In recent years, some Latin Americanists have questioned the hermeneutics defining the field of Latin American History. The colonial designation some feel posits a disjuncture (or beginning) when it could be argued that continuity characterized the historical narrative. While students of ideas, political practice, and the cultural domain have been the strongest proponents of this intervention, scholars of indigenous cultures—especially the Nahua Studies groups—share similar sentiments despite differences in scope and method. Consequently, scholars have been utilizing terms like ‘early’ and ‘early modern’ Latin America to distinguish their work from a colonial project and its association with the rupture that Spanish and Portuguese hegemony allegedly implied. Concurrently, a self-conscious collection of scholars identified as the Latin American subaltern studies group have called into question the elitist hegemony shaping the structure and content of writings about Latin America. Scholars of the Latin American subaltern along with those who take issue with the occidental reasoning informing how Latin America history is currently conceived are introducing new terminology (subaltern, postcolonial, Afro-Latin American) that allegedly re-frames the Latin American past and present. In our semester’s work, we shall explore the meanings and implications, if any, that this and other discursive shifts have had on research and writing Latin America. Even as this seminar attends to shifts in meaning and context, we will engage the substance of the existing scholarship.

In our semester’s work, we shall specifically explore the meanings and implications, if any, that invoking the term Afro-Latin America has on Latin American historiography and knowledge production in relation to the social sciences. What is implied when we invoke the term “Afro-Latin American?” What work does this term perform? How does it disturb the existing canon? How does it conform to the canon? Can the term define an analytical prism for discerning the workings of history? Or is it simply a heuristic device? But even as this readings course attends to shifts in meaning and context, our core focus will be on the substance of the existing historiography, its strengths and limitations.

In the wake of successive turns (post-structural, post-modern, linguistic, cultural, and archival), we are left with a lingering dilemma of representation. How might one represent a past, render an experience or forge an understanding of specific socio-cultural experiences. Here what I want to get to is that at the moment in which the work on the New World black experience has reached a depth and
density, we are still employing for that population the very categories that were forged in and through Western social science rather than asking if those categories might be ill suited for those individuals and the collectivities that they composed. Here my concern is with the over-determination of representation—the linguistic games, strategies, and positions—but little by means of historical and social construction that stakes claims to how those whose experiences we have spent last thirty ‘recovering’ may have forged lives in need of definition that is now in tension with the still universalism of Western social science—the very frameworks ‘both inadequate and indispensible’ that enabled us to fashion into meaningful form what it meant to be a new people. Here then is not an effort to return to the recovery of authentic (lost) experience but an effort to press us into a realization that now that project of ‘recovery’ has brought into relief a tremendous social landscape we are also need of projects of social and cultural construction that ultimately may question our uncritical employment of Western social science in fashioning the lives and experiences of our subjects.

As an endeavor to explore, question and critique the state of the field from the perspective of the contemporary moment, I should note that the course represents a re-engagement with my previous work on racial formation in Latin America. After working on the question of sovereignty in relation to the fifteenth-century African-European encounter, I am now intent on exploring a series of thematic and theoretical concerns emerging from earlier writing but in particular to the shifts in the field of Latin American studies and its intersection with the African diaspora.

Requirements:
All students will be responsible for leading a class discussion. In preparation for this assignment the designated student will meet with the instructor at least one week ahead of time to discuss the thematic focus, the state of the literature, pedagogical concerns, etc. In conjunction with class discussion another student will be asked to write a short review (1500 words) of the assigned readings for that week. The seminar participant writing the review will be asked to consult with the individual leading the discussion and the course instructor so as to formulate the most effective means to stage a seminar conversation. Both the class discussion and the short review will be assessed. In addition to these two assignments, all students will be graded on the seminar participation and will be expected to write a substantial literature review.

The final essay, a literature review 15-18 pages in length, requires you to select a theme in consultation with the instructor. In this essay you will be asked to situate the theme in the broadest of historiographical and/or analytical context. Reviews that appear in Reviews in American History or the New York Review of Books can serve as exemplars. Here the focus is for you to bring to bear a much more substantial knowledge base than the author’s argument and engagements. You will want to think of historiography in relation to knowledge production, conceptual
innovation or theoretical orientations. The first draft of review is due November 19, 2015. The final draft is due December 17, 2015.

**Guidelines for Reading & Seminar Discussion:**
Ideally, you should engage all of your readings with the following guidelines and questions (or some similar version) in mind. After reading a book or article take about 20-30 minutes to write your thoughts in relation to the following queries. The questions and your responses are designed to facilitate discussion and serve as a guide for how you should be approaching all the books and articles we read this and every semester.

1. What are the main arguments of the book or article?

2. Why these arguments? i.e., what’s at stake for the author? (this is a question you should ask of everything you read; it is the equivalent of the "what keeps you up at night? question.)

3. What did you learn that you did not know?

4. What are 3 representative or provocative or memorable quotes?

5. What are the book’s strengths? Why do these strengths appeal to you? Why are these particular strengths so apparent to you? What do they say about intellectual interests, commitments, preferences?

6. What are the book’s structural, argumentative or empirical weaknesses? (remember: Be constructively critical [try asking yourself: could I have written this book?]) Why are these particular weaknesses so apparent to you? What do they say about your intellectual interests, commitments, preferences?

7. What footnotes did you turn to the back to look at (there ought to be at least a few!)? What books, articles or ideas do you want to pursue from this text? (and what system do you have [you need one!] for keeping track of leads like this?)

8. How or why is this book useful to your work? When all is said and done (pros, cons, loved it, hated it, etc.), what is the “take away”?

9. How might this book be useful for teaching?
10. What other kinds of questions or issues do you want to raise in discussion, whether in class today, with a colleague or professor, or in the course of your own work? (why did I boldface or underline certain passages? And not unrelatedly, whom do you know who’s interested in the same kinds of questions you are? how will you make the time to pursue these kinds of questions in conversation, in community? what, where, who are your communities?)

If you address these questions in writing, however briefly, for every book and article you read in the coming weeks and months, you’ll be well on your way toward an annotated reading list by the time your exams. It is a challenging task, but worth thinking about, even in modified form (make a template of your own design, use it as a worksheet for everything you read).

**Required Readings:**
**Weekly Readings:**

**Part I:**

**Week One:**
- August 27
  - Introductions; Social Sciences & the Problem of Race in the Americas: An Overview

**Week Two:**
- September 3
  - Framings: Racial Formation
  - **Readings:**

**Week Three:**
- September 10
  - Framings: Slavery, Race & Development
  - **Readings:**

**Week Four:**
- September 17
  - Framings: Race & Governance
  - **Readings:**

**Week Five:**
- September 24
  - Framings: Sociology, Colonialism & Difference
  - **Readings:**

**Part II:**

**Week Six:**
- October 1
  - Ethnographic Foundations
  - **Readings:**

**Week Seven:**
- October 8
  - The Problem of Culture & New World Societies (i)
  - **Readings:**
Week Eight: The Problem of Culture & New World Societies (ii)
October 15

Week Nine: The Question of Culture Formation (i)
October 22

Week Ten: The Question of Culture Formation (ii)
October 29

Week Eleven: State, Nation & Region
November 5

Week Twelve: Race & the Politics of Blackness
November 12

Week Thirteen: Nation, Nationalism & the Problem of Blackness
November 19

Week Fourteen: No Class: Thanksgiving Break
November 26

Week Fifteen: Race, Region, & the Politics of Blackness
December 3
Week Sixteen: Race & Knowledge Production
December 10