AMST/ANT 117A 1
Introduction to Decolonization:
A Native American Studies Approach

Instructor: Lee Bloch
Email: lbloch@brandeis.edu
Class Location: Brown 316
Office Location: Brown 327
Class time: M, W, Th 1:00-1:50 PM
Office Hours: M 2:00-4:00 PM

Comic by Matt Bors

Course Description
Someone once said that one cannot hope to understand the United States without understanding the place of Native American peoples within it. Indeed, the history of the US is a history of settler colonialism. Confronting this requires both telling truth to power and grappling with what a more socially just world might look like. It necessitates “decolonizing our minds” by challenging ideologies that we have all been indoctrinated within. It also necessitates decolonizing the land by transforming the material and spiritual conditions of settler colonialism.

This introductory course will ask, “What is decolonization?” through the perspective of Native American studies. The course is organized around two core interventions: (1) the affirmation that Native American peoples are not fixed in a “pre-historical” past but are still here; and (2) a semester-long inquiry into the nature of decolonization as a liberatory social project.
In this course, we will challenge popular stereotypes about Native American peoples, learn about contemporary Indigenous issues, and build analytical tools for critiquing settler colonialism as it permeates our everyday lives and institutions. We will ask questions such: What is Native American studies and why does it matter? How can it transform our understanding of history, society, and politics? Why don’t we usually learn about Native American peoples and their histories in school? What is the difference between Native American studies and the study of Native American peoples? Topics covered are meant to sample a wide range of issues, including identity, sovereignty, boarding schools, truth and reconciliation, language revitalization, Indigenous feminisms, two-spirit/queer Indignities, environmental justice, and Indigenous futurisms. Focus will be placed on Indigenous peoples in the United States and Canada.

Course Goals
By the end of the semester, students should be able to:

- Explain a little about the histories, contemporary presence, and diversity of Native American peoples in North America;
- Problematize stereotypes that place Native Americans within a mythical, “primitive” past;
- Describe a range of important issues and approaches within Native American and Indigenous Studies as an interdisciplinary field of scholarship, and why the field matters;
- Problematize whose perspectives are taken for granted and whose are marginalized in dominant narratives;
- Explain critical concepts such as settler colonialism, Indigeneity, sovereignty, and decolonization, as well as how these intersect with other axes of oppression, and
- Practice critical truth- and storytelling

Prerequisites
No prerequisites. This course serves as an introduction to Native American studies.

Oral Communication Requirement
This course meets the Oral Communication General University Requirement.

Course Requirements and Evaluation
Success in this 4 credit course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class (including readings, papers, preparation for presentations, etc.)

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A: The student consistently makes creative contributions to discussion and moves the conversation forward in significant ways. The student draws connections between course
materials and extends key concepts by applying them to new situations. Engages with both the instructor and with fellow students.

**B:** The student consistently contributes to class discussion and demonstrates a solid understanding of course materials. The student thinks through the readings, other students’ comments, and one’s own points well. Engages with both the instructor and with fellow students.

**C:** The student sometimes participates in class discussion and understands most of the facts of the readings, but perhaps not the big picture.

**D:** The student only infrequently participates in class discussion or makes statements that are unrelated or do not advance the project of the course. Only has a partial understanding of the materials. Spotty attendance.

**E:** The student does not consistently come to class, does not participate in or disrupts class discussion, or misses the point of course materials. This is a failing grade.

**Participation**
We will work through course materials during class discussion, during which we will review, interpret, extend, draw connections between, and critique the readings. As such, students must come to class having completed the readings and be prepared to discuss them.

This approach departs from a “banking” model of education in which the expert (that’s me!) “deposits” knowledge in students’ brains and “withdraws” it in tests. Instead, the goal of discussion is to practice the tools of critical thinking through collective discussion, or problematizing systems of domination with the aim of transforming the world.

Talking about systems of domination may make some students feel uncomfortable. This discomfort is a part of the learning process. At minimum, students are expected to work to understand the arguments of the course materials. But I also encourage students to “lean in” to the discomfort by reflecting on where it comes from. Remember, these critiques are not about whether you as an individual are a good person: it is about sharpening your ability to identify settler colonial violence that is often invisible to most non-Native peoples.

That said, it is OK to make mistakes. I promise to make enough for all of us, anyway.

**Absences**
Life happens, and so students have 3 “free passes” to miss class. After that, all unexcused absences will result in the student’s final grade being lowered by one letter: i.e., a student who would otherwise get an A would get a B, a student who would get a B would get a C, and so on.

**Thoughts and Questions**
Each week, students should complete one Thoughts and Questions assignment each week, starting the third week. These are brief, written response to one of the readings. A more detailed description will be distributed separately.
T&Q’s will be graded on a credit/no-credit basis. You may skip two of these assignments over the semester with no penalty.

**Group Presentation**
Students will give an in-class presentation in small groups focusing on contemporary Indigenous peoples in Massachusetts. Groups will conduct research and share what they learned with the rest of the class. Each presentation should be 25 minutes, with time afterwards for Q&A.

**Essays**
All essays must be proofread, paginated, and double-spaced, using 12-point font and 1 inch margins. All essays must draw connections to course materials. Prompts will be distributed in class at least two weeks prior to the deadline.

The short essays (#1 and #2) will each be 4-6 pages in length.

The final essay will be 7-10 pages in length. For this essay, will conduct research into a topic of your own choosing that relates to course materials. You may go deeper into a topic we discussed in class or select a totally new topic. You may also look into issues that effect Indigenous peoples in other parts of the world, such as Latin America, Australia, the Pacific Islands, or Africa. Students are also required to give a 10 minute, conference style presentation based on their essay to the class during the final period.

**Alternative Creative Option**
Students may opt to take a more creative approach as an alternative to a traditional essay format. This could involve making a comic, painting, photo essay, or film, or using another medium entirely. Students selecting this option are expected to reflect on how their approach allows them to do something different than a traditional essay: in other words, why select this creative option? Students must get approval from the professor before taking this option.

**Alternative Service-Learning Option**
As an alternative to the three essays, students with existing relationships with nearby Native American communities or organizations can complete a service-learning option. Students opting to take this option will volunteer with an Indigenous organization and write a short reflection essay. Students must get approval from the professor before taking this option.

**Post-Assignment Reflections**
Within 36 hours of completing each essay and presentation, please submit a brief response to the following two questions: 1) What do you think you did well in this assignment? 2) What could you have done better if you had more time?

These will be graded on a credit/no-credit basis. Reflections that I consider good faith efforts will pass. I will only read your response after I grade your assignment. The purpose of this assignment is to reflect on your own learning process and identify areas you might continue to think through in the future.
Academic Integrity
You are expected to be honest in all of your academic work. Please consult Brandeis University Rights and Responsibilities for all policies and procedures related to academic integrity. Students may be required to submit work to TurnItIn.com software to verify originality. Allegations of alleged academic dishonesty will be forwarded to the Director of Academic Integrity. Sanctions for academic dishonesty can include failing grades and/or suspension from the university. Citation and research assistance can be found at LTS - Library guides.

Communications
Updates regarding the class, including syllabus changes and snow days, will be communicated by email.

Email Policy
I will respond to reasonable email inquiries within a reasonable timeframe: usually within 24 hours. I expect your emails to be courteous and professional: it is good etiquette to include a salutation and signature and to make the subject line relevant to the content. Proofread all emails before sending. (Grammar and email etiquette standards are ultimately a means of reproducing social hierarchies. But you should still know the etiquette.)

Students with Disabilities
I do my best to make the classroom accessible. If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately. Please do not hesitate to let me know if there is a way I can make the class more accessible.

Content Warning
Students who suffer from past traumas may find topics discussed in this class triggering. These include but are not limited to: genocide, racism, rape, forced sterilization, and state-organized child abuse. If a specific topic is likely to be triggering for you, I’d be happy to discuss any concerns you have before that subject comes up in class. If, due to such lingering traumas, you need to step outside during class, you may always do so without academic penalty. I would appreciate it if you explained why you stepped out to me afterwards. Additionally, if you wish to discuss your reactions with me in class or afterwards, I welcome such conversations as an important part of the coursework.

Required Materials
- Cook Inlet Tribal Council (CITC) and Upper One Games. 2014. Never Alone (Kisima Innitchuna). E-Line Media.
  o Download: http://neveralonegame.com/
  o Available as a free e-book via Brandeis Library


### Schedule of Readings

**Week 1**

**Wednesday, August 29: Introduction to the Course**

• No readings

**Thursday, August 30: The Current World Order Was Not Inevitable**


• Review these maps of the lands of Native American peoples. Who are the traditional landowners in Boston? Where you grew up?
  
  o [http://www.emersonkent.com/images/maps/native_american_map.jpg](http://www.emersonkent.com/images/maps/native_american_map.jpg)
  
  o [https://native-land.ca/](https://native-land.ca/)

**Week 2**

**Monday, September 3 (No Class)**

**Wednesday, September 5: Representations and Stereotypes**


**Thursday, September 6: This History of the US is a History of Settler Colonialism**


• Treuer, Introduction

**Week 3**

**Monday, September 10 (No Class)**

**Wednesday, September 12: Rez Life**

• Treuer, Chapter 1 and 2

**Thursday, September 13: Rez Life**

• Treuer, Chapter 3
Week 4
Monday, September 17: Rez Life
• Treuer, Chapter 4 and 5

Wednesday, September 19 (No Class)

Thursday, September 20: Rez Life
• Treuer, Chapter 6 and Eulogies

Week 5
Monday, September 24 (No Class)

Tuesday, September 25 (Brandeis Day): What Does Justice Look Like?
• Waziyatawin, Introduction and Chapter 1

Wednesday, September 26: Native New England
• Group Presentations

Thursday, September 27: What Does Justice Look Like?
• Group Presentations

Week 6
Monday, October 1 (No Class)

Wednesday, October 3: What Does Justice Look Like?
• Waziyatawin, Chapter 2 and 3

Thursday, October 4: What Does Justice Look Like?
• Waziyatawin, Chapter 4 and 5

Week 7
Monday, October 8 (Indigenous People’s Day)
• No Class – Attend the screening of Dawnland instead

Essay #1 due Monday, October 8
Wednesday, October 10: Boarding Schools and the Work of Truth and Reconciliation

  - Read pages 1-53, 77-87

Thursday, October 11: Boarding Schools and the Work of Truth and Reconciliation

  - Read pages 1-53, 77-87

Week 8

Monday, October 15: Representations and Stereotypes

- **Film:** *Real Injun* (2009)

Wednesday, October 17: Language Revitalization and Digital Storytelling

- Baird, Jessie Little Doe (Wampanoag) on Reviving the Wampanoag Language. In *Speaking of Indigenous Politics.*
- **Begin:** Cook Inlet Tribal Council (CITC) and Upper One Games. 2014. *Never Alone (Kisima Innitchuna).* E-Line Media.
  - Be sure to watch and take notes on the “Cultural Insights” videos as you unlock them. These are unlocked by finding owls. If you miss one, you can find them all here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FIl41nipj_g&list=PLIvS4D9HSKasMZmLDNyKOlauwrCdionBQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FIl41nipj_g&list=PLIvS4D9HSKasMZmLDNyKOlauwrCdionBQ)
  - Please do not spend six hours dying over and over. If you are the kind of person that just cannot get the hang of this game, watch a run through here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GeQPDGefyeA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GeQPDGefyeA)

Thursday, October 18: Language Revitalization and Digital Storytelling

- **Finish:** Cook Inlet Tribal Council (CITC) and Upper One Games. 2014. *Never Alone (Kisima Innitchuna).* E-Line Media.

Week 9

Monday, October 22: Educational Partnerships and Collaborations

- Guest Speaker: Cedric Woods, UMass Boston
Wednesday, October 24: Decolonizing Methodologies


Thursday, October 25: Decolonizing Methodologies


Week 10

Monday, October 29: Critiquing Settler Colonialism

- Patrick Wolfe on Settler Colonialism. In *Speaking of Indigenous Politics*.

Wednesday, October 31: Red Power


Thursday, November 1: The Politics of Recognition

- Kathleen A. Brown-Pérez (Brothertown Indian Nation) on Tribal Legitimacy in the Face of Termination. In *Speaking of Indigenous Politics*.

Week 11

Monday, November 5: The Politics of Inclusion

- David Cornsilk (Cherokee) on Freedmen Citizenship Rights at Cherokee. In *Speaking of Indigenous Politics*.
Wednesday, November 7: Borders and Sovereignty


Thursday, November 8: Borders and Sovereignty


Week 12
Monday, November 12: Decolonizing Gender and Sexuality

- Arvin, Maile (Kanaka Maoli), Eve Tuck (Aleut), and Angie Morrill (Kalmath). 2013. “Decolonizing Feminism: Challenging the Connections between Settler Colonialism and Heteropatriarchy.” Feminist Formations 25(1): 8-34.
- Optional: Sarah Deer (Muskogee [Creek]) on Native Women and Sexual Violence. In Speaking of Indigenous Politics.

Wednesday, November 14: Decolonizing Gender and Sexuality


Thursday, November 15: Decolonizing Gender and Sexuality

- In Class: Out of State
Week 13
Monday, November 19: Decolonizing Gender and Sexuality

Essay #2 due Monday, November 19

Wednesday, November 21 (No Class)

Thursday, November 22 (No Class)

Week 14
Monday, November 26: Decolonizing the Earth and Environmental Justice
  • Winona LaDuke (Ojibwe) on Environmental Activism. In Speaking of Indigenous Politics.

Wednesday, November 28: Decolonizing the Earth and Environmental Justice

Thursday, November 29: Global Indigenous Studies
  • Moreton-Robinson, Aileen (Quandamooka) on Whiteness and Indigeneity in Australia. In Speaking of Indigenous Politics.

Week 15
Monday, December 3: Rethinking Settler Spaces and Identities
Wednesday, December 5: Rethinking Settler Spaces and Identities


Thursday, December 6: Rethinking Settler Spaces and Identities


Week 16
Monday, December 10: Decolonial Futures, Part 2

- Selection from Walking the Clouds
- Selection from Love Beyond Space and Time

Final Essays due during the final period