Re-visiting the Black Atlantic: Knowledge, Disciplinarity & Diasporic Formations

(NYU): AMST-GA 2901.00.1 and HIST-GA 2540.00.1
(GC): IDS 81660

Professor Herman L. Bennett, CUNY Grad Center
Professor Jennifer L. Morgan, New York University

Fall, 2013/Tuesdays, 11-2
Please note- The Seminar will meet at the Graduate Center, 365 Fifth Avenue, room 6417, and at New York University, 20 Cooper Square, room 471 on alternate Tuesdays. Please take care to be in the right place at the right time.

Office Hours:
Prof. Bennett- Fridays, 12-1 or by appointment, History Program, 5114.06, CUNY Grad Center 212-817-8435 (hbennett@gc.cuny.edu)
Prof. Morgan- Mondays, 2-4 or by appointment, Dept. of SCA, 20 Cooper Sq, 450. 212-998-2135 (Jennifer.morgan@nyu.edu)

This seminar examines how Paul Gilroy’s The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness has influenced scholars of slavery and racial formation to re-configure their theorization of the past and the writing of history. For this reason, the course is not strictly configured as an exercise in historiography—the effort to historicize scholarly writings on a particular theme or event in the past. Even as this course analyzes selective historiographies related to slavery, race making, and freedom, our attention will always be directed at the ways that scholars since Gilroy’s intervention have approached these aforementioned themes in relation to the narrative of modernity. Stated differently, how have writers related experiences of violence, difference, and an emergent liberty to modernity prior to and in the aftermath of The Black Atlantic’s appearance?

All texts are on order for the course at Shakespeare & Co., 716 Broadway (at Washington Place). Please note that in the first weeks of the semester we have a number of selections from a range of texts. These readings will be placed on the course website so that students can access them without obtaining the entire text.
Assignments:

**Book Review:** A critical review of Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic* (1500-2000 words). The purpose of this assignment is to establish a baseline for close reading and being able to reproduce an author’s argument. Here the objective is to be able to discern the argument, delineate the anatomy of the argument, and discuss how it structures the book. In acquiring proficiency in close readings and being able to reproduce an argument, seminar participants will make meaningful progress to mastering the fundamentals of historiography. (Participants will have specific instructions about what constitutes a solid review, which will be on the handout for reading for class discussion.)

**Short Critical Reviews:** Half of the seminar participants will have a review due on week 5 of the semester, the other half will have a review due on week 10.

**Group A** Your essay should be framed around the ways that the various authors approach the question of modernity and by implication come to position their engagement with modernity in conformance or in opposition to the classic claims or the interpretations of another author/writer. Clearly, the stakes involve far more than disciplinary divides or approaches rooted in interpretive properties associated with a specific discipline. If that is indeed the case, then what is at stake for the various authors who engage modernity in their framing cultures of the African diaspora?

**Group B** Your essay should be framed around the ways that the various authors approach the subject matter of slavery. How successfully are these studies embedded in an Atlantic context? In what ways are scholars actively grappling with the slavery’s afterlife through their scholarship? How are studies of slavery and enslavement shaped by the contemporary context of race and racial hierarchy?

**Final Paper:** You have a final essay (20pp) due in which you engage in a detailed literature review of a particular aspect of the scholarship we’ve examined together. Please meet with us by the mid-way point of the semester to decide on the topic for this final paper.

**Seminar Participation:** Participation in the seminar is crucial. Each meeting of the seminar shall be concerned with the following central questions—What is/are the argument/s that the author/s engage? What is the evidence? What is the methodology? What are the key questions to which the author responds? How does the work engage and propel the field? Please come to each class with careful notes on the text—It is essential that your discussion is thoughtful, flows from the particularities of the reading and is designed to facilitate a nuanced and multifaceted understanding of the work in question. Please understand that simply speaking regularly in class is does not constitute excellent class participation.
[Please come to the first day of class having carefully read Cedric Robinson’s *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* over the summer.]

**Week One: September 3, **Foundations, Meeting at NYU (room 471)


**Week Two: September 10, **The Black Atlantic, Meeting at GC (room 6417)

[Review of Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic* due in class.]


**Week Three: September 17, NYU** The Enlightenment & Modernity Projects; Ethnic & Cultural Studies

- Immanuel Kant, “What is Enlightenment”
- Ian Baucom, *Specters of the Atlantic*, 1-18
- Georg Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, selections
- Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, selections
- Horkheimer & Adorno, *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, selections
- Jurgen Habermas,
- McIntyre, *After Virtue*

**Week Four: September 24, GC** Origins of the Black Atlantic: Slavery and Culture


**Week Five: October 1, NYU** “Counter-Cultures of Modernity,” Europe & Power

[ 2nd Writing Assignment Due for Group A]

- Jared Hickman, “Globalization and the Gods, or the Political Theology of ‘Race’”, *Early American Literature* 45: 1
- Foucault, Governmentality
- David Scott, Colonial Governmentality
- Steven Feierman, “The End of Universals” in Gyan Prakash
Week Six: October 8, GC  **The Primal Histories of the Enslaved: The Slave Trade, Empire & Slavery**

Reading:
- Marx, “On Primitive Capital Accumulation,”
- Marx, “Letter to Prodhoun,”
- Marx, “The Communist Manifesto,”
- Perry Anderson, “Passages,”
- Bloch, Slavery
- Rebecca Scott (revisit Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism*, pt I)

Week Seven: October 15, NYU  **Gender and Sexuality in New World Slavery**

Readings;
- Jennifer L. Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (University of Penn Press, 2004),

Week Eight: October 22, GC  **Alternate Atlantics**

2nd Writing Assignment due for Group B


October 24-25, 2013 Paul Gilroy Symposium at the GC

Week Nine: October 29, NYU  **New Black Atlantics and Middle Passages**


Sowande Muskateen, “‘She must go overboard and shall go overboard’: Diseased bodies and the spectacle of murder at Sea,” *Atlantic Studies* 8 (2011) 301-316.

Week Ten: November 5, GC  **Structures of Faith and Action**

Randy Matory, Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomble (Princeton, 2005)


Week Eleven: November 12, NYU  **Meaning Making and Mortality**

Week Twelve: November 19, GC Cultural Studies & the National Project

Week Thirteen: November 26, NYU Cultural Studies and the Enlightenment Project

Week Fourteen: December 3, GC Nation, Culture, and Histories
December 6, 2013 Ian Baucom at GC

Week Fifteen: December 10, NYU
Reading: Paul Gilroy, The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness