**The American Border: Politics, Policy, Theology**

Northwestern University

Political Science 101

Winter 2021, Tues./Thurs. 12:30-1:50

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A Shrine to Santa Muerte in Mexico

(photo credit: Dan Morales, http://www.flickr.com/photos/moralesdirect/468794066/)

This course is a study of the American border, past and present. We will pay particular attention to the history of the U.S. border with Mexico, indigenous communities, law and the border, sovereignty, and the cultural, environmental, and religious politics of the borderlands. We will discuss various ways of thinking about border issues from multiple perspectives, including but also going beyond issues of surveillance and enforcement.

As a first-year seminar, this course also emphasizes critical research and writing skills to prepare you for college-level research and writing. You are strongly encouraged to consult a peer tutor at the Writing Place (writingplace@northwestern.edu). We will discuss academic integrity and get tips from a librarian on how to make the most of the library’s resources during your time at Northwestern.

Thanks to Dr. Sarah Leavitt, Prof. Osman Balkman, Prof. Spencer Dew, Peter Slevin, and Alex LaPierre for their input on this course.

**Learning Objectives:** Through taking this course, students will:

* Summarize and evaluate arguments made by others;
* Formulate persuasive arguments, orally and in writing, based on careful analysis of evidence;
* Cite sources appropriately;
* Use Northwestern University Library resources to locate, identify, cross-check, and critique important sources, including scholarly articles.
* Write competently enough to satisfy the Weinberg College writing requirement.

**Inclusive Classroom:** One of my priorities is to create a learning environment that is welcoming to all students. If you have special circumstances that impact your life as a student (i.e. child or elder care duties, financial or other personal concerns), please inform me as early as possible so that we can work together to ensure your success in this class.

**Course Requirements:** You are expected to come to class prepared to participate. Take notes on the readings, bring the notes to class, and use them to participate in discussion. Attendance and participation are crucial components of the final grade. You will also complete four writing assignments over the course of the quarter.

**Written Assignments:** There will be 4 written assignments: two 2-page reader’s response pieces, one final paper outline, and one 5-7 page final paper. I encourage you to use [The Writing Place](https://www.writing.northwestern.edu/).

**Grading and Academic Integrity:** Final grades will be based on: 1) attendance and participation (25%); 2) two 2-page response pieces (25%); and 4) outline and final essay (50%). No late work is accepted without a written medical excuse.

Anyone who violates the University’s principles of academic integrity will fail this course and be referred to the Associate Dean for Undergraduate Studies’ office for further action by the University. The Dean’s policy for WCAS is [here](http://www.weinberg.northwestern.edu/undergraduate/courses-registration-grades/integrity/procedures-for-cases-of-alleged-violations-of-academic-integrity.html). For further reference see:

[Academic Integrity: A Basic Guide](https://www.northwestern.edu/provost/policies/academic-integrity/academic-integrity-guide-2020.pdf)

[Avoiding Plagiarism](http://nuwrite.at.northwestern.edu/communities/first-year/academic-integrity.html)

**Guidelines for Written Assignments:** All papers must be submitted as a PDF file. Other formats (.doc, google docs, etc.) will not be accepted. When submitting your assignments, use your last name as the file name, i.e. Hurd.pdf. Failure to follow submission guidelines will result in a reduction of your grade.All writing that you submit should be typed, double-spaced, in a standard font (e.g. Ariel or Times New Roman) with standard margins and page numbers. Your name, the date, and the title of the paper should appear on the first page.

**Disability Accommodation:** Any student requesting accommodations related to a disability or other condition is required to register with AccessibleNU (accessiblenu@northwestern.edu; 847-467-5530) and provide me with an accommodation notification from AccessibleNU, preferably within the first two weeks of class. All information will remain confidential.

**Office Hours:** You can schedule an appointment by emailing me. I encourage you to come to office hours to go over questions or concerns you may have about the course. Meeting one on one allows me to get to know you (and vice versa) outside of the classroom.

**Readings:** Readings with an asterisk (\*) are posted on Canvas under Course Reserves with the exception of those that are open access. Please purchase the following books:

James S. Griffith, *Folk Saints of the Borderlands: Victims, Bandits & Healers* (Tucson, AZ: Rio Nuevo Publishers, 2003).

Valeria Luiselli, *Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in 40 Questions* (Minneapolis, MN: Coffee House Press, 2017).

Todd Miller, *Empire of Borders: The Expansion of the U.S. Border Around the World* (New York: Verso, 2019).

Rachel St. John, *Line in the Sand: A History of the Western U.S.-Mexico Border* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012).

**Course Schedule:**

**Class 1 (Jan. 12): Introduction**

Miller, *Empire of Borders*, 1-29.

Discussion Questions for class: What interests you about studying the American border? What would you like to learn in this course? What did you learn from the Miller reading that you didn’t know before?

**Class 2 (Jan. 14): Border south**

Watch:“[Border South](https://search.library.northwestern.edu/discovery/fulldisplay?context=L&vid=01NWU_INST:NULVNEW&search_scope=MyInst_and_CI&tab=Everything&docid=alma9980953045902441)”(Director: Raúl Paz Pastrana, Bullfrog Films, 2020, 82 min.). Available to [stream](https://search.library.northwestern.edu/permalink/01NWU_INST/h04e76/alma9980953045902441) through the Library.

Discussion Questions: What does the train symbolize for the film’s protagonist? What is Prof. de Leon attempting to document with his work in Arizona? What did you learn about life on the migrant trail from watching this documentary? How does the border feature in this film? How were the Mexican and US authorities represented?

For class: write down your answers to these questions and bring to class.

Recommended:

Jason de León, *The Land of Open Graves: Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015.

Sonia Nazario, *Enrique’s Journey: The Story of a Boy’s Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with His Mother*. New York: Random House, 2007.

Film: *Human Flow* (2017), directed by Ai Wei Wei.

**Class 3 (Jan. 19): Inventing the border**

Class visit: Alex La Pierre, Program Director, [Border Community Alliance](https://bordercommunityalliance.org/), Tupac, Arizona.

Visit [Border Community Alliance](https://bordercommunityalliance.org/) website.

\*Daniel Immerwahr “The Greater United States: Territory and Empire in U.S. History,” *Diplomatic History* 40, no. 3 (2016): 373-391.

Suzy Hansen, “[Unlearning the Myth of American Innocence](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/aug/08/unlearning-the-myth-of-american-innocence),” The Guardian (August 8, 2017). Adapted from *Notes on a Foreign Country: An American Abroad in a Post-American World.*

Recommended:

Aristide R. Zolberg, *A Nation by Design: Immigration Policy in the Fashioning of America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008.

Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America.* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2014.

**Class 4 (Jan. 21): Crossing the border**

Luiselli, *Tell Me How It Ends*, all.

For class: While reading Luiselli’s essay make a note of every immigration-related organization or advocacy group (of all kinds, both governmental and nongovernmental) that she mentions. Select one of the groups that interests you and research it for 20 minutes. Write down three facts about the organization that you find interesting to discuss in class.

**Class 5 (Jan. 26): “The border has a history”**

Rachel St. John, *Line in the Sand: A History of the Western U.S.-Mexico Border*, pp. 1-38.

Recommended:

Greg Grandin, *The End of the Myth: From the Frontier to the Border Wall in the Mind of America* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2019).

Porter Fox, *Northland: A 4,000-Mile Journey Along America's Forgotten Border*. (Norton, 2018).

**Class 6 (Jan. 28): “Holding the line:” Border history, part 2**

St. John, *Line in the Sand*, pp. 39-62.

**\*Reader’s response #1 due before class (2 pgs.)\*** Prompt: Discuss two points that you learned from reading Chap. 1 or Chap. 2 of *Line in the Sand* that surprised you or that you didn’t know before.

Recommended:

Hernandez, Kelly Lytle. *Migra!: A History of the U.S. Border Patrol* (University of California Press, 2010).

**Class 7 (Feb. 2): “Landscape of profits:” Economies of the border**

St. John, *Line in the Sand*, pp. 63-89.

\*Today: Zoom session with resource librarian Ms. Jeannette Moss on how to use the library.\*

**Class 8 (Feb. 4): Locating borders: “The border is everywhere”**

Miller, pgs. 30-53.

E.S. Hurd, “[Defund the Border Police: Racial Justice and the American Border](https://canopyforum.org/2020/07/13/defund-the-border-police-racial-justice-and-the-american-border/).” Canopy Forum (July 13, 2020).

**Class 9 (Feb. 9): Securing borders**

Miller, *Empire of Borders*, 57-128.

Jefferson Cowie, “[Is Freedom White](http://bostonreview.net/race/jefferson-cowie-is-freedom-white?fbclid=IwAR0ucR0FaMZ1KDz1H2WBBU7wcwx-xcH6OEpuszgS6WEwviJv49cL7RZh1GI#.X2yr40DcnL0.facebook)?” Boston Review (Sept. 24, 2020).

**Class 10 (Feb. 11): Litigating borders**

St. John, *Line in the Sand*, pp. 174-197.

\*J.J. Mulligan Sépulveda, *No Human is Illegal: An Attorney on the Frontlines of the Immigration War* (Brooklyn: Melville House, 2018), Part III, “The Border,” pp. 107-144.

Recommended:

John Torpey, “States and the Regulation of Migration in the Twentieth-Century North Atlantic World,” in *The Wall Around The West: State Borders and Immigration Controls in North America and Europe*, eds. Peter Andreas and Timothy Snyder (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000): 31-54.

John Washington, *The Dispossessed: A Story of Asylum at the US-Mexican Border and Beyond*. New York: Verso, 2020.

**Class 11 (Feb. 16): Living borderlands: folk saints**

Griffith, *Folk Saints of the Borderlands*, pp. 1-41.

Lois Ann Lorentzen, [*Santa Muerte:*Saint of the Dispossessed, Enemy of Church and State](https://hemisphericinstitute.org/en/emisferica-13-1-states-of-devotion/13-1-essays/santa-muerte-saint-of-the-dispossessed-enemy-of-church-and-state.html), States of Devotion: Religion, Neoliberalism, Biopolitics, vol. 13, issue 1 (2016).

**Class 12 (Feb. 18): Santa Muerte beyond church and state**

Watch: [New Religion: Santa Muerte](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zFR__Z4-rr8&feature=emb_logo), episode of CNN show ‘Believer’ with Reza Aslan (2017). 42 min.

Read: \*Desirée A. Martín, “Illegal Marginalizations: La Santísima Muerte,” in *Borderlands Saints: Secular Sanctity in Chicano/a and Mexican Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2013): pp. 182-209.

Robert Orsi, “[The Breaking-in of the Gods](https://tif.ssrc.org/2016/08/23/the-breaking-in-of-the-gods/),” The Immanent Frame (August 23, 2016).

**\*Reader’s response #2 due before class.\*** Prompt: What do you find most interesting in the materials you’ve read and watched about Santa Muerte? Why do you think it might be important to think about her followers as we study the border? How do you think about religion and the border after learning about these issues?

Recommended:

David Metcalfe, “[Borderland Devotions: Santa Muerte and the Margins of Faith](http://realitysandwich.com/216283/devotion-in-the-borderlands-santa-muerte-and-faith-in-the-margins/).” *Reality Sandwich* (Jan. 25, 2014).

Tómas Prower, *La Santa Muerte: Unearthing the Magic and Mysticism of Death* (Woodbury, MN: Llewyllen, 2015).

Paul J. Vanderwood, *Juan Soldado: Rapist, Murderer, Martyr, Saint* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2004).

**Class 13 (Feb. 23) Resisting the border**

Read: Christina Leza, “[What is the U.S.-Mexico Border to Indigenous Peoples Who Have Lived There?](https://www.yesmagazine.org/opinion/2020/07/07/mexico-border-indigenous-leaders/)” Yes Magazine (July 7, 2020).

Watch/listen: [Papers](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x79mpAj84ww), [No Mercy](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8eW_MndajlE), and [All Day](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hIaGI1L00Co) by Shining Soul (YouTube). (All Day is from Shining Soul’s 2016 [Politics Aside](https://shiningsoulmusic.bandcamp.com/)).

Read: \*Christina Leza, “‘Hip Hop is Resistance’: Defining Indigeneity on the U.S.-Mexico Border.” In *Music and Modernity among First Peoples of North America*. Victoria L. Levine and Dylan Robertson, eds., pp. 69-90. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2019.

Recommended:

Anne Brice, “[Objects of Resistance: Protesting the Feminicide of Girls and Women at the Border](https://news.berkeley.edu/2020/09/22/protesting-feminicide-at-the-border/).” Berkeley News (Sept. 22, 2020).

Eve Tuck & K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (September 2012): 1-40.

**Class 14 (Feb. 25) Other borders, other histories**

Yásnaya Elena Aguilar Gil (Trans. Ellen Jones), “[The Map and the Territory](https://thebaffler.com/latest/the-map-and-the-territory-aguilar-gil),” The Baffler (Oct. 26, 2020).

Watch: “[A Long Journey: The Hidden Jews of the Southwest](https://www.pbs.org/video/a-long-journey-the-hidden-jews-of-the-southwest-pjxuez/)” (Director: Isaac Artenstein). PBS (Nov. 19, 2020, 57 min.)

Questions for discussion: Why are (were) the Jews of the southwest “hidden?” What is “crypto-Judaism?” What is Rabbi Leon’s role in the El Paso/Juarez community? What is the Spanish citizenship program mentioned in the film? How does it work and why is it needed? How does the border play into this film’s storyline?

Recommended:

[United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](https://undocs.org/A/RES/61/295)

**Class 15 (March 2) The Wall/El Muro**

St. John, *Line in the Sand*, pp. 198-208.

John C. Moritz, Aileen B. Flores, Brandon Loomis, Daniel González and Gustavo Solis,

[The Wall](https://www.usatoday.com/border-wall/), (USA Today Special Report, 2018). Explore the site, following your interests.

Recommended:

Carmen Boullosa & Alberto Quintero, eds. *Let’s Talk about Your Wall: Mexican Writers Respond to the Immigration Crisis* (New York: The New Press, 2020).

Ronald Rael, *Borderwall as Architecture: A Manifesto for the U.S.-Mexico Boundary* (University of California Press, 2017).

**Class 16 (March 4): The Wall/El Muro, part 2**

Zoom discussion with Dr. Sarah Leavitt, curator of [The Wall/El Muro](https://www.nbm.org/exhibition/the-wall/) at the National Building Museum.

Read: Sarah A. Leavitt, “[Today is the Day](https://www.nbm.org/today-is-the-day/),” National Building Museum (May 15, 2020).

Armando Trull, “[A Little Border Music in Texas](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/a-little-border-music-in_b_58af32b4e4b02f3f81e444f9).” Huffington Post (Feb. 24, 2017).

Nicole Antebi, “[Between Texas and Mexico, a Restless Border Defies the Map](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-08-16/mapping-a-restless-river-at-the-u-s-mexico-border).” Bloomberg CityLab (Aug. 16, 2019).

Sarah Cascone, “[Artists Briefly Bridge the US-Mexico Border With a Heartwarming Seesaw Linking Kids in Both Countries](https://news.artnet.com/art-world/us-mexico-border-teeter-totter-wall-1612897).” Artnet (July 30, 2019).

[Migrant Quilt Project](http://migrantquiltproject.org/) (read one paragraph).

Jared Margulies, [Welcome to Otay Mountain: An Alternative Field Guide](https://issuu.com/jmargulies/docs/scanned_otay_zine_hires) (April 17, 2019).

Recommended:

Wendy Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Zone Books, 2010).

Joseph Nevins. “Nationalism, the Territorial State, and the Construction of Boundary Related Identities,” in *Operation Gatekeeper: The Rise of the “Illegal Alien” and the Remaking of the U.S.-Mexico Boundary* (Routledge, 2005), pp. 125-137.

Ian Volner, *The Great, Great Wall: Along the Borders of History from China to Mexico*. (Henry N. Abrams, 2019).

Barbara Sostaita, “Water, Not Walls:” Toward A Religious Study of Life that Defies Borders.” *American Religion* 1, no. 2 (Spring 2020): 74–97.

Laiken Jordahl, “[A Year of Devastation in Arizona’s Wild Lands](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/01/opinion/trump-wall-arizona-environment.html?referringSource=articleShare).” *The New York Times* (Nov. 1, 2020).

**March 8-9 (Reading week): Discuss final paper outlines in meetings with instructor (submit your outline prior to your meeting).**

Final paper prompts (choose one):

* Select one of the following groups: Indigenous Alliance Without Borders, O’odham Voice Against the Wall, or Indivisible Tohono, or another border advocacy or activist group that interests you. Answer the following questions: how does this group understand and represent the American border? What does it mean to them? What did you learn in this course that helps you understand this group and its activities? Use specific quotes and evidence from the texts to support your points.
* Discuss three aspects of U.S. border history, politics, and/or culture that you learned about in this class that you think most Americans are probably unaware of, and explain why you think this is the case. What should Americans learn or understand about the border? What did you learn about this topic in high school? How do you think border studies should be taught?
* Consider and synthesize the most useful insights or approaches from the views articulated in our texts and class discussions to develop your own critical perspective on what you regard as an important problem related to the border. Make an argument that positions and justifies your own view on a key topic, debate, or representation. Use specific quotes and evidence from the texts to support your points.

**Monday, March 15th by noon:**

**Final papers due electronically to** **eshurd@northwestern.edu****.**

**See above for formatting guidelines.**