

Ethnicity in American Literature

ENGL 169

Spring 2026 Section 02 In Person 3 Unit(s) 01/22/2026 to 05/11/2026 Modified 01/22/2026

Contact Information

Professor: Dr. Maite Urcaregui (she/they)

Email: maite.urcaregui@sjsu.edu

Office: Faculty Office Building (FOB) 216

Office Hours

Monday, Wednesday, 3:00 PM to 4:00 PM, Zoom

<https://sjsu.zoom.us/j/89770941217?pwd=ob2FfnsEGgZgPVC7VAthuckBM8s6Qg.1>

[.https://sjsu.zoom.us/j/89770941217?pwd=ob2FfnsEGgZgPVC7VAthuckBM8s6Qg.1](https://sjsu.zoom.us/j/89770941217?pwd=ob2FfnsEGgZgPVC7VAthuckBM8s6Qg.1)

Course Information

ENGL 169: Ethnicity in American Literature explores ethnic and racial identities, communities, and literary traditions within the United States. We will read a variety of literary forms and genres ("slave narratives," or narratives of the enslaved; historical fiction; speculative fiction; young adult literature; and graphic memoir) that are by and about people of color in the U.S., including African American, Native American, Chicanx, and Arab American. We will work to understand the historical, cultural, and political contexts from which these works arise and the ways in which they creatively respond to the contexts. In addition to addressing the social significance of these works, we will also examine and celebrate their formal innovations and literary contributions. Some central themes that we explore throughout the course include: histories of colonialism and racism, notions of un/freedom, national exclusion and belonging, citizenship, migration, labor, and intersectionality (how other aspects of experience, such as gender and sexuality, intersect with ethnicity and race).

Tuesday, Thursday, 4:30 PM to 5:45 PM, Boccardo Business Center (BBC) 125

Course Description and Requisites

Study of expressions of ethnic and racial identity in American literature, with close attention to strategies of representation and resistance. Selected texts primarily arise out of the lived experiences of people of color, including Native Americans, Black Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinx Americans.

Satisfies UD Area: 4. Self, Society, and Equality in the U.S. (Formerly Area S).

Prerequisite(s): Completion of Core General Education and upper division standing are prerequisites to all UD GE courses. Completion of, or co-registration in, 100W is strongly recommended.

Grading: Letter Graded

* Classroom Protocols

Attendance

Regular attendance is vital to your learning and success in the course. We don't want to miss out on the opportunity to learn from/with you! If you are sick, or are unable to make it to class for whatever reason, you can catch up on the material you missed on our course Canvas page, via a friend/peer, and/or in my office hours or by appointment.

Preparation & Participation

We all have a responsibility and an opportunity to be an active participant in our own learning and to contribute to the knowledge that we'll create together in this class! Please come prepared to do so. This means that you've completed the assigned reading for the day in advance of class; you have access to those readings during our class discussion; and you have basic materials like pen/pencil, paper, and a device if you would like or are requested.

Devices

You are welcome to use larger devices like a tablet or laptop for class-specific activities, but please refrain from using your cell phone. Please be present and help create a respectful and distraction-free class by using your devices for class work only during our time together.

Engaging in Class Discussion & Building Community

Given the history of the Americas, this course explores challenging issues around colonialism, race and racism, and gender-based and sexual violence, among others. I encourage you to engage in these discussions to the degree you feel comfortable, to connect what we read to your own life and to the world around you, and to listen to and learn from your peers with respect and care. We will continue to discuss our collective goals and guidelines around developing safe and inclusive classroom discussions throughout the semester.

Course Communication & Emails

All course materials can be found on [Canvas Learning Management System course login website](#). Please check both our course Canvas and your email regularly to stay up to date.

Please be aware that I do not respond to emails outside of traditional business hours, M-F 9-5. I encourage you to also maintain professional boundaries around email and step away from it when you can/need. Unless it is a weekend or I am sick or away for travel, I should respond to your message within 48 hours. If you worry that I haven't seen or responded to your email, please do not hesitate to send me a follow up. I would appreciate it in fact!

When you email me, I'd appreciate it if you included a specific subject that states the purpose of your email as well as a greeting, message, and your name.

Academic Originality, Honesty, and AI

The literature we will be reading and discussing is so, so good, and it explores narratives and experiences that are often ignored, distorted, or marginalized. I want you to do justice to that literature by seriously engaging with it and developing your own original analysis of it. In short, I want to hear what you, and only you, have to say. While AI is now an unavoidable part of our reality, it is important that we understand how AI works and the ethical and environmental issues it raises. There are two types of AI tools, generative AI (which processes large amounts of text in order to learn and predict patterns and generate new content) and assistive AI (which do not produce content but helps users refine the content they've created).

Generative AI Tools are any platform that creates content based on user inputs and prompts (e.g., ChatGPT, JASPER, Bard, DeepMind, DALL-E, some functions of Grammarly, etc.). Generative AI for many assignments is the antithesis of the kind of learning we are engaged in in the Humanities Department. But for some creative assignments, it might be used consciously and specifically for a learning goal. So students should always be cautious and vigilant when considering whether or not to use an AI tool, considering whether a) the use of AI thwarts the goals of the assignment, and/or b) the use of AI is not permitted in your class or on this assignment. It is up to the student to know the

Assistive AI Tools are platforms that aid the user in producing or refining their own original content, but which do not generate new or creative content on their own (e.g., Hemingway, MS Editor, etc.). In general, Assistive AI platforms don't generate their own content, they aren't considered academic integrity violations. But for various reasons (e.g., students' need to develop their own mastery of grammar and syntax) individual instructors may prohibit their use. Using assistive technology when it is explicitly and clearly prohibited would be a violation of academic integrity.

For this class, you may use assistive AI tools but not generative AI tools. If I suspect you have used generative AI, I will first schedule a meeting with you to get more information and, if necessary, will assign an F for that assignment and report the issue to SJSU's Office of Student Conduct. The model that generative AI uses to generate material is fundamentally derivative and is also known to be inaccurate and incomplete and to reproduce misinformation, biases, and stereotypes. I want to hear your original ideas, arguments, and writing that can only be achieved by engaging with the texts we're reading and the writing process! Additionally, we want to make sure that the scholars and authors whose ideas we engage with are properly cited and credited to not only credit their labor/talents/insights but also to build our own credibility as an writer.

Ultimately, it is your responsibility to take ownership over your education and to practice the mental muscle of developing, refining, and communicating ideas through writing. It is also your responsibility to know what plagiarism is, how to avoid it, and how to properly cite all sources.

Program Information

Welcome to this General Education course.

SJSU's General Education Program establishes a strong foundation of versatile skills, fosters curiosity about the world, promotes ethical judgment, and prepares students to engage and contribute responsibly and cooperatively in a multicultural, information-rich society. General education classes integrate areas of study and encourage progressively more complex and creative analysis, expression, and problem solving.

The General Education Program has three goals:

Goal 1: To develop students' core competencies for academic, personal, creative, and professional pursuits.

Goal 2: To enact the university's commitment to diversity, inclusion, and justice by ensuring that students have the knowledge and skills to serve and contribute to the well-being of local and global communities and the environment.

Goal 3: To offer students integrated, multidisciplinary, and innovative study in which they pose challenging questions, address complex issues, and develop cooperative and creative responses.

More information about the General Education Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) can be found on the [GE website \(https://sjsu.edu/general-education/ge-requirements/overview/learning-outcomes.php\)](https://sjsu.edu/general-education/ge-requirements/overview/learning-outcomes.php).

English Program Information

The following statement has been adopted by the Department of English for inclusion in all syllabi: In English Department Courses, instructors will comment on and grade the quality of student writing as well as the quality of ideas being conveyed. All student writing should be distinguished by correct grammar and punctuation, appropriate diction and syntax, and well-organized paragraphs. The Department of English reaffirms its commitment to the differential grading scale as defined in the SJSU Catalog ("The Grading System").

Grades issued must represent a full range of student performance:

- A = excellent;
- B = above average;
- C = average;
- D = below average;
- F = failure.

Within any of the letter grade ranges (e.g. B+/B/B-), the assignment of a +(plus) or -(minus) grade will reflect stronger (+) or weaker (-) completion of the goals of the assignment.

Program Learning Outcomes (PLO)

Upon successful completion of an undergraduate degree program in the Department of English and Comparative Literature, students will be able to:

1. Read closely in a variety of forms, styles, structures, and modes, and articulate the value of close reading in the study of literature, creative writing, or rhetoric.
2. Show familiarity with major literary works, genres, periods, and critical approaches to British, American, and World Literature.
3. Write clearly, effectively, and creatively, and adjust writing style appropriately to the content, the context, and nature of the subject.
4. Develop and carry out research projects, and locate, evaluate, organize, and incorporate information effectively.
5. Articulate the relations among culture, history, and texts, including structures of power.

Department Information:

Department Name: English and Comparative Literature

Department Office: FO 102

Department Website: www.sjsu.edu/english (<https://www.sjsu.edu/english>)

Department email: english@sjsu.edu (<mailto:english@sjsu.edu>)

Department phone number: 408-924-4425

Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs)

GE UD Area 4: Self, Society, and Equality in the U.S.

In UD Area 4 courses, students study the interrelationships of individuals, racial groups, and cultural groups to understand and appreciate issues of diversity, inclusion, inequalities, and justice in the United States. By exploring different perspectives and helping students articulate and discuss their own values, UD Area 4 courses prepare students to live and work responsibly and cooperatively in a multicultural society.

GE UD Area 4 Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of an UD Area 4 course, students should be able to:

1. describe how identities are shaped by cultural and societal influences within contexts of equality and inequality. Examples include, but are not limited to, race, ethnicity, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, religion, disability status, age, generation, regional origin, national identity, language, and intersectionalities;
2. analyze historical, economic, political, or social processes that shape diversity, equality, and structured inequalities in the U.S. and reflect on one's own identities and positions within these structures;
3. evaluate social actions which have or have not led to greater equality and social justice in the U.S.; and
4. engage in constructive interactions about social issues in the U.S. within the framework of equality and inequalities.

Content

1. Courses shall focus on issues or present perspectives from different academic disciplines and include an integrative assignment appropriate to the course content.
2. Courses shall require students to apply basic skills (reading, writing, speaking, critical thinking, research, and mathematics/quantitative reasoning) gained in Core General Education courses.
3. Assignments must utilize library research and oral and written communication skills.
4. Courses shall promote reflective processes and critical analysis of the civic relevance and ethical dimensions of course topics.
5. Materials must include primary sources appropriate to the disciplinary approaches used in the course (Examples include, but are not limited to, original creative works, scholarly journal articles, interviews, oral histories, historical documents).

ENGL 169 Specific Learning Outcomes

1. describe some of the historical, social, and political contexts that shape our understandings of race and ethnicity and the experiences of people of color in the U.S;
2. examine how race and ethnicity intersect with other categories of experience, such as gender, sexuality, class, religion, and citizenship status;
3. identify and analyze both the social significance of literature and its formal innovations and strategies;
4. synthesize historical and literary research with literature to develop original ideas and arguments and to communicate them through writing.

Writing requirement

The minimum writing requirement is 3,000 words in a language and style appropriate to the discipline.

Course Materials

Note that you are responsible for getting access to all of these texts. While you are not required to purchase them, I encourage you to rent or purchase a print copy if you're able. All of these texts are available for rent or purchase at the SJSU library and some are available online through the SJSU library.

All other course readings will be available on Canvas.

Course Requirements and Assignments

Specific assignment directions will be posted on Canvas in advance and discussed in class. Please visit me in office hours if you'd like some individualized or additional support

Participation (15%)

I encourage you to participate in class discussion not only by sharing your thoughts and asking questions but also by actively listening and creating space for others to share. I understand, however, that we all process knowledge in different ways and that our level of comfort participating in the classroom may be influenced by our own relationships to power and privilege and by our educational experiences. Every day students will be asked to participate in a short introductory assignment that will fulfill their participation for

the day. *Participation assignments will not be excused unless there is an emergency or extenuating circumstance that you communicate with me. However, each students' lowest three participation grades will automatically be dropped.*

Discussion Posts (15%)

You will submit a discussion post (150-200 words) at the end of each unit, so five total. There will be an opportunity for you to share your ideas and interact with your peers in a low-stakes forum outside of the classroom.

Close Reading Paper (20%)

The close reading paper is a short (600-800 word) paper that asks you to hone your close reading skills: using direct textual evidence to develop your own original analysis that, ultimately, supports a larger argument about the text or some aspect of it.

Final Exam (25%)

The final exam is an open book exam that will ask you to define, in your own words, relevant concepts and terms (both literary and sociological) from the class and to connect them to the literature we've read. The exam will include shorter and longer essay questions.

Final Research + Close Reading Paper (25%)

The final paper (1500 words) will ask you to blend your close reading skills with literary and historical research to develop a paper about your favorite text. It will be an opportunity to synthesize and distill all that we've learned in the course into your own original contribution.

Grading Information

Participation 15%

Discussion Posts (5 total) 15%

Close Reading Paper 20%

Final Exam 25%

Final Research + Close Reading Paper 25%

Extensions & Late Work

I am willing to work with you if you anticipate that you may need extra time to submit your best work in an assignment. In order to avoid last-minute stress, please email me in advance of an assignment deadline to discuss an extension. If an emergency or other extenuating circumstance arises that makes this impossible, please contact me, and we can work out a solution. If late work is submitted, it will be graded at my discretion and may receive a deduction.

University Policies

Per [University Policy S16-9 \(PDF\)](http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf) (<http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf>), relevant university policy concerning all courses, such as student responsibilities, academic integrity, accommodations, dropping and adding, consent for recording of class, etc. and available student services (e.g. learning assistance, counseling, and other resources) are listed on the [Syllabus Information](https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php) (<https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php>) web page. Make sure to visit this page to review and be aware of these university policies and resources.

Course Schedule

This specifics of this schedule are subject to change in the best interest of student success. Note that, while I may make changes, I will never add additional work, and all changes will be announced in advance.

When	Topic	Notes
Week 0	Course Introductions	Thursday, Jan. 22 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introductions• Review syllabus & course expectations
Week 1	Race, Ethnicity, and Language	Tuesday, Jan. 27 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tehama Lopez Bunyasi and Candis Watts Smith's "Race" from <i>Stay Woke: A People's Guide to Making All Black Lives Matter</i>• Trica Keaton's "Race" from <i>Keywords for African American Studies</i> Thursday, Jan. 29 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hanif Abdurraqib "Schoolboy Q Wants White People to Say the Word"• Discuss & develop community and conversation guidelines
Week 2	Un/freedom in Early African American American Literature	Tuesday, Feb. 3 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Nell Irvin Painter's "Introduction" to Harriet Jacobs' <i>Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl</i> pp. ix-xxvi• Preface by the Author, Introduction by Editor, and Ch. I-V of Harriet Jacobs' <i>Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl</i> pp. 3-33 Thursday, Feb. 5 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ch. VI-XIII of Harriet Jacobs' <i>Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl</i> pp.34-84

When	Topic	Notes
Week 3		<p>Thursday, Feb. 10</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ch. XIV-XXIII I of Harriet Jacobs' <i>Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl</i> pp. 85-138 <p>Thursday, Feb. 12</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ch. XXIV-XXXI of Harriet Jacobs' <i>Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl</i> pp.139-183
Week 4	Formal Innovations in Contemporary African American Literature	<p>Tuesday, Feb. 17</p> <p>*Last day to drop course without W</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stephanie A. Smith's "Harriet Jacobs: A Case History of Authentication" from <i>The Cambridge Companion to the African American Slave Narrative</i> Ch. XXXII-Appendix of Harriet Jacobs' <i>Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl</i> pp. 184-228 Discussion Post #1 due before start of class <p>Thursday, Feb. 19</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Valeria Smith's "Neo-Slave Narratives" from <i>The Cambridge Companion to the African American Slave Narrative</i> pp. 1-4 (stop reading at Beloved section) "Prologue," "The River," and "The Fire" of Octavia Butler's <i>Kindred</i> pp. 9-51
Week 5		<p>Tuesday, Feb. 24</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "The Fall" from Octavia Butler's <i>Kindred</i> pp. 52-107 <p>Thursday, Feb. 26</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "The Fight" from Octavia Butler's <i>Kindred</i> pp. 108-188
Week 6		<p>Tuesday, March 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "The Storm" from Octavia Butler's <i>Kindred</i> pp. 189-239 <p>Thursday, March 5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "The Rope" and "Epilogue" from Octavia Butler's <i>Kindred</i> pp. 240-264 Discussion Post #2 due before start of class

When	Topic	Notes
Week 7	National Exclusion & Alienation in Japanese American Literature	<p>Tuesday, March 10</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close Reading Workshop <p>Thursday, March 12</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christine Hong's Introduction to Miné Okubo's <i>Citizen 13660</i> pp. vii-xix • Miné Okubo's <i>Citizen 13660</i> Preface pp. xxv-xxix and pp. 4-51
Week 8		<p>Tuesday, March 17</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tehama Lopez Bunyasi and Candis Watts Smith's "Citizenship" from <i>Stay Woke: A People's Guide to Making All Black Lives Matter</i> • Miné Okubo's <i>Citizen 13660</i> pp. 52-123 <p>Thursday, March 19</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Miné Okubo's <i>Citizen 13660</i> pp.124-209 <p>Friday, March 20</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close reading paper due by 5:00 p.m.
Week 8	De/colonial pasts and presents in Native American Literature	<p>Tuesday, March 24</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leslie Marmon Silko's <i>Ceremony</i> pp. TBD <p>Thursday, March 26</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leslie Marmon Silko's <i>Ceremony</i> pp. TBD
Spring Break		<p>March 28-April 5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rest and relax • Catch up on makeup reading and work if necessary
Week 9		<p>Tuesday, April 7</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leslie Marmon Silko's <i>Ceremony</i> pp. TBD <p>Thursday, April 9</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leslie Marmon Silko's <i>Ceremony</i> pp. TBD

When	Topic	Notes
Week 11	Migration & Labor in Chicana Literature	<p>Tuesday, April 14</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helena María Viramontes' <i>Under the Feet of Jesus</i> pp. TBD • Shannon Gleeson's "Labor" from <i>Keywords for Latina/o Studies</i> <p>Thursday, April 16</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helena María Viramontes' <i>Under the Feet of Jesus</i> pp. TBD
Week 12	Under the Feet	<p>Tuesday, April 21</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helena María Viramontes' <i>Under the Feet of Jesus</i> pp. TBD <p>Thursday, April 23</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-class writing workshop
Week 13	Multiracial Experiences in Asian/Arab American Literature	<p>Tuesday, April 28</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Malaka Gharib's <i>I Was Their American Dream</i> pp. 1-8 <p>Thursday, April 30</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Malaka Gharib's <i>I Was Their American Dream</i> pp. 83-156 <p>Friday, May 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final Research + Close Reading Paper due by 5:00 p.m.
Week 14	Final Reflections & Preparations	<p>Tuesday, May 5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final exam review <p>Thursday, May 7</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final discussions & preparations
Finals Week		<p>Thursday, May 14, 3:5-5:15 p.m.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final exam in-class (all make up exams must be scheduled in advance)