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**African American History: Research Seminar**

History 26:510:534:01: African American History Research Seminar  
American Studies 26: 050:502: Interdisciplinary Approaches to African American History  
Tuesday, 5:30-8:10  
Conklin 447  
Spring 2018

*I have tracked my bleeding countrymen through the widely scattered documents of American history; I have listened to their groans, their clanking chains, and melting prayers, until the woes of a race and the agonies of centuries seem to crowd upon my soul as a bitter reality. Many pages of this history have been blistered with my tears; and, although having lived but a little more than a generation, my mind feels as if it were cycles old.*

These words from George Washington Williams are taken from the preface of his 1884 tour de force, History of the Negro Race in America, 1619-1880. Williams, a Negro journalist and Union Army veteran, could not have known at the time that his efforts as one of the founders of the Negro History Movement, and those of others, would ultimately lay the foundation for a fundamental reconsideration of African Americans in American history and the larger narrative of the American Republic. Now at the center of contemporary historiographical debates over race, racism, and the bittersweet accounting of slavery, freedom and civil rights in the United States, African American history is a window onto a larger terrain. This course will examine long-standing and current scholarly perspectives on African American history from the late nineteenth century to the modern civil rights movement, including politics, the Great Migration, popular culture, nationalism, gender identity, urban and suburban community creation, and the power of memory.

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These words above—from Williams and the explanation of their relevance—are taken from the syllabus of Professor Clement Price, who for many years taught the graduate seminar at Rutgers-Newark, Problems and Readings in African American History. We miss Clem and we honor his memory as we continue to study the topics about which he was so passionate and learned.

## SUMMARY

In this graduate research seminar, students will learn how to research and write an original essay on any aspect of African American history (or continue to build research/writing skills you already have). For the first half of the semester we will focus on readings about different time periods and from different subdisciplines. The second half of the semester will be oriented toward the research and writing process. Through workshops, small groups, and one-on-one meetings, students will consider how to develop research questions and define research topics, how to find sources, and how to interpret these sources. We will also focus on how to outline, draft, write, and revise seminar papers in ways that incorporate these research techniques.

The seminar is designed for graduate students to develop skills in **three** areas:

1. Content and historiography: Students will explore topics that concern scholars of African American history and African American studies, and the methods that scholars in political history, cultural history, literary theory, sexuality studies (among others), use to research and write about these subjects.
2. Research and writing: Students will research and write original scholarship on any topic having to do with African American history.
3. Professionalization: Students will work together—reading, evaluating, discussing and critiquing each other's work.

In other words, the goal of this seminar is for each of you to do the work of historians and be a historian yourself.

NOTE: This is not a graduate readings seminar and is **not** a comprehensive survey of African American history; nor does it focus on primary sources from the era. Because this is a research seminar, we are focusing on a few topics in more depth—with attention to questions of research and method—more than we are trying for coverage. Consequently, we will not be engaging with a great many topics and questions that are important to this field. You may end up developing a paper topic that has little to do with the content of the required readings. Regardless of your topic, to write an effective research paper, you will need to read a great deal that is off of the syllabus.

Note: this syllabus is a work in progress and some of the required readings may change as we move along through the semester.

## REQUIRED TEXT:

Cox, Aimee. *Shapeshifters: Black Girls and the Choreography of Citizenship* (Duke, 2015)

(NOTE: only several chapters of this book will be required and I can copy those and make them available on bb; consider this book optional).

All other readings—articles and book chapters—will be available online, either through blackboard, links on the syllabus, or through the Dana Library.

PLEASE BRING ALL REQUIRED READINGS TO CLASS.

## Recommended Background Reading:

If you have significant gaps in African American history, I recommend John Hope Franklin and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans*; Thomas Holt, ed., *Major Problems in African American History*, (this offers documents as well as historiographical debates); or Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves*.

For those of you who are doing major research for the first time, I urge you to draw on Wayne Booth, et al, *The Craft of Research*, OR Jules Benjamin, *A Student's Guide to History*. These books offer crucial nuts and bolts information about the process of researching and writing.

## GRADING AND CLASS REQUIREMENTS

The requirements are designed to strengthen reading, writing, and verbal skills, and specifically, to develop the skills necessary to write a paper based on original research with primary sources. Seminar requirements are also oriented toward learning how to work together as part of a larger community of scholars.

- Participation and Responses to Readings (25%)
- Footnote exercise (10%)
- **ONE** article review essay, 5-7 pages (25%)
- Final Essay, approximately 20 pages, double spaced, (250 words pp), footnotes required ; including paper proposal, thesis summary and source analysis (40%)

### 1. Participation and Responses to Readings (25%)

This crucial component of the class includes:

- Attendance, completing reading by assigned dates, and thoughtful participation in class discussions. Simply showing up is not enough to get a strong grade in this area. Please let me know in advance if you will not be in class. Your comments must suggest that you've done the reading thoughtfully and *thoroughly*. **NOTE:** Graduate students are always expected to read the footnotes or endnotes carefully and in tandem with the text, but this is especially important in a seminar oriented on research.

- **POSSIBLE:** Depending on class size and interest, we may include required oral presentations/starting questions. If so, during the first half of the semester several students each week will work together to start the seminar discussion. Students will offer a **brief** overview (10 minutes max.) and **three to four questions** to the class as a starting point for our discussion. These overviews should help launch our discussion, and, with a focus on any **TWO** of the required readings, take the following into consideration: what questions is each scholar asking?; how does he/she go about answering those?; what kinds of research and story-telling strategies does the scholar use?; how has the work been received?; what are the main interventions the article/book seeks to make?; how are the required readings similar to/different from each other?

- Three short (1-2 page) response papers. At three points during the semester, you will submit a one-page response to any of the readings. Use these responses to test out ideas and ask questions, to react (pro or con) to what you've read, and to stretch your writing "muscles." **A response is required on January 23;** you may submit the other two at any point until **Feb. 27**. You must submit the response on the week that we are discussing the material you write about, and I prefer to get these responses before class via email.

### 2. Footnote exercise (10%)

Footnote exercise: Reading both text and footnotes carefully is an important skill to develop, one which will help you as you write your own text and footnotes. At any point during the first half of the semester until Feb. 27, please choose one required reading and then choose one footnote from that required reading to study. Locate a **primary source** that the author cites in that note. Read this source and consider the following three questions: 1. Does the author cite and quote this source correctly? 2. Why does the author draw on this source? How does the author read/interpret and "use" this source? 3. Do you agree? Whether or not you agree, what other possible readings or interpretations does this source lend itself to?

The week that you do this assignment, please come to class prepared to discuss these questions about sources and footnotes; a 1-page written summary is required.

### 3. ONE article review essay (25%)

Please choose two (possibly three, but please discuss with me in advance) readings and write a *comparative* essay, 5-7 pages, evaluating both content and method. This paper should NOT simply summarize the articles, but must analyze them in relation to each other.

As you develop your *own thesis* about these readings, consider the following:

- what questions does each scholar ask and does how each locate him/herself in relation to larger debates in the field/s?;
- what is the thesis of each article?;
- what sources does each scholar draw on to answer these questions and develop the thesis?;
- how might the story and/or argument be different had each author considered other sources?;
- how does each scholar read and interpret these sources?; what other avenues of research does each article invite, and what sources might you look to if you were to explore further?;
- do you find the argument/s persuasive?; why or why not?;

• how does considering these articles in relation to each other affect your evaluation of either one independently?

These questions suggest that the essay should focus on issues of research and method, with attention to sources, evidence, argument and narrative, and the assumptions (implicit or explicit) that each scholar may make about African American history. You certainly need not answer all of these questions (and could not do so in 5- pages!), but these are the types of issues that should inform your analysis and shape your thesis.

You may submit this essay at any point between January 30 and February 27. You may draw on articles from different weeks of class; indeed, I encourage you to think across the themes of each week if you are so inclined. But please submit the essay on the day that one of the articles you are writing about is assigned (I do not want to receive an essay about two slavery readings on Feb. 27, but if you write about one article from the slavery week and one from the transnational black cultures week, then you can submit it on Feb. 27).

Please submit these essays via BB; you may also bring hard copy to class. For sample book review essays, please consult with the *American Quarterly*, *American Literary History*, *Reviews in American History*, or the *New York Review of Books* (among many others!).

#### 4. Final Essay (40%) 20-25 pages.

This portion of your grade will be determined not only by the final product (though of course, the final paper matters), but also by the quality of each student's engagement with the overall process. This includes:

- Jan. 23. Preliminary brainstorming session
- Jan. 30. Second brainstorming session: A one-paragraph description of possible topic AND/OR a primary source of interest with brief explanation of why is required.
- Feb. 23. Preliminary pre-proposal: a brief description of your possible topic with both tentative questions and primary sources.
- **SUNDAY**, March 4. Research Paper Proposals Due, noon (or time TBD together).
- March 20. Source analysis
- March 26. Thesis summary
- **THURSDAY**, March 29. Draft I
- **FRIDAY**, April 20. Draft II
- May 1. Final essay

Steps along the way include writing/revising drafts and peer review-- during which each student will read, comment on, and discuss drafts at two different stages along the way toward completion. This attention to the revision and RE-revision process will allow us to consider the following: How do we revise drafts effectively? How do we make choices about revision based on potentially competing responses to drafts? When is it necessary to do more research in order to revise, and when is it most important to focus on issues of organization and writing style?

#### **NOTE:**

The 36<sup>th</sup> Annual Marion Thompson Wright Lecture Series takes place on **SATURDAY February 17, 9:30 am**. We are not having class the week after this event, because if at all possible, I would like everyone to plan to attend.

#### **A few other important points.**

--Rutgers University treats cheating and plagiarism as serious offenses. In your papers, you must cite and provide a reference for all language **and/or** ideas that are not your own. While this should be understood in a graduate seminar, it is important to note that violations of the university honor code will be prosecuted to the full extent that is permitted.

--In this course, we will be reading and discussing material on which we may not all agree; some of the themes and imagery we encounter in the sources may seem offensive or otherwise controversial. In this context especially, it is crucial for us to combine the free expression of ideas with respect for each other. This is your community and your class; each one of you has a responsibility to that community.

--Please turn cell phones off and **PUT PHONES & ALL OTHER ELECTRONICS** away before class begins. If you take notes on a laptop, please remember that only that document (or related required sources) may be open. Texting or emailing or otherwise using technology in an inappropriate way at any time during class is **prohibited**.

--Food and drink are permissible as long as neither is disruptive. We will usually have a 5-10 minute break.

--Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines>. If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus's disability services office will provide you with a Letter of Accommodations. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. To begin this process, please complete the Registration form on the ODS web site at: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/registration-form>. For more information please contact Kate Torres at (973) 353-5375 or in the Office of Disability Services in the Paul Robeson Campus Center, in suite 219 or by contacting [odsnewark@rutgers.edu](mailto:odsnewark@rutgers.edu).

## CLASS SCHEDULE:

### Tuesday, January 16:

#### **Introductions and Preliminary Questions**

- Kevin Gaines, *African American History* (AHA, 2012).
- Alicia Garza, “A Herstory of the Black Lives Matter Movement” (*The Feminist Wire*, October 7, 2014): <http://www.thefeministwire.com/2014/10/blacklivesmatter-2/>
- Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* (Haymarket Books, 2016), introduction, pp.1-19.
- 1956 Travel book: <http://fusion.net/story/171579/guidebook-black-travelers-jim-crow-green-book/>. (Click around and review the 1949 edition, especially).

Based on your reading of Gaines, Taylor, and Garza (and more generally), what questions would you ask of this primary source? What stands out to you about it? What kinds of secondary sources would you look to in order to answer these questions?

### Tuesday, January 23:

#### **Race, Racism, and Slavery**

- Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Harvard, 2003), excerpts.
- Sven Beckert, chapter 5, “Slavery Takes Command” in *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (Knopf, 2015), excerpts.
- Treva Lindsey and Jessica M. Johnson, “Searching for Climax: Black Erotic Lives in Slavery and Freedom,” *Meridians: Feminism, Race, and Transnationalism*, (2014): 169-195.
- Heather Williams, *Help Me to Find My People: The African American Search for Family Lost in Slavery* (UNC, 2012), excerpts.
- OPTIONAL: Ta-Nehisi Coates, “What this Cruel War Was Over,” *The Atlantic*, June 22, 2015. <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/06/what-this-cruel-war-was-over/396482/>

**ALSO:** Come to class prepared for a preliminary brainstorming session. We will share ideas on topics and sources.

### Tuesday, January 30:

#### **“Ordinary” People and Organizing Across Eras**

- Robin D.G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (Free Press, 1996), excerpts.
- Tera Hunter, “Domination and Resistance: The Politics of Wage Household Labor in New South Atlanta,” (1993), reprinted in Darlene Clark Hine, et.al., eds., *‘We Specialize in the Wholly Impossible’: A Reader in Black Women’s History* (NY: Carlson, 1995), pp. 343-357.
- Aimee Cox, *Shapeshifters: Black Girls and the Choreography of Citizenship* (2015), excerpts, chapters TBA.
- OPTIONAL: Robin D.G. Kelley, recent interview. <http://www.thenation.com/article/what-a->

[band-of-20th-century-alabama-communists-can-teach-black-lives-matter-and-the-offspring-of-occupy/](#)

**DUE:** Please bring a one-paragraph description of a possible topic or questions for your research paper **OR** a primary source that interests you from which you may build your research questions. We will have a second brainstorming session for paper topics, addressing content, sources, method.

**Recommended:** Benjamin, pp. 88-92, or Booth, pp. 35-55.

### **Tuesday, February 6:**

#### **The Carceral State and African American History**

• Sarah Haley, *No Mercy Here: Gender, Punishment and the Making of Jim Crow Modernity* (UNC, 2016), excerpts.

• Talitha LeFlouria, *Chained in Silence: Black Women and Convict Labor in the New South* (UNC, 2016), excerpts.

• Dan Berger, *Captive Nation: Black Prison Organizing in the Civil Rights Era* (UNC, 2014), excerpts.

• **OPTIONAL:** Brittney Cooper, “She was Guilty of Being a Girl: The Mundane Terror of Police Violence in American Schools,” *Salon.com*, Oct. 28, 2015.

[http://www.salon.com/2015/10/28/she\\_was\\_guilty\\_of\\_being\\_a\\_black\\_girl\\_the\\_mundane\\_terror\\_of\\_police\\_violence\\_in\\_american\\_schools/](http://www.salon.com/2015/10/28/she_was_guilty_of_being_a_black_girl_the_mundane_terror_of_police_violence_in_american_schools/)

### **Tuesday, February 13**

#### **Sonic Dissent: Music and African American History**

• Farah Jasmine Griffin, “When Malindy Sings: A Meditation on Black Women’s Vocality,” in Robert G. O’Meally, F.J. Griffin et al., eds., *Uptown Conversation: The New Jazz Studies* (Columbia, 2004), pp. 102-125.

• Daphne Brooks, “Nina Simone’s Triple Play,” *Callaloo* 34.1 (2011), 176-197.

• Penny Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Harvard, 2006), excerpts, chapters TBA

• Karl Hagstrom Miller, *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow* (Duke, 2010), excerpts, chapters TBA.

**OPTIONAL:** Daphne Brooks, “How #BlackLivesMatter Started a Musical Revolution,” *The Guardian*, March 13, 2016.

**Class workshop on research at the Institute of Jazz Studies with Elizabeth Surles. We will start class at 5:30, at the IJS—4<sup>th</sup> floor of the Dana Library.**

### **SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 9:30 am**

36<sup>th</sup> Annual Marion Thompson Wright Lecture Series.

This year’s MTW panel will include Griffin and Brooks. I strongly encourage everyone to attend.

**Tuesday, February 20.**

**No class**

**DUE (by Friday, Feb. 23):** Preliminary paper topic. Please submit/post a paragraph describing what you would like to research. This paragraph should include 2-3 questions you want to explore further, 2 primary sources you have identified as potentially useful, and 2 relevant secondary sources.

**Tuesday, February 27.**

**Transnational Black Cultures**

- Mary Dudziak, “Desegregation as a Cold War Imperative,” *Stanford Law Review* 41.1 (1988): 61-120.
- Kevin Gaines, *African Americans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era* (UNC, 2008), chapters TBA.
- Samantha Pinto, *Difficult Diasporas: The Transnational Feminist Aesthetic of the Black Atlantic* (NYU, 2013), chapters TBA.

**Note:** This is the last day that you may complete and submit a footnote exercise or a review essay.

**Class workshop on research at the Dana Library with Natalie Borisovets. We will start class at 5:30, in the lobby of the Dana Library.**

**RESEARCH PAPER PROPOSALS DUE (through bb): SUNDAY March 4, noon (or time TBD, together)**

This proposal (approx. 2-3 pages), should discuss:

- (1) the topic to be addressed and its relationship to African American history; what are your main questions?
- (2) the secondary scholarship with which you will be in dialogue; what are the debates in the field/s with which you are engaging?
- (3) the primary sources you plan or hope to find and investigate. You must consider what **and where** these sources are (consider the practical: are they available? can you make use of them in the time that you have?), AND what you think your approach to them will be.
- (4) a brief—and preliminary--bibliography of primary and secondary materials. In addition to this list of sources, name and describe in a few sentences one article or book that you feel is a particularly significant jumping-off point for your work (whether as model or foil). This bibliography may be attached to the 2-3-page discussion.

**Tuesday, March 6:**

**Proposal Workshop**

- Peer Review: Read and prepare written comments on two proposals (more TBA)
- Plus: Individual meetings. More TBA.

**Tuesday, March 13:**

No class. Spring Break

## **Tuesday, March 20**

### **Research and Interpretation**

- “Saving Sound, Sounding Black, Voicing America: John Lomax and the Creation of the ‘American Voice’”: <http://soundstudiesblog.com/2015/06/08/john-lomax-and-the-creation-of-the-american-voice/>)

In this class, we will focus on document interpretation. What questions do certain sources generate? How do we as scholars come up with answers to those questions? How do we evaluate what is said and not said in sources—whether they are written documents or, others? What can primary sources reveal, or obscure, about African American history in particular?

**DUE: Source Analysis.** Bring to class 1 (possibly 2) primary sources that at this point, are particularly relevant to your project, and/or that you are wrestling with and trying to figure out (for whatever sets of reasons).

In 1-2 paragraphs, briefly describe the source; then, consider its relevance to your topic and developing thesis. Some questions to consider: What information does it reveal and what kinds of questions does it generate? What kind of story do you think you will tell in which this source will play a part, and what kind of thesis will you develop in which this source will play a part? What other kinds of PRIMARY sources are you looking for to build a research paper drawing on the document and these questions? What types of secondary sources are you drawing on to answer these questions? How might the scholars we’ve read thus far this semester “use” and engage with this source? Finally—and of greatest importance for class--what challenges does this source pose, and/or what questions do you have about it? If possible, please photocopy and/or attach some form of a reproduction of the source to your essay.

**NOTE:** if your source is long (a book, for example), please have a short excerpt in mind to discuss and write about.

## **Tuesday March 27:**

**No class. Required meetings. More TBA.**

**DUE on MONDAY, 3/26:** Thesis summary: This summary (about one paragraph) should include the argument you plan to make, and suggest how your evidence will allow you to develop that argument.

**DRAFT I DUE: Thursday, March 29, 9 pm.**

## **Tuesday, April 3:**

**Peer Review**

## **Tuesday, April 10:**

**Revising workshop; Research, Technology and Social Media, and African American History**

- Readings TBA.

- Recommended reading on revising: Booth, chapters 13 and 16; Benjamin, chapter 7. More readings TBA

## **Tuesday, April 17:**

**No class.**

**Second Drafts Due: Friday, April 20, 9 am, or time TBD**

- Read and respond to second drafts.

**Tuesday, April 24:**

**Peer Review**

**DUE:** Final Papers. Monday, May 1, 9 am