This seminar explores the emergence of notions of tradition and modernity and their reproduction in Eurocentric epistemologies and political formations. In tracing dominant genealogies and considering alternatives, critical engagement with Eurocentrism and colonialism is emphasized, and perspectives from science studies, rhetoric, ethnic studies, postcolonial and decolonial studies, and other areas provide crucial points of departure and return. My principal goals in teaching the class are two-fold: First, when work is framed as “theory,” many students become anxious. I thus design the seminar in such a way as to examine how the “theory” frame seems to induce both power and violence; by confronting this process, I hope that students can find their own ways to engage complex ideas without being weighed down by this oppressive aura. Second, US education fosters individualism, competition, and the emergence of academic hierarchies. Students trained at elite universities often enjoy performing their ability to “talk theory”; others are paralyzed. Moreover, the question of what is “theory” and how this designation hierarchicalizes universities, students, and researchers, thus reproducing class, race, nation, and other inequalities, is one of the foci of the course. A central goal of the class is to position individual, creative encounters with theory within a collective, supportive, and egalitarian process, helping all of us become comfortable as both readers and producers of theory. Addressing these goals makes teaching Theories of Traditionality and Modernity both an entirely new experience each year and a pleasurable one, in which I learn as much as the students.

For decades, a central goal of my teaching has been challenging Eurocentrism, racism, and white supremacy. One way that I do this is by including works by African American, Latinx, Native American, Latin American, and South Asian writers as central components of the syllabus. The theoretical cornerstone of both 160AC and C262A is provided by Américo Paredes. The core idea that enabled folkloristics to become an ideological and academic cornerstone of nationalism and white supremacy is the projection of folklore as shared culture, a sort of cultural lowest common denominator that provides the affective, ideological, and political bond that unites social communities. Indeed, the Grimms’ projection of fairy tales (and other forms) as the cultural core shared by all Germans—long before Germany existed—was crucial for making a nation-state project and nationalist ideologies possible. In 1958, as a part of a decolonial and anti-racist project explicitly designed to challenge white supremacy and racialized violence against Texas Mexicans (his term), Paredes countered that folklore is fundamentally about difference, power, and borders (of race and class as well as nation). In addition to reading other postcolonial, decolonial, feminist, race and ethnic studies approaches, we read classic works by elite, white, European and American men precisely in order to collaboratively scrutinize how assumptions about “man,” “nature,” “society,” etc. were produced in ways that, as Dipesh Chakrabarty argues, took these provincial views and elevated them to the status of universals. The class critically scrutinizes dominant genealogies in order to challenge students’ abilities to develop their own genealogies and anti-
genealogies, a technique I refer to as the multi-genealogical approach. Beyond producing insightful new readings of very well-worn texts, this process highlights the unique contributions offered by participants who have overcome barriers of race, sexuality, class, disability, and nation, further disrupting the (re)production of academic hierarchies.

**Structure of Class (Un)Meetings**

The class this semester will be conducted remotely: [https://berkeley.zoom.us/j/95291954549](https://berkeley.zoom.us/j/95291954549)

**Requirements**

1. Faithful preparation of readings for class and participation in synchronous seminar meetings.
2. Listen carefully to asynchronous recordings prior to the class, when available (approximately half of the class sessions). Most of these will take the form of a dialogue—not a lecture—about an hour in lengthy, with a writer who we will be reading.
3. Join with at least one other student in taking the lead in the discussion of two week’s readings.
4. Written précis of final research project, due on 21 October, at clbriggs@berkeley.edu. I recommend that we meet during my office hours to discuss your plans far in advance of this date.
5. A research project, resulting in an approx. 20-25 pp. (double-spaced) research paper, due Wednesday 16 December, that a) develops a critical approach and b) applies it to the critical evaluation of a body of scholarship related to the topic of the seminar. It should substantively engage readings and perspectives discussed in class and build a bridge to your own research interests. Please send the paper to clbriggs@berkeley.edu.
5. Optional: On the last class, 9 December, please present an oral summary of your research project to the class.

"Required" Texts:


Required readings drawn from chapters in books are available digitally through bCourses.berkeley.edu. **Careful:** The PDFs may not match the assignment (they often contain additional pages), and the chapters may be contained in multiple files. Journal articles are available electronically through the Berkeley libraries; in most cases, I have provided the web address. See the Library’s instructions for setting up your web browser for remote access to journals. I have noted where the books are available electronically through the Library. Please read them as far ahead of time as possible: in some cases, only one electronic copy is available for "check out" at a time. The webpage for ereserves for the course is: [https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1mhHI5r0rz_1ecUp1B0dGJWs5JMrcW_Lg5hoje94k88i4/edit#gid=0](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1mhHI5r0rz_1ecUp1B0dGJWs5JMrcW_Lg5hoje94k88i4/edit#gid=0)
Themes and Readings

Week 1  Questioning Genealogies of Tradition and Modernity

26 August

Recommended readings:

Week 2  Making Whiteness, Making Universals

2 September

Recommended Readings:
Week 3
Language, Folklore, and Symbolic Violence: British Colonialism in South Asia
Special guest: Sadhana Naithani

9 September

Recommended readings:

Week 4
From the Poetics and Temporalities of Whiteness to Racing the Nation

16 September
Bauman and Briggs, Voices of Modernity, pp. 163-196.
Recommended readings:

**Week 5 Genealogical Erasure: Américo Paredes on Folklore, Race, and Borders**

23 September


Recommended readings:


And please listen to a podcast where John McDowell reflects on Paredes as mentor: [http://folklore.berkeley.edu/podcast](http://folklore.berkeley.edu/podcast)
**Week 6**  
The Contemporary Legacy of Américo Paredes’ Scholarship and Activism  
Special guest: Alex Chávez

30 September
Limón, José E. 1994. *Dancing with the Devil: Society and Cultural Poetics in Mexican-American South Texas.* Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, chaps 1, 5-6. [available through bCourses]

Recommended readings:

**Week 7**  
“Methodology” as Theory and Politics: Research, Remoteness, and Power
7 October

Recommended Readings:
Week 8  Franz Boas and W.E.B. Du Bois on Culture, Race, Equality, Politics
Special guest: Lee Baker

14 October

Recommended readings:
Bauman and Briggs, Voices of Modernity, chap. 8.
**Week 9**

**Zora Neale Hurston’s Mules and Men**  
Special guest: Lashon Daley

21 October  
Walker, Alice. 1975 *Looking for Zora*. Ms. Magazine. [available through bCourses]

Recommended readings:  

**Week 10**

**Narrative, Authority, & the Violence of Translation in Native American Narrative**  
Special guest: Christopher B. Teuton

28 October  

Recommended readings:  
Bauman and Briggs, *Voices of Modernity*, chap. 7.  

**Week 11   Language, Narrative, Anti-Blackness**
4 November

Recommended readings:

11 November: No class, UCB holiday

**Week 12   Culture, Commodification, Mediatization**
18 November


Recommended readings:


Martín-Barbero, Jesús. 1993[1987]. *Communication, Culture and Hegemony from the Media to Mediations*. London: Sage. The Spanish edition is much better (the English translation is not strong): *De los medios a las mediaciones: Comunicación, cultura y hegemonía*. In the Spanish edition, the most important pages to read are pp. 14-26, 31-43, 164-198.


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**Week 13 Writing Anti-Black Violence**

2 December


Listen to an interview with Laurence Ralph: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KrNXtuacaPE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KrNXtuacaPE)

and animated film: [https://www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com)

Recommended readings:


**Week 14  Seminar Presentations**

9 December

16 December 2020

Final paper due