class will operate as a seminar in which you listen to others’ perspectives, ask productive questions, and articulate ideas with nuance and clarity. You must come to class prepared to discuss all readings on the days they are listed in the class schedule.

Learning outcomes:
This class meets most of the requirements for the following learning outcomes: Humanities (HUM) to “Develop an awareness of some of the key historical themes of one or more of the humanities,” “Develop an awareness of the multi- or interdisciplinary nature of issues within the humanities,” and “Develop an awareness of the contexts (historical, social, geographical, moral) in which these issues emerged”; Global Studies (GLO) to “Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the interconnectedness of the world, past and present” and “Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of a society or culture outside of the United States”; and American Studies (USA) to “Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of U.S. history and society” and “Demonstrate knowledge of a subculture or relationships among subcultures within U.S. society.”
Note on subject matter:
This course centers on subject matter of current and controversial interest, and a primary objective is to have a classroom atmosphere that promotes full and free discussion, the aim of which is to provoke healthy intellectual discomfort and the critical inquiry that ought to be its consequence. The aim of the course is consistent with the Undergraduate Bulletin. By enrolling in this course, you therefore understand and accept its requirements. You must submit every piece of written work in order to be eligible to pass the course. Moreover, academic policy and regulation at the university prohibits making any “special” arrangements with individual students who have problems with course materials (with the exception of a documented physical or learning disability). If any student in the course has a problem with any text or other course material, the student needs to drop the class before February 6, 2015, the last day to drop classes without a “W” (withdraw) on student records.

Required books:
John Steinbeck. *The Grapes of Wrath*
Zora Neale Hurston. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*
Linda Hogan. *Solar Storms*
Cormac McCarthy. *The Road*
Edwidge Danticat. *Breath, Eyes, Memory*
Junot Diaz. *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*
Jhumpa Lahiri. *Unaccustomed Earth*

Films (to be viewed in class):
*Climate Refugees: The Human Face of Climate Change* (2010; 1hr 24 minutes), a documentary film that investigates today’s global migrations of people in consequence of rapid climate change; written and directed by Michael Nash.
*Which Way Home* (2009; 1 hr 22 minutes), a documentary film that follows three children who make a dangerous trek through Mexico en route to the U.S. border, hoping to reunite with their parents; directed by Rebecca Cammisa.

Course website in Blackboard:
I will post the syllabus and reading materials (articles, essays, and book chapters) in our course website on Blackboard. On occasion, I may include in our course website any visual materials or images for discussion in class.

The website for this class is located at:
http://www.stonybrook.edu/~blackboard

Work requirements:
In this course, you will undertake a range of assignments that take several forms to bring course materials, media depictions, and everyday life into the class while you export your “book learning” and theoretical ideas outside, as you live in the world. This class provides you with a range of learning tools—through reading written texts, critically engaging with films, and working collaboratively on a group project.
Note about final course grades: all course grades are final. After I have determined and submitted your final course grade, you cannot request a grade change. Absolutely no exceptions will be made. The grade you receive will be based on the effort you put into all of the work requirements for the course.

Regular attendance and active participation in class: 10%
As mentioned above, this class will mainly engage in vigorous class discussion. Your daily preparation and willingness to actively participate in discussion are central to the quality of the course. Come prepared to talk about the issues covered that day. If you are a shy or reserved person who does not speak in class, I may on occasion call on you to contribute to discussion. Class attendance is mandatory. Class attendance and posting a question on Blackboard are mandatory. More than four absences will lower your participation grade; more than five will lower your overall course grade. Coming late to class repeatedly or leaving early will count toward absences. Getting up to leave while class is in session is prohibited and will count toward absences. You may get up to leave while class is in session only if it’s an emergency or only if you’ve arranged it ahead of time with me. Attendance is required during all group presentations; see below.

Leading class discussion with a posted question on Blackboard (included as participation)
We will begin discussion with questions presented by members of the class. On the evening before we begin the class, one or two members will formulate one question about the reading. We will use the question to initiate and lead discussion. Be sure that your question refers to specific passages in the text. In your question, you are required to comment on the reading in a way that expresses your analysis of it in relation to the topics in our class. You can pose a question that will lead us to examine closely the language in the reading or compare it to other readings in the course. Your question can also express what you find most intense, meaningful, or puzzling about the reading.

Students will take turns formulating and posting a question throughout the semester based on the alphabetical order of last names. If you are working with another class member to post a question, you can contact each other (by email, phone, or meeting outside of class) to plan your question that one of you will then post on Blackboard in advance of the class meeting. I will screen your question in class on the day you both are to present it. I will take into account the quality and effort you both put into your question when factoring your participation grade.

Quizzes: 10%
Occasionally, I will give a quiz based on the reading assigned for class that day. These quizzes are to make sure that everyone is keeping up with scheduled readings. They will include questions about plot developments, characters, and style. Quizzes may also include questions about assigned secondary readings (articles and essays). There will be four quizzes. I will drop your lowest quiz grade when I calculate your average. I will not give make-ups for quizzes; you need to be in class to take them.

Analytical essay on one book (5-6 pages) and prospectus (1-2 pages): 20%
Write an essay of close analysis on any one text in the course prior to the date the paper is due in class (The Grapes of Wrath or Their Eyes Were Watching God). I will give you a list of block quotes from the books, and you must select one of these quotes to quote entirely in your paper
for analysis. Also, you are required to come up with your own argument (thesis) that you must demonstrate and support through close analysis of your one selected block quote as well as other passages (quotes) from the book that you will choose. You may refer to our class discussions and the posted questions in Blackboard for help to come up with your argument (thesis) for your essay. I am glad to meet with you individually in my office hours to discuss your argument. I will not discuss your essay’s argument via email. You must schedule an appointment ahead of time to discuss your essay with me in person. Send me an email to schedule an appointment.

Instructions for the prospectus:
The prospectus (a typed written plan of 2 pages) for your essay is due in class on Tuesday, March 3. In your prospectus and under your name do the following: (1) Write the author’s name and the title of the book you’ve chosen for your essay. (2) Write your essay’s provisional thesis statement (2-3 sentences). (3) Type a block quote from the book that you’ve chosen to analyze in your paper. (4) Under the typed block quote, write a brief paragraph of close analysis of some details (words, terms, or language) in the quote. In your analysis, be sure to put quotation marks around the details from the quote that you are analyzing closely. (4) Write an argument (i.e., a topic sentence) about the block quote that you have generated through your analysis of the details. Write your argument (the topic sentence) above the block quote.
This paper is an essay of close analysis. You do not need to refer to secondary materials in your paper. However, if you like, you can include historical and social context from the secondary materials in Blackboard (Article, Essays, and Book Chapters). If you do include any secondary materials in your paper, you must cite them in a bibliography (Works Cited) section. Use MLA style format.


Late paper policy. The analytical paper must be turned in by the due date. I’ll make exceptions in cases of medical or family emergency, but in general I’m holding fast to this rule. If you anticipate a problem, I need to hear about potential lateness before the due date. See the Brief Style Guide for English Papers in Blackboard.

Group project: 30%
We will conclude the semester with class members giving a presentation in groups consisting of 5 members. Each group will arrange themselves according to a particular issue or theme pertaining to the topic of international migration, immigration, and the migrant’s search for a sense of place and belonging in America. Each group will have about 25 minutes to present their project to the class. Each presenter should have a role and speak individually to the class for at least 5 minutes. I will pass around a sign-up sheet in class for you to choose a group project for your presentation. Plan carefully with your group to contribute your own part that supports and relates to your group’s overall topic or argument. It should be clear, in other words, that your effort is integrally part of your group’s work.

The group project leaves you room to explore those aspects of the class that most appeal to you. You may choose to make a PowerPoint slide presentation that touches on some aspect of the migrant or immigrant experience or you may choose to conduct interviews of family members to
analyze the issues faced by migrant or immigrant people. Your group may want to focus on one of the six course units or your group might agree to choose a particular topic that interests all of you: for example, the experiences of undocumented students who were raised in the United States and their struggle to pass the Dream Act (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors), a bill that would provide conditional permanent residency to certain immigrants of good moral character who graduate from U.S. high schools, arrived in the United States as minors, and lived in the country continuously for at least five years prior to the bill’s enactment; the experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender (LGBT) people who seek or have been granted asylum in the United States under the particular social group category; the particular historical experience of a racial minority or ethnic immigrant group, for example: Asian (Chinese/Filipino/Korean), Caribbean (Dominican/Cuban/Haitian), African (Nigerian/Sudanese/Egyptian/Kenyan), Mexican, Central American, South American; and European (Italian/Irish/Russian/Polish); the demographics and culture of a particular ethnic immigrant group who have settled and called home in New York City, for example: Chinese in Flushing (Queens), Russians and Ukrainians in Sheepshead Bay (Brooklyn), Filipinos in Woodside (Queens), and Dominicans and Puerto Ricans in the Bronx and Manhattan; the experiences of Muslim, Jewish, and other religious refugees who seek or have been granted asylum in the United States under the particular social group category; debunking stereotypes and misperceptions about a particular undocumented immigrant group, for example: explaining why so many undocumented Mexicans come to the U.S. and what happens to the families and communities they leave behind and thus giving these people who are otherwise disparaged as “threatening” and “illegal” a human face; the influence of recent and ongoing popular television shows (such as The Border, The Wire, Modern Family, Ugly Betty, Boardwalk Empire) and popular Hollywood movies (such as The Godfather Part II, Crash, In America, The Visitor, Fast Food Nation, The Immigrant, The Good Lie) on perceptions of particular immigrant groups or migrant people in the United States.

Your group should connect your selected project to any of the texts, films, and readings in our class. Think of this connection as a way to discuss any of the readings and films that inspired you and helped generate the topic of your presentation. You can and should include digital media or visual materials and audio recordings available in the Internet and in Melville Library (e.g., PowerPoint slides, YouTube videos, music recordings, films, etc.) Use these materials and digital media to communicate your complex ideas, analysis, and argument about your topic. I am happy to help you acquire or prepare any media equipment you may need for your presentation. Just let me know ahead of time if you need such help.

After the presentation each member will turn in a written plan (3 pages) of the individual work or contribution to the group project. For the first part of your written plan, indicate the questions you ask, the arguments you make, or any other information you feel is important to your part in planning and contributing to the presentation. Your written plan must be typed in a coherent narrative or essay form. Do not turn in an outline or fragmentary notes.

The grade you receive will be based on your own performance in the group and the quality of your own written plan.

Take-home final exam (close analysis of passages from books; 8-10 pages typed): 30%
In the take-home final, you will select five of eight passages or images that I will list from our required books and films. You will write close analysis of each of your selected passages or images. For each of your selected passages, you will analyze important details that are relevant to explaining the meaning of the passage or the image. In other words, explain the meaning of the passage or image by examining closely its language, literary or visual devices, style, narrative and rhetorical forms, symbols and/or metaphors that help explain its meaning. **In your exam, write close analysis of details, not plot summary.**

In total, your analysis of passages and images will locate, evaluate, synthesize and incorporate relevant primary materials and secondary materials (e.g., chapters in Blackboard from Gerber’s *American Immigration*, Gregory’s *American Exodus*, Gabbacia’s *Immigration and American Diversity*, my lectures in PowerPoint, etc.) in an 8-10 page paper that comprises a thesis-driven, interpretive essay.

The take-home final exam is due on the last day of class. **It must be typed, contain a bibliography (works cited), pages numbered, and written in MLA style format; see Analytical essay for MLA style format.**

**Academic integrity:**
Plagiarism on one assignment may result in an F for the entire course. University guidelines on dealing with plagiarism will be followed. Although I encourage you to read websites, articles, and books about the course material, you must be careful to avoid plagiarism in your papers and midterm exam. Plagiarism is using others’ ideas and words without clearly acknowledging the source of that information. Plagiarism, intentional or unintentional, is considered academic dishonesty and all instances will be reported to the Academic Judiciary. To avoid plagiarism, you must give credit whenever you use another person’s idea, opinion, or theory; any facts or any other pieces of information that are not common knowledge; quotations of another person’s actual spoken or written words; or paraphrase of another person’s spoken or written words. Citing all sources and putting direct quotations in quotation marks are required. For further information on the policies regarding academic dishonesty see http://ws.cc.stonybrook.edu/uaa/academicjudiciary/

**DSS assistance:**
If you have a physical, psychological, medical, or learning disability that may impact your course work, please contact Disability Support Services at (631) 632-6748 or http://studentaffairs.stonybrook.edu/dss/. They will determine with you what accommodations are necessary and appropriate. All information and documentation is confidential.

Students who require assistance during emergency evacuation are encouraged to discuss their needs with their professors and Disability Support Services. For procedures and information go to the following website: http://www.sunysb.edu/ehs/fire/disabilities.shtml

**Course etiquette:**
The use of laptop computers and cell phones are prohibited during class meetings. However, you may bring your laptop computer to class only if you are using it for your group presentation or to read the course texts in electronic form. If you violate this rule, you will be asked to leave the class. Inattentiveness during class discussions will negatively affect your grade. **If you use**
your cell phone during class, you will be told to leave and your grade will be lowered. This includes class meetings when we view films.

Tentative class schedule
Be ready to discuss all readings on the days they are listed below. I may change some of these readings to recommended reading. I will inform the class of these changes in advance.

PQ: Posted questions for discussion in class.
* This reading is available in PDF format in Blackboard under Articles, Essays, and Book Chapters.
(R) This reading is recommended only.

Week 1:
Unit 1. A primary force causing today’s global migrations of people: environmental crisis and human-induced climate change

Tu, 1/27 Course mechanics, syllabus
Video in class: Climate Refugees: The Human Face of Climate Change (95 minutes)

Th, 1/29 Climate Refugees (finish watching the film in class)
Christian Parenti. Tropic of Chaos: Climate Change and the New Geography of Violence (have read chapters 1-3)*
Giles Slade. American Exodus: Climate Change and the Coming Flight for Survival (have read Introduction)*

Week 2:
Unit 2. The westward movement of dispossessed farmers during the Great Depression

Tu, 2/3 Finish discussion of chapters by Parenti and Slade and the film Climate Refugees.

PQ: The Grapes of Wrath (have read up to chapter 11)
Giles Slade. American Exodus: Climate Change and the Coming Flight for Survival (have read chapter 1)*
Robert McLeman. “Case Study: Depression-Era Migration on the North American Great Plaines” (pp. 168-79) (R)*

Th, 2/5 PQ: The Grapes of Wrath (have read up to chapter 18)
James N. Gregory, American Exodus: The Dustbowl Migration and Okie Culture in California (Chapters 1 – 2) (R)*

Week 3:
Tu, 2/10 PQ: The Grapes of Wrath (have read up to chapter 21)
David Gerber. American Immigration (have read pp. 1-44)

Th, 2/12 PQ: The Grapes of Wrath (have read up to chapter 26)
David Gerber. American Immigration (have read pp. 45-63)*
Week 4:
Tu, 2/17  PQ: *The Grapes of Wrath* (have finished the book; discussion of the ending)

Unit 3. The journeys of African Americans on the East Coast after the Civil War and the abolition of slavery (Reconstruction Era)

*Their Eyes Were Watching God* (have read up to chapter 5)
Donna R. Gabbacia. *Immigration and American Diversity: A Social and Cultural History*, “Redefining the Nation: 1850-1900” (have read pp. 110-33)*

Th, 2/19  PQ: *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (have read up to chapter 10)

Week 5:
Tu, 2/24  PQ: *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (have read up to chapter 19)
David Gerber. *American Immigration* (have read pp. 65-85)*

Th, 2/26  PQ: *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (have finished the book)
List of block quotes for analytical essay handed out in class

Week 6:
Unit 4. The forced removal and migration of Native Americans caused by environmental injustice

Tu, 3/3  Prospectus (written plan) for the analytical essay due
PQ: *Solar Storms* (have read up to chapter 7)

Th, 3/5  PQ: *Solar Storms* (have read up to chapter 12)

Week 7:
Tu, 3/10  PQ: *Solar Storms* (have read up to chapter 19)
*Which Way Home* (begin watching film in class)

Th, 3/12  Analytical essay due in class (5 pages typed)
*Which Way Home* (finish watching film and discussion)

Week 8:

March 16-22 (Monday to Sunday): Spring Recess

Week 9:
Tu, 3/24  PQ: *Solar Storms* (have finished the book; discussion of the ending)

Unit 5. Migration and struggling to survive in the aftermath of a planetary catastrophe (?)
*The Road* (have read up to p. 102)

Th, 3/26  PQ: *The Road* (have read up to p. 198)

Week 10:
Unit 6. The international migrations of those from the Caribbean, the Asia-Pacific, and the Global South during the mid-twentieth century to the present
Tu, 3/31  **PQ: The Road** (have finished the book; discussion of the ending)

_Breath, Eyes, Memory_ (have read up to chapter 13)
David Gerber. _American Immigration_ (have read pp. 86-100)*

Th, 4/2  **PQ: Breath, Eyes, Memory** (have read up to chapter 20)

**Week 11:**

Tu, 4/7  **PQ: Breath, Eyes, Memory** (have read up to chapter 35)

Th, 4/9  **PQ: Breath, Eyes, Memory** (have finished the book; discussion of the ending)
_The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao_ (have read up to chapter TWO, p. 50)

**Week 12:**

Tu, 4/14  **PQ: The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao** (have read up to part II, p. 201)
David Gerber. _American Immigration_ (have read pp. 101-120)*

Th, 4/16  **PQ: The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao** (have read up to p. 261)

**Week 13:**

Tu, 4/21  **PQ: The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao** (have finished the book; discussion of the ending)

_Unaccustomed Earth, Hema and Kaushik_ (have read “Once in a Lifetime”)
David Gerber. _American Immigration_ (have read pp. 121-135)*

Th, 4/23  No class.

**Week 14:**

Tu, 4/28  **PQ: Unaccustomed Earth, Hema and Kaushik** (have read “Years End” and “Going Ashore”)

_Take-home final available electronically in Blackboard_

Th, 4/30  Group Presentations (1 and 2)

**Week 15:**

Tu, 5/5  Group Presentations (3 and 4)

Th, 5/7  Group Presentations (5 and 6)

Tu, 5/12  Take-home final exam due by 5pm; email it to me as a PDF:
jeffrey.santa.ana@stonybrook.edu