

## Methodologies in African American and African Studies

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Department of African American and African Studies

Winter Quarter 2019

Office Hours: Tuesday 1:00- 2:00pm

And by appointment

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**Course AAS 204**

Th 1:10-4:00 pm Hart 2215

2209 Hart Hall

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### **Course Description and Goals**

**How** do we design social science and humanities research at the graduate level? **What** counts as evidence and why? **Is** our research design consistent with our theories of humanity and human societies? **Why** does it matter? **Who** and/or what are our subjects? **How** do they relate to us? **What** is my perspective? **Does** it make a difference?

The goal of this course is to equip students with knowledge, tools and texts that allow them to design and carry out appropriate research at the graduate level using methodologies grounded in theory. The intent is to build a foundation for understanding basic epistemological questions regarding the nature of evidence and explanations and how they are related to our conceptualizations of human society, with a focus on the principle tenets of intellectual production in African American and African studies. As such, the course encourages students to think critically about theory as an essential part of developing research methodologies.

This course will focus on developing skills in research design. In particular it will focus on three things:

1. Developing a research question
2. Choosing methods relevant to your theoretical framework and to the research question.
3. Establishing representativeness in evidence

Our aim in this course is to hone our abilities to ask good questions and to be able to design a plan to find answers. In terms of hands on experience, by the end of the class each student should have experience of collecting evidence using one research method.

### **Required Readings:**

Required readings will include:

- 1) Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. 1995. *Silencing the past: power and the production of history*. Boston: Beacon Press
- 2) Cox, Aimee Meredith. 2015. *Shapeshifters: Black Girls and the Choreography of Citizenship* Duke University Press.
- 3) Scott, David. 2004. *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- 4) Woods, Clyde. 2017. *Development Drowned and Reborn: The Blues and Bourbon Restorations in Post-Katrina New Orleans (Geographies of Justice and Social Transformation Series)* Laura Pulido and Jordam Camp (eds). University of Georgia Press.

- 5) Mutongi, Kenda. 2017. *Matatu: A History of Popular Transportation in Nairobi*. University of Chicago Press.

#### **Course Requirements and Grading**

This is a seminar, so class sessions will rest heavily on discussion. Each week, you will come to class having completed the assigned reading and prepared to discuss the week's work within the context of methodological theory and practice. There are some monographs we will be reading for the class, while you're reading, it would help to have the following questions in mind:

- 1) What is the work's main argument?
- 2) Where does the author root his/her argument?
- 3) How do particular pieces of evidence work for this author?
- 4) How does the author make the evidence work for him/her?
- 5) Are there other sources of evidence that would have been more compelling?
- 6) What is the significance of the author's findings?

The classes will be divided into conceptual discussion and workshoping a particular issue. Students will be asked to lead class discussion at least once during the quarter. Each student is expected to produce a 15 page original essay at the end of the seminar where s/he presents her/his main theoretical foundation as it relates to a critical engagement with the concerns of African American and African studies, a main epistemological question, a series of methodological questions, a choice of some methods and a discussion of representation. In the paper, the student will focus on the relationship between his/her theoretical position and his/her methodological choices.

Your grade will be a letter grade based on the following areas:

Philosophical Tenets, Concepts and Categories	5%
Development of Research Question	10%
Self, Subject, Audience	5%
Time and Space	5%
Representation and Approach	5%
Rationale / Justification paper	10%
"What is a train ride?" Research Exercise	20%
Final Paper (15 pages)	40%

**Methods and Funding** The students will list the methods that they hope to use for their research. They will also discuss how these methods support their philosophical tenets. They will also investigate and do a running list of funding in their chosen field

**Philosophical Tenets, Concepts and Categories** because methodology depends on your theoretical framework, students will put down their philosophical tenets about the understanding of humanity and of society at the beginning of class to become aware of their particular theoretical takes and to choose appropriate structuring of research and research methods. This can be further developed throughout the class. They will also discuss the categories they hope to investigate in their research and the main concepts that support these categories.

**Research Question** This will be developed throughout the class. We will workshop turning a research problem or interest into a research question. And subsequently developing methodological (empirical) questions from one main research question.

**Self, Subject, Audience** The students will discuss how they are thinking about the relationship between themselves, their subjects and their audience. Who will they be studying, who they are thinking of addressing with their research and how they are thinking of analyzing the research.

**Time and Space** The students will write about the concepts of time and space they are using in their research. The students will choose a potential location and time frame for research and explain why this location is best suited to their research.

**Representation and Approach** Students will write about the ways their chosen units of analysis and subjects of study are representative in light of the research question and their theoretical background. They will discuss their main sensory approach (sight, sound, touch, smell, taste) that they will take while doing research. They will include a discussion of what is gained and lost by focusing on one sensory approach rather than others

**Rational / Justification Paper** this paper will consist of a discussion of how the chosen methods, location, approach, categories and concept of time and space are related to 1) the student's research question (s), and 2) to the student's theoretical framework. (max 3 pages)

**“What is a train ride?”** Research Exercise

- 1) Each student will be assigned a single method
- 2) The student will answer the question “what is a train ride?” taking into account the theoretical tenets of African American and African studies discussed in the first day of class as well as their personal theoretical framework. They will develop secondary methodology questions to answer the main question, that incorporate these theories.
- 3) In addition, these secondary questions must also fit the method they have been assigned
- 4) They will do research using their one method and their questions throughout the quarter in preparation for an end of the quarter presentation of the results in class.
- 5) The presentation must:
  - a) answer the question “What is a train ride?”,
  - b) discuss the ease or difficulty in using the method assigned considering the theoretical framework
  - c) discuss in what way the results are representative of train rides.

**Final Paper** The students will write a 15 page final paper in the form of a pared down research proposal / outline. They will include all the different parts discussed in class with a strong emphasis on design, structure, and relationships between parts.

## Class Schedule

### Week One: *Methodology vs Methods: Research Structure*

Thursday January 10<sup>th</sup>

**Objective:** to make clear the structure and expectations of the class and to discuss the main differences between methodology (research design) and methods (research activities). To get students started thinking about their research questions

**Reading:** **Collins, Patricia Hill.** 1998. *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota; (Introduction: The Politics of Critical Social Theory")

**Ng'weno, Bettina.** 2018. “Growing Old in a New City: Time, the Post-Colony and Making Nairobi Home” *City* Vol. 22(1): 26-42.

**Ng'weno, Bettina.** 2012. “This Land That Diaspora: Indigeneity, Nation States and Afro Latin America” in *Comparative Indigenities of the Americas: Towards a Hemispheric Approach*. M. Bianet Castellanos, Lourdes Gutierrez Najera, and Arturo J. Aldama (eds.) Tucson: University of Arizona Press. Pg. 198-212.

**Activity:** Workshop on turning problem into question and brain storming different kinds of methods

**Hand in:** survey of interests, research questions and methods, locations, disciplines, etc

## Week Two: *Philosophical Tenets, Concepts and Categories*

Thursday January 17<sup>th</sup>

*Objective:* to make clear from what theories we are working. In particular to understand some of the foundational philosophical tenets in African American and African studies. What does it mean to work from theory? What concepts and categories are we comparing or using? Why? How are they related to our theories?

*Readings:* **Adejunmobi, Moradewun** 2004 *Vernacular Palaver: Imaginations of the Local and Non-native Languages in West Africa* Multilingual Matters Ltd (Chp 3 “Foreign Languages, Local Audiences: The Case of Nigerian Video Film in English”)

**Moradewun Adejunmobi.** 2014. “Evolving Nollywood Templates for Minor Transnational Film” *Black Camera* Vol 5(2):74-94

**Moradewun Adejunmobi.** 2015. “African Film's Televisual Turn” *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 54 2): 120-125

*Activity:* Guest Speaker: **Moradewun Adejunmobi**, Professor, African American and African Studies. Workshop on ideas of humanity and society. What basic chain of qualifiers are attached to each?

*Assignment of methods for* “What is a train ride?”

*Hand in:* Research Question revised. Philosophical tenets and concepts of humanity and the world around us

## Week Three: *Learning how to ask*

Thursday January 24<sup>th</sup>

*Objective:* to understand that the kinds of questions we ask determine the kind of research results we can get. To understand the relationship between our theories, the questions we ask and the results and data we can then use in analysis. Where is dynamism located? How do we relate questions to new theories?

*Reading:* **Scott, David.** 2004. *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment.* Durham: Duke University Press.

*Activity:* Workshop on research question. What are theoretical questions? What are methodological questions?

*Hand in:* Research Question revised. Research questions for “What is a train ride?” first draft.

## Week Four: *Time and Space*

Thursday January 31<sup>th</sup>

*Objective:* What concepts of time and space are we using? How do we understand different temporal and spatial periods to be related to each other? Am I looking at an event or a process? How do I or those I am studying understand historicity? What forms of analysis am I using? Cause and effect? Genealogies? What is the space for contingencies? Does the land change? How is space imagined?

*Reading:* **Trouillot, Michel-Rolph.** 1995. *Silencing the past: power and the production of history.* Beacon Press.

*Activity:* Workshop on time and space.

*Hand in:* Outline of where and when you plan to do research. How are you thinking of time or space?

## Week Five: *The General and the Particular*

Thursday February 7<sup>th</sup>

*Objective:* this is to investigate ideas of accuracy, precision, data, and approach. It is also to think about how we can structure research in a way that relates the particular to the general. What is data?

*Reading:* **Mutongi, Kenda.** 2017. *Matatu: A History of Popular Transportation in Nairobi.* University of Chicago Press.

*Activity:* Guest Speaker: **Branwen Okpako**, Associate Professor, Cinema and Digital Media  
Workshop ideas of evidence and accuracy

*Hand in:* Research Question revised including methodological questions and choice of methods.

## Week Six: *Self, Subject, Audience*

Thursday February 14<sup>th</sup>

*Objective:* Where am I in all this? How will my presence affect my research results? What must I be aware of? Who and what am I studying? What do they think of me and why is it important? How will I take into account their changing idea of who I am as my research progresses? What is IRB? Who is my audience and why does it matter? How will I analyze my data and what difference does it make?

*Reading:* TBA

*Activity:* Guest Speaker: **Margaret Laurena Kemp**, Associate Professor, Theater and Dance.  
Workshop on IRB, thinking subjectivity and audience

*Hand in:* Who are you thinking of studying? What is your purpose? Who will be your audience? Philosophical tenet handed in.

### **Week Seven: Representation and Approach**

*Thursday February 21<sup>st</sup>*

*Objective:* How do we know whether material is representative or not? Representative of what? Understanding representation as a form of evidence building

*Reading:* **Cox, Aimee Meredith.** 2015. *Shapeshifters: Black Girls and the Choreography of Citizenship* Duke University Press.

*Activity:* Guest Speaker: **Maxine Craig**, Professor, Sociology Department  
Workshop on representation and approach.

*Hand in:* Discussion of how your choice of subjects, locations, activities are representative and of what?

### **Week Eight: Relations of Power**

*Thursday February 28<sup>th</sup>*

*Objective:* What concepts of power are we using? How does it relate to agency and subjecthood? Is it repressive or productive? How does it relate to society or knowledge? Is it directed or dispersed? What are the limits of dominance? How can we imagine spaces of otherwise? How does scale matter? What forms of analysis am I using? What is the space for contingencies?

*Reading:* **Woods, Clyde.** 2017. *Development Drowned and Reborn: The Blues and Bourbon Restorations in Post-Katrina New Orleans*

*Activity:* Prepare presentation, write up funding list and method list.

*Hand in:* Outline dynamics of power. How are you thinking of power and its effect on your research?

### **Week Nine: Rationale and Justification**

*Thursday March 7<sup>th</sup>*

*Objective:* To specify in clear language how the different parts of a research plan are related to each other and in particular to the research question.

*Reading:* TBA

*Activity:* Guest Speaker: **Elisa Joy White.** Associate Professor. African American and African Studies.

*Hand in:* Rationale and Justification paper (Max 3 pages)

### **Week Ten: Presentations**

*Thursday March 14<sup>th</sup>*

*Objective:* to discuss the ways in which certain methods can not support certain questions while other methods more readily do. To discuss the different kinds of representativeness of information.

*Activity:* Students will present their "What is a Train?" research to the rest of class. Each will have 15 minutes.

*Hand in:* A written form of the presentation (2 pages)

### **Week Eleven: Final Papers**

Please hand in Paper March 17-21<sup>th</sup>

