

# Just Revenge

ENGL 425: Special Studies in the Literature of the United States  
Fall 2022

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## Course Description:

Betrayal, theft, murder, and rape— When is revenge justified? When is justice reduced to mere vengeance? Contemporary American authors foreground how these sorts of crimes are complicated and compounded by the collective violence central to the construction of race in the United States. This course will focus on the fiction of Louise Erdrich, Nicole Krauss, Cherrie Moraga, Toni Morrison, Nina Revoyr and others to question why these wrongs are often repeated and to join these authors in imagining how these grievances might be repaired or even avenged.



We will attend in particular to the narrative and other aesthetic strategies these authors use to represent historical trauma. Through a careful examination of the formal strategies used to stage individual conflicts of fictional characters alongside the non-fiction collective violence, this course will ask how and why literature serves as an important mode to address historical grievances.

## Proposed Assignments:

Participation: 15%  
Class Notes\*: 5%  
Reflection/ Discussions: 20%  
Short Essay: 15%  
Longer Essay or Unessay: 20%  
Final Essay: 25%

## Proposed Texts\*\*:

Luis Alfaro, *Electricidad* (ebook in library)  
Louise Erdrich, *The Round House*  
Louise Erdrich, *The Plague of Doves*  
Nicole Krauss, *The History of Love*  
Toni Morrison, *Jazz*  
Nina Revoyr, *Southland*

\* This assignment involves posting notes for one or two class periods for those who cannot attend class due to illness or other reasons.

\*\* Students are welcome to read any edition of these texts in any format.