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 the Modern Era.

On a 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, Indian Ocean, 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 as they relate to the African diaspora. 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 earlier forms of inquiry (the history of colonial expansion, the history of Christianity, colonial missions, 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, cultural contact, race relations, African Studies, Brazilian history, studies of religion, English Cultural Studies)
**Requirements:**

All seminar participants are expected to produce a twenty to thirty-page literature review related to the African Diaspora in their own discipline or field of inquiry. Alternately, you may write a paper of equal length based on the themes or semester’s readings.

The seminar paper, 20-30 pages in length, requires you to select a range of field defining books and articles in consultation with the instructor. In this review essay, you will be asked to situate the books and articles in the broadest of historiographical and/or analytical context. Here the focus is for you to read, contextualize, order, or derive meaning from a set of arguments as they appear in the books and articles that you have identified as being critical to your thematic focus. You will want to think of historiography or the literature review in relation to knowledge production, conceptual innovation, or theoretical orientations.

All papers need to be submitted electronically as a Word document (no PDFs). Your margins should be 1” and with the 12pt font.

**Key Dates:**

September 29, 2022  Thematic Abstract Due (1-3 pages in which you offer an exploratory thematic framing which you expect to structure your paper)

October 13, 2022  Bibliographic Summary Due

November 10, 2022  Preliminary Draft (1-3 pages) of Framing Due

December 16 2022  Final Paper Due

**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:**


**Recommended Readings:**

The list below is obviously incomplete but serves as a preliminary guide for you to navigate the vast intellectual terrain of the African diaspora.

**Memoirs and Histories of Intellectual Formations:**


Oliver, Roland. *In the Realms of Gold: Pioneering in African History* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1997)


**General Works:**


**Classics & Conceptual Works:**


**Monographs:**


Landers, Jane G. *Atlantic Creoles in the Age of Revolutions* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2010)

Larson, Pier M. *History and Memory in the Age of Enslavement: Becoming Merina in Highland*
Madagascar, 1770-1822 (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000)
Smallwood, Stephanie E. Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2007)

August 25: Introductions & Course Overview

September 1: Diaspora & Colonial Studies
Readings:

September 8: Readings:

September 15: Diaspora as Historical Process
Readings:

September 22: Language, Literacy & the Making of Diasporic Subjects
Readings:

September 29: No Class (Monday classes meet on Thursday)
October 6: Race, Literacy & the Making of Diasporic Subjects
Readings:

October 13: Atlantic Circuits & the Diasporic Moral Universe
Readings:

October 20: Diaspora & the Question of Africa
Readings:

October 27: Diaspora, the Politics of Religion & the Making of Africa
Readings:

November 3: Diaspora & the ‘Black’ Public Sphere
Readings:

November 10: Movement Cultures & Self-Fashioning
Readings:

November 17: Blackness, Africa & Colonial Formations
Readings:

November 24: No Class (Thanksgiving Holiday)

December 1: Nation, Texts & Black Internationalism
Readings:
December 8: Nation, Militarism, & Imperial Formation

Readings:
