

The Graduate School and University Center
City University of New York
Ph.D. Program in History

Herman L. Bennett
History 727000: The African Diaspora
Wednesdays 6:15-8:15 p.m.

Spring 2017
Office Hours: By Appointment

Course Description:

By employing the heuristic concept of diaspora—and specifically the African diaspora—this course focuses on the analytical work generated by studying cultures of movement. As scholars, we might begin by asking whether diaspora complicates our understanding of disciplinary formations—including the normative assumptions that inform the study of society and culture. How does diaspora, for instance, enhance our perspectives on imperial, colonial, national and post-colonial formations and the ways in which they have been historically represented? In utilizing the prism of diaspora, we confront the politics of representation through which scholars render meaning out of the past and present. For this reason, diaspora like other categories of analysis engages the vexed terrain of representation whereby scholars frame the subject of their inquiries.

Diaspora brings into relief many of the principle categories and themes informing the social and human sciences. It de-naturalizes many of the foundational assumptions on which contemporary social theory rests. For this reason, we will route our conversations and readings through some of the central concepts defining social theory (state, nation, society, sovereignty, difference, stratification, race, ethnicity, religion, and culture) so as to discern how diaspora might trouble existing forms of knowledge bequeathed to us by the Renaissance, Enlightenment and Liberalism.

On a practical professional level, the course serves as a graduate-level introduction to diasporas in general but the African diaspora in particular. Scholarship on this subject along with its development over time and in distinct settings (the United States, Latin America and the Caribbean, Sub-Saharan Africa, England and Continental Europe) introduces us to the historical profession and professionalism. For this reason, we will devote significant time focusing and discussing how various scholars have framed and approached their scholarly projects. Since the African diaspora as a field of study constitutes a relatively novel endeavor, most of the readings draw on works from the last few years. While this conveys a sense of where the field is presently at it also serves to delineate how the African diaspora draws and builds on early forms of inquiry (the history of colonial expansion, the history of slavery and freedom, the history of racial formation, etc.) Over the semester we will constantly need to ask what defines an inquiry, an approach or a perspective as diasporic in scope. In doing so, we will necessarily focus on an earlier body of scholarship that was associated with different fields of inquiry (slavery, race relations, African Studies, Brazilian history, the study of religion, English Cultural Studies).

Preliminary List of Readings:

- Anderson, Benedict. 1983. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso.
- Bastide, Roger. 2007. *The African Religions of Brazil: Toward a Sociology of the Interpenetration of Civilizations*. Translated by Helen Sebba. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Brown, Wendy. 2014. *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*. New York: Zone Books.
- Clancy-Smith, Julia A. 2011. *Mediterraneans: North Africa and Europe in an Age of Migration, C. 1800-1900*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Edwards, Brent Hayes. 2003. *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Foucault, Michel. 2007. *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-1978*. Edited by Michel Senellart & Translated by Graham Burchell. New York: Picador.
- Gilroy, Paul. 1991. *There Ain't no Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Herskovits, Melville. 1941. *The Myth of the Negro Past*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Ho, Engsang. 2006. *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility Across the Indian Ocean*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Koteff, Hagar. 2015. *Movement and the Ordering of Freedom: On Liberal Governance of Mobility*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Malkki, Liisa H. 1995. *Purity & Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Mann, Gregory. 2015. *From Empires to NGOs in the Western African Sahel: The Road to Nongovernmentality*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Matory, Randy. 2005. *Black Atlantic Religions: Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in Afro-Brazilian Candomblé*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Peel, J. D. Y. 2000. *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Sidbury, James. *Becoming African in America: Race and Nation in the Early Black Atlantic*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Sweet, James. *Recreating Africa: Culture, Kinship and Religion in the African-Portuguese World, 1441-1770*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003.

Ware, III, Rudaolph T. *The Walking Qur'an: Islamic Education, Embodied Knowledge, and History in West Africa*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014.