

Testimonio in the Americas: Voices In Pursuit of Social Justice

SPW 6934XXXX; SPT3930x16H5

Instructors:

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Description:

This course critically reevaluates U.S. history through testimonio, challenging the myth of exceptionalism by listening to the voices of marginalized peoples from throughout the Americas. These accounts offer us openings to examine the destructive and contradictory nature of capitalism, opening a space for dialogue on changes within or alternatives to the current system that could accommodate all peoples of the world. In this course, we seek to break out of and transcend narrow conceptions of objectivity that dehumanize people and reduce them to subjects for study or numbers for calculation.

We pursue this reevaluation through testimonio because it helps us to break from and critically deconstruct the hegemony of dominant narratives by listening to the voices of those who have suffered the most without being heard. While testimonio has sometimes been understood as a specific literary genre spanning the divide between orality and writing, in this course we approach its liminality as a key to understanding it less as a definable genre than as an adaptable tool for breaking the silences imposed on marginalized peoples and groups. Testimonio has been an invaluable form of expression in the face of marginalization and oppression in both the Global South and the Global North.

Testimonio is not exclusively the domain of women, but women have provided some of the strongest voices in testimonio, speaking out urgently about injustices faced by their communities. This perhaps more than anything helps to emphasize why testimonio is different from typical oral history/life history interviews, as well as from genres such as autobiography that are traditionally structured through the linear progressive development of the individual: testimonio challenges distinctions between the individual who is speaking and the collective that they speak from, and is more often driven by the direct action-fomenting power of storytelling than meditative or historically-'informative' goals unto themselves.

This course is therefore not simply about a genre, but about the potential for intervention and for real change that goes beyond the limits of the academy. If we are really listening to the voices in the texts from this course, we are not simply thinking about parsing particularities of genre, but about how we can envision and work toward alternative futures that are more just and equitable than the world in which we currently reside.

Course objectives:

Students in this course will:

- Become familiar with testimonio as a tool for expression to open spaces for dialogue
- Sharpen skills in recognizing and confronting power asymmetries
- Develop critical understanding of the relationship between orality, literacy, narrative, and voice, especially as these are entangled with gender, race, sexuality, etc.
- Approach a people's history of the Americas that meaningfully includes marginalized voices
- Learn about women's and men's roles in Indigenous and Black activism and resistance throughout the Americas

Assignments:

Attendance and participation (30%)

Emerging forms of testimonio--e.g. Ferguson, Standing Rock, #MeToo (30%)

- Composing a testimonio as a final project, possibly in multiple media
- And reflections/analysis of process

Select a week to lead/facilitate discussion, including circulating a short reflection piece to the class emphasizing main points that stand out (20%)

Select a testimonio from a list and write a reflection (20%)

Roundtables

Commented [1]: Perhaps at the end of each thematic unit, to go over recent readings or concepts, and perhaps, have class discuss, debate problematic ideas. Also for reflection: Have we learned anything else new? About history, minorities, women, alternative views of ...economics, politics, in/justice?

WEEK 1 (August 23)

Introduction

- Reflexive introductions
 - Looking at disparities in Alachua County (Kahoot! App game)
 - use the recent study
- <http://youtu.be/t9pU9FPz-dk>
- "Alive," shot on Blackfeet reservation (7:12)

WEEK 2 (August 30)

Guaman Poma de Ayala (selected readings)

Mignolo, *Idea of Latin America* (intro)

Winnemucca, Sarah. 1883. *Life Among the Piutes: Their Wrongs and Claims*. (Excerpts)

Commented [2]: Perhaps at the theoretical level, we can have them read an analysis of her testimony, watch Rigoberta, we have videos, don't we?, and read Zinn's chapter 6. "The Intimately oppressed." (Just an idea.)

Commented [3]: Recommend students to visit: <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-americas/new-spain/viceroyalty-peru/a/guaman-poma-the-first-new-chronicle>

Nícolar, Joseph, (Annette Kolodny, ed. 2007. *The Life and Traditions of the Red Man: A Rediscovered Treasure of Native American Literature*. Annotated edition. (Selections)

WEEK 3 (September 6)

Burgos-Debray, Elizabeth, and Rigoberta Menchú. (1984) *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*

Our Culture Is Our Resistance (scan)

Grandin, Greg. 2010. "It Was Heaven That They Burned: Who Is Rigoberta Menchú?" *The Nation*. <https://www.thenation.com/article/it-was-heaven-they-burned/>

(Menchú, Rigoberta. 1998. *Crossing Borders: An Autobiography*. (Excerpts)

Arias, Arturo, ed. 2001. *The Rigoberta Menchú Controversy*. (Selections)

WEEK 4 (September 13)

Defining and understanding "testimonio" as a complex genre

Spivak, Gayatri. "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

Spivak 1996, "Subaltern Talk- Interview with the Editors"

Campbell, Sue. 2003. "Framing Women's Testimony: Narrative Position and Memory Authority."

Chapter 3 of *Relational Remembering: Rethinking the Memory Wars*.

Trouillot, *Silencing the Past* (excerpts?)

Commented [4]: We can have them investigate before class on what Testimonio is, and have them present what they found. Have them see samples of "testimonials" and see what they conclude the definition of Testimonio could be, after that.

Commented [5]: I like that idea.

Commented [6]: I also like Lienhart. He works testimonio as "a voice." He begins with colonial times. <https://revista-iberoamericana.pitt.edu/ojs/index.php/iberoamericana/article/viewFile/5816/5961> (He is my diss.)

WEEK 5 (September 20)

Lienhard, Martín. 2000. Voces marginadas y poder discursivo en América Latina. *Revista Iberoamericana* 66(193): 785-98.

Ortiz, Paul. 2017. *A Black and Latinx History of the United States*. Chapter 4-5

Spillers, Hortense. 1987. "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe"

Commented [7]: I found this, a whole issue of a Spanish magazine on testimonio. In Spanish and a long link: 'Avatares del testimonio en América Latina' – Número especial de la revista Kamchatka <https://www.uv.es/uvweb/master-estudios-hispanicos-avanzados-aplicaciones-investigacion/es/master-universitario-estudios-hispanicos-avanzados-aplicaciones-investigacion/-avatares-del-testimonio-america-latina-numero-especial-revista-kamchatka-1285881237978/GasetaRecerca.html?id=1285969045707>

WEEK 6 (September 27)

Barnet, Miguel, and Esteban Montejo. 1966. *Biografía de un cimarrón*.

Ogundayo, 'Biodun J. 2006. Polyphony in Miguel Barnet's *Biografía de un cimarrón*. *Nebula* 3.2-3: 189-204.

Commented [8]: What about Hedges interview to a black activist, on History is today.: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AF9FkgkY9jQ>

Commented [9]: I found a couple of articles on this book. One is: <http://www.nobleworld.biz/images/Ogundayo.pdf>

WEEK 7 (October 4)

Discuss Olaudah Equiano, Harriet Jacobs, WPA Slave narratives, and other testimonials of enslaved peoples

Reports of the Committees of the Senate of the United States for the Second Session of the

Forty-Second Congress, 1871-'72.

Kennedy, Stetson, ed. 2010. *The Florida Slave*. (Selected readings)

Hurston, Zora Neale. 1931. *Barracoon: The Story of the Last "Black Cargo"*. (Excerpts)

WEEK 8 (October 11) [Juanita and Ryan in Montreal]

Benjamin, Medea and Elvia Alvarado. 1987. *Don't Be Afraid, Gringo: A Honduran Woman Speaks*.

Commented [10]: Perhaps around here they get to see the video of Arundhati Roy, "Come September."

Roy, Arundhati. 2002. "Come September." (<https://youtu.be/fHz8cpULUpo>)

WEEK 9 (October 18)

Latinx testimonio

Commented [11]: I think at some point we need to read/see Galeano, author of *Open Veins of Latin America*. See an interview here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QH0OPatdPLU>

Anzaldúa, Gloria. 1987. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. (Selected readings).

Cervantes-Soon, Claudia. 2012. Testimonios of Life and Living in the Borderlands: Subaltern Juárez Girls Speak. *Equity and Excellence in Education* 45(3): 373-91.

Latina Feminist Group. 2001. *Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios*.

My Name is Story- Aurora Levins Morales (pp. 100-103)

Welcome to the Ivory Tower - Latina Anónima (pp. 218-224)

Díaz, Ella. 2011. Seeing is believing: Visualizing and Performing Testimonio in Chicana/o and Latina/o Art. <http://www.thisbridgecalledcyberspace.net/FILES/2423.pdf>

Cruz, Cindy. 2001. Testimonial Narratives of Queer Street Youth: Toward an Epistemology of a Brown Body. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 14(5): 657-669.

WEEK 10 (October 25)

Nueva Trova as testimonio

Music by/readings on Violeta Parra, Víctor Jara, Mercedes Sosa, and others

[?] Partnoy, *The Little School*

NPR interview with Alice Partnoy,

<https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=185559556>

WEEK 11 (November 1)

Truth and Reconciliation Commissions

Grassroots truth and reconciliation movements--#MeToo, Black Lives Matter

Stephen, Lynn. 2012. "Testimony in Truth Commissions and Social Movements in Latin America." In *Pushing the Boundaries of Latin American Testimony*. Breckenridge and Detwiler, eds. Palgrave.

Fernandes, Sujatha. 2017. *Curated Stories: The Uses and Misuses of Storytelling*. (excerpts)

Child, Brenda J. 1998. *Boarding School Seasons: American Indian Families, 1900-1940*. (excerpts)

Deer, Sarah. 2015. *The Beginning and End of Rape: Confronting Sexual Violence in Native*

America. U MN P. (Excerpt)

WEEK 12 (November 8)

Chacaby, Ma-Nee, with Mary Louise Plummer. 2016. *A Two-Spirit Journey: The Autobiography of a Lesbian Ojibwa-Cree Elder*

Risling-Baldy, Cutcha. 2018. *We Are Dancing for You: Native Feminisms and the Revitalization of Women's Coming-of-Age Ceremonies*. U WA Press. (Excerpt)

Simpson, Leanne. "How to Steal a Canoe." (<https://youtu.be/dp5oGZ1r60g>)

WEEK 13 (November 15)

Eco-testimonios

Cochabamba water wars

Flint and women's activism

Berta Cáceres

Standing Rock

Western Shoshone women's activism and multinational gold mining

Aluna (Kogi) <https://youtu.be/hRgTtrQOiR0>

WEEK 14 (Nov 22) NO CLASS

WEEK 15 (November 29)

Final roundtable on agreed-upon themes/discussion points

WEEK 16 (December 6) NO CLASS

WEEK 17 FINALS WEEK

Final reflections and wrap-up; maybe some kind of food?

Maybe circulate final projects and then all be prepared to comment