Throughout life we are asked to draw discrete boxes around categories of race, ethnicity and national-belonging—college applications, job applications, the census, and so on. For Latino-Americans it can be difficult to know which of the inflexible checkboxes regarding those categories of identity to tick off. The logistical designations of the U.S. census (which has designated “Hispanics” as the fastest growing U.S. population by birth) cannot account for the complexity of the American racial imaginary and the incongruities of self-identification, and lived experience.

In *Drawing Borders*, we will examine literature and popular culture both about and by American Latinos (of different national heritages) to trace out the complex and varied ways Latino-American identity is understood, performed, written through, and historically situated. In particular, we will be looking at both graphic literature and memoir as sites that establish a matrix for that necessary visibility, and consider the role of notions of masculinity, youth subcultures (like punk and hip hop) and the representation of Latinos in mainstream media influencing those ideas.

Osvaldo Oyola has been a full-time lecturer in the NYU Expository Writing Program since 2014, the same year he received his Ph.D from Binghamton University in English, focusing on contemporary transnational American literature and popular culture. He has written about Latina superheroes in Gilbert and Jaime Hernandez’s *Love and Rockets* comics for the *Journal of Comics and Culture*, Prince and queering the popular love song for *Stone Canoe*, and was a regular contributor to the peer-reviewed *Sounding Out!* blog, writing in-depth on a range of sound-related topics including race, masculinity, hip hop and authenticity.
Throughout life we are asked to draw discrete boxes around categories of race, ethnicity and national-belonging—college applications, job applications, the census, and so on. For Latino-Americans it can be difficult to know which of the inflexible checkboxes regarding those categories of identity to tick off. The logistical designations of the U.S. census (which has designated “Hispanics” as the fastest growing U.S. population by birth) cannot account for the complexity of the American racial imaginary and the incongruities of self-identification, and lived experience.

In *Drawing Borders*, we will examine literature and popular culture both about and by American Latinos (of different national heritages) to trace out the complex and varied ways Latino-American identity is understood, performed, written through, and historically situated. In particular, we will be looking at both graphic literature and memoir as sites that establish a matrix for that necessary visibility, and consider the role of notions of masculinity, youth subcultures (like punk and hip hop) and the representation of Latinos in mainstream media influencing those ideas.

**Required Texts:**
- *Down These Mean Streets* - Piri Thomas
- *Drown* – Junot Diaz (selected stories)
- *The Death of Speedy* – Jaime Hernandez
- *Soledad* – Angie Cruz
- *Human Diastrophism* – Gilbert Hernandez

All other readings will be handouts or online.

**Assignments:**
- Class Presentations – Each week 1 to 3 students (depending on class size) will present on that week’s reading (15% of grade)
- Seven 1 to 2-page response papers (20% of grade)
- Mid-term Paper: (20% of grade) 3 to 5 pages.
- Final Research Seminar Paper (30% of grade) 7 to 9 pages

**Participation:**
The remain 10% of the class grade is based on class participation, which includes being prepared for each class with a response and having completed the reading, and ready engagement with class discussion and feedback for student presentations.
Presentations:
Students (alone or in groups depending on enrollment) will make 15 to 20 minute presentations on the that week’s text. This includes presenting some biographical information about the author, identifying their important work, and providing a bit of historical and cultural context on the work. They will be responsible for drawing up a one-page handout for the class including a bibliography.

Response Papers:
These short papers are meant to help students articulate questions and ideas about one item of the week’s reading (primary text, ancillary reading, etc…) and provide a basis for participating in class discussion and develop questions for their peers during presentations. The first two of these will receive a grade to give students a sense of how they are being evaluated for their writing and idea work early in the semester.

Mid-Term Paper:
This paper will respond to one of two prompts asking students to choose one of the class’s primary readings and develop a thesis of its relationship to cultural understandings of Latinidad through close-reading (as modelled in class and other ancillary reading examples) and some research to establish a historical or cultural context for it.

Final Paper:
A seminar paper of 7 to 9 pages that engages in the historical, critical, and literary analysis of one to two class texts (with the possibility of using an outside text) as modelled in class discussions and presentations, through rigorous academic research and close-reading.

Class Schedule

January 26: Class introduction. Demographics and the U.S. Census, Nueva York (Folkways), Excerpt from Blurred Borders: Transnational Migration Between the Hispanic Caribbean and the United States (in-class handout)

February 2: Response Paper #1 due, Presentations on Down These Mean Streets (Read selected portions 75 pages total), Supplemental reading: “Puerto Rican Literature in the United States: Stages and Perspectives” – Juan Flores (1993).

February 9: DTMS (concluded) (Read selected portions 75 pages total),

February 16: Response Paper #2 due, Presentations on Violence Girl, (read to page 153—short selections with lots of photos), Excerpt from Anzaldúa Borderlands/Frontera (8 pages),


March 2: Response Paper #3 due, Presentations Human Diastrophism (60 pages—graphic novel), excerpt Understanding Comics (8 pages—graphic lit)

March 9: Presentations Film: Salt of the Earth (1954). Mid-term paper due

March 16: No Class (Spring Recess)

March 23: Response Paper #4 due, Presentations The Death of Speedy (90 pages—graphic novel), Supplemental reading; excerpt “Your Brain on Latino Comics” (12 pages)

March 30: Response Paper #5 due, Presentations Soledad (Read to 111)

April 6: Soledad (concluded) (Read 112 to 201)
April 13: Response Paper #6 due, Presentations: *Drown* (selected stories, approximate 60 pages)

April 20: *Drown* (selected stories; approximately 40 pages), Supplemental reading: “Baseline is You Suck” (an interview with Junot Diaz, approximately 4 pages)

April 27: Response Paper #7 due, Selected essays by Julia Alvarez and Judith Ortiz Cofer (40 pages total)

May 4: Last Day of Class. Presentations Robert Rodriguez’s *Machete* (2010), Final Research paper due (may make this due on day of scheduled final if possible).