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James J. Donahue

Departments of English & Communication and Interdisciplinary Studies

Decolonizing the American Literature Survey Course: Some Thoughts Toward a Native-Centered Pedagogy

Abstract. Long a staple in Literature programs across the country, American Literature survey courses are used to teach the literary history of the United States, a settler-colonial nation that continues its historical oppression of the Indigenous peoples of this continent. It is my contention that such survey courses are institutional constructs that support and perpetuate the systemic violence of settler colonialism. And while these courses have become more “diverse” – with token representation of various canonical non-white authors, including Indigenous authors – such diversity does not in any meaningful way counter the symbolic violence of erasure performed by such courses, as they often rest on structures – timelines, concepts, and selection criteria – rooted in Euro-American epistemologies. In this lecture, I will address this concern and suggest alternatives that force us to rethink how we can construct such survey courses to teach “American Literature” from a Native-centered pedagogy.