

Global Summer Seminar

“The African American Atlantic: Modernity and the Black Experience”

Accra and Cape Coast, Ghana, and London, England

June 20-July 31, 2010

Taught by Simon Gikandi, Princeton University

Course Description:

This seminar offers students the opportunity to understand how the Atlantic Ocean, historically associated with the pain of slavery and the violence of enslavement, is now recognized as the conduit through which Africans encountered the modern world and set out to redefine the nature of modern identity itself. How did blacks in the new world conceive themselves as modern subjects? How have African, African American, and Caribbean writers and intellectuals imagined global citizenship? What is the meaning of Africa in the imagination of blacks in Britain and the United States? What is the relationship between culture, history, and the politics of development?

Through an examination of a range of literary and historical texts, film, and music, the course will consider how the Atlantic Ocean became the stage on which new black identities were constructed. We will read some fictional and non-fictional works that explore the movement and passage of people through the Atlantic and how these has reflected the changing experiences of black writers, artists, and intellectuals in the U.S., the Caribbean, and Africa. Above all, the course will explore the diversity of modern experiences across the Atlantic Ocean.

For the first four weeks of the course, we will be based in Accra where we will explore the rich history and culture of the West African coast from the period of slavery to the present. In addition to seminar discussions, students will be immersed in the everyday culture of Ghana through visits to important institutions such as the W.E. B. Dubois Center, the National Theater, the Kwame Nkrumah Memorial, and Kumasi, the capital of the ancient kingdom of Ashanti. There will be regular lectures by experts on the history, literature, and politics of Ghana. Tours to the slave forts at Elmina and Cape Coast will introduce students to debates about memory and remembering in the black Atlantic, changing notions of the past, and the impact of modernity on the black experience. Through community service and visits to important conservation sites, students will engage with issues of development, the environment, and public health.

The last two weeks of the course will be spent in London where participants will have an opportunity to meet scholars who have been instrumental in transforming our understanding of Atlantic history and culture, visit the museum of slavery at Liverpool, and discover how migrants from Africa and the Caribbean are

transforming London, turning it into the quintessential multicultural city of the twenty first century.

Requirements

1. Participation in discussions, including journal entries (30%)
2. Seminar presentations (10%)
3. Short writing assignments (30%)
4. Final Research Project (30%)

Weekly Schedule:

Mondays-Thursdays

9:30-10:20am: Instruction in Twi language

10:30-12:20 am: Seminar

12:30-2:00: pm: lunch

2:00-4:00 pm: Lectures

Fridays: Excursions

Week 1 Reversing History: Modernity and the Black Atlantic

Paul Gilroy, Chapter 1: "The Black Atlantic as a Counterculture of Modernity"

Michael A. Gomez, "Movement People"

Janet Berry Hess, "Imagining Architecture: The Structure of Nationalism in Accra, Ghana" ((Africa Today, Vol. 47, 2000)

Excursion: Tour of Accra and vicinity

Week 2 Modernity and the Problem of Slavery

Cheryl Finley, "The Door of (No) Return"

(<http://www.common-place.org/vol-01/no-04/finley/index.shtml>)

Gilroy, Chapter 2: "Masters, Mistresses, Slaves"

Walter Johnson, "Time and Revolution in African America"

Excursion: Tour of Cape Coast and Elmina

Week 3 Journeys to Ghana: Two Perspectives

Richard Wright, *Black Power*

Saidiya Hartman, *Loose Your Mother*
Excursion: Tour of Kumasi and vicinity

Week 4: Alternative Modernities: Culture and Development

Amma Darko, *Faceless*
Jesse Shipley, Film, "Living the Hiplife"
Youssou N'Dour, Video, "Return to Goree"

Week 5 Britain and the African American Atlantic

Samuel Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*
BBC Video, "Empire Windrush"

Excursion: Liverpool

Week 6 Black London and the Dream of Multiculturalism

Zadie Smith, *White Teeth*
Bill Swartz, "Britain, America and Europe"