GeSem 120g
Strangers at Home: Rogues, Outsiders, and Aliens in the Contemporary Caribbean
Spring 2020
Tuesdays and Thursdays 9:30 am – 10:50 am
Professor Natalie L. Belisle

Contact Information
Email: nbelisle@usc.edu
Office: Taper Hall 156 N
Office Hours: Tuesdays 12:30 pm – 2:30 pm or by appointment

Course Overview
Strangers inhabit our everyday lives. Their familiar presence often marks the distinction between the private domain (home, family, friends) and the public (work, school, the market). And yet, we consider the stranger to be that which is wholly foreign to us—whether they speak another language, come from another culture, or have belief systems unlike our own. In this General Educational Seminar, we will challenge some of the prevailing assumptions about what it means to be a “stranger” by reading texts whose main characters sees themselves or are seen as strangers—aliens, foreigners, and outsiders—in the places they call home by birth. We will study the figure of the “stranger at home” from the vantage point of Caribbean literature, visual art, and music. Described by Martiniquan philosopher Édouard Glissant as “a meeting place of cultures”, the Caribbean is a place where people from Europe, Africa, Asia, and the indigenous Americas collided, giving birth to a uniquely diverse, multicultural, and multilingual milieu. And, in a region marked historically by dispossession and alienation, it is through narration that people of the Caribbean have attempted to make sense of these diverse relations and define what it means to be at home. For this key reason, the literature and culture from the Caribbean can serve as a model—both here in the United States and globally—for understanding the opportunities and challenges of coexisting and belonging as human beings and citizens.

Writers and artists to be studied include: Eliseo Alberto, Aimé Césaire, Maryse Condé, Annalee Davis, Nalo Hopkinson, Eduardo Lalo, René Philoctète, and Yoss.

Through a close reading of a corpus of literary, visual, and digital texts from the Caribbean, this course will focus on three overarching themes:

- the feeling of being alienated from the place one calls home;
- how this alienation is expressed through the act of storytelling and humanistic expression; and,
- how storytelling enables alienated and marginalized subjects to imaginatively construct alternative homes or other worlds