

## BC 3329 Colloquium on Harlem in Theory

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**Prof. Michelle Smith**  
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**Office: 422C Lehman**

**Spring 2014**  
**Office Hours: TBD**  
**Class: M 2:10 – 4:00 pm**

*Harlem was home; was where we belonged; where we knew and were known in return; where we felt most alive; where, if need be, somebody had to take us in. Harlem defined us, claiming our consciousness and, I suspect, our unconsciousness. (Ossie Davis)*

*I am a lover of learning, and trees and open country won't teach me anything, whereas men in the city do.” (Socrates in Plato's *Phaedrus*)*

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Harlem in Theory is an advanced political theory colloquium. Its focus is both thematic and methodological. Joining a two-thousand year tradition of doing philosophy in and for the city, we theorize Harlem as *urbs* and *civitas* (place and socio-political association) and bring Harlem to bear on philosophy. We explore the political theorist's craft by engaging different theoretical approaches and methodologies used by political, social and critical theorists. Our readings include political philosophy (ancient and modern), critical frameworks for interpretation (e.g.: Geertzian thick description, Foucaultian analysis, Marxist analysis, feminist theory) and historical, social scientific and literary works about Harlem—supplemented by film, music and of course periodic trips to various Harlem venues. We not only think critically about issues raised in the assigned texts about Harlem but also examine the strengths and weaknesses of the various philosophical frameworks and interpretive methods we cover.

### **Student Learning Outcomes**

Students who complete the course successfully will be able to:

- ❖ Demonstrate a theoretically informed understanding of the social, economic and political challenges gentrification in Harlem presents.
- ❖ Characterize and attack or defend different arguments for/against gentrification and aggressive policing methods in Harlem.
- ❖ Demonstrate some understanding of the historical and contemporary significance of the Harlem Renaissance literary/arts movement.
- ❖ Demonstrate a theoretically informed understanding of differences between several different critical theoretical interpretive methods (i.e.: Geertzian thick description, semiotics, Foucaultian analysis).
- ❖ Demonstrate new skills of close reading, critical thinking, analytical writing and oral presentation.

### **Books to Purchase**

Books are available for purchase at Book Culture (536 West 112<sup>th</sup> Street). All other texts are available through CLIO.

- Barthes, Roland, *Mythologies*, New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1972.  
Bradley, Stefan, *Harlem vs. Columbia University: Black Student Power in the Late 1960s*, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009.  
Fausset, Jessie, *Plum Bun*, Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1990.  
Foucault, Michel, *The Michel Foucault Reader*, New York: Pantheon, 1984.  
Gill, Jonathan, *Harlem: The Four Hundred Year History from Dutch Village to Capital of Black America*, New York: Grove Press, 2011.  
Locke, Alain, *Survey Graphic: the March 1925 Number Harlem Mecca of the New Negro*, Baltimore, MD: Black Classic Press, 1980.  
Spivak, Gayatri, *Harlem*, Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2012.  
Tough, Paul, *Whatever it Takes: Geoffrey Canada's Quest to Change Harlem and America*, 2009.  
Thurman, Wallace, *Infants of the Spring*, New York: Dover Publishing, 2013  
Vergara, Camilo, *Harlem the Unmaking of a Ghetto*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013.

### **Recommended for Purchase**

- Foucault, Michel, *The Foucault Reader*, New York: Pantheon, 1980.  
Geertz, Clifford, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York: Basic Books, 1973  
Hesse-Biber, Sharlene, *Feminist Perspectives on Social Research*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004  
Simmel, Georg, *On Individuality and Social Forms*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971

### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

Each week, students are assigned readings (historical, critical theoretical, literary) about Harlem and its people, sometimes supplemented by interpretive methods texts. The success of the colloquium depends upon the intensive participation of each student. For this reason, attendance at every session, as well as thoughtful contribution to our discussion based on a thorough analysis of the readings are crucial.

### **Three Short Papers**

Each student is required to complete three short assignments which treat Harlem as a case and are designed to familiarize students with Barthean (semiological), Geertzian (thick descriptive), and Foucaultian (discourse analytical) methods. Each short paper is worth

20% of the final grade.

### **Non-thesis students: Final Analytical/Research Paper**

Each student will also write a substantial research or analytical paper of at least 25 papers on a topic chosen in consultation with the instructor. The final analytical/research paper should draw upon feminist methodological approaches AND/OR critical race theoretical approaches to race, gender, political inequality in an urban setting (need not be Harlem). The paper will be due at the start of class on the last day of our course. Students will submit a carefully written, well thought-out one-page topic statement for this longer paper at the start of class in week 5 of the semester and an annotated draft bibliography (of at least 15 sources) for the paper at the start of class in week 8 of the semester. The final paper will count for 40% of your grade.

### **For Seniors Who Have Designated This Course as Colloquium to Fulfill Their Senior Capstone Requirement**

1. Provide constructive criticism and feedback to your designated peer partner(s). You and your partner should hold meetings, in consultation with the instructor, to discuss your assignments, e.g. research proposals, research methods, rough drafts.
2. If not already required by the syllabus, present your main findings in class at the end of the semester. A portion of the Class participation grade will reflect the quality of your mentoring and final presentation.
3. Attend at least one of the Senior overviews of the library and online resources hosted by the instructor or another member of the Political Science Department.
4. Generate a poster that summarizes your research question, argument, and findings. The poster should accompany your class presentation and will be displayed at the Senior end-of-year Departmental party in May 2014. The poster will not be graded, but is required to receive a "Pass" for your Senior requirement and will factor into Departmental considerations for Senior Project Distinction.

### **Policy on Late Assignments**

Late submissions will be significantly penalized (one third of a letter grade per day after the deadline). For example, a "B" assignment due Wednesday but handed in Friday will receive a C+. Papers submitted more than four days after the due date will not be accepted. Extensions will be given ONLY in the case of documented illness, family emergency, or other crisis situation. (Please provide any form of documentation available).

### **ACCESSIBILITY**

Students with disabilities who will be taking this course and may need disability-related accommodations are encouraged to make an appointment to see Prof. Smith as soon as

possible. Disabled students who need accommodations related to assignments and/or classroom must be registered in advance with the Office of Disability Services (ODS) in 105 Hewitt.

### **ACADEMIC HONESTY**

Students affirm that all work turned in is their own, and that they have fully and accurately cited every written source, including web-based sources, used in their writing. All students taking this course must adhere to the Barnard College honor code. The honor code considers it “dishonest to ask for, give or receive help in examinations or quizzes, to use any papers or books not authorized by the instructor in examinations or to present oral or written work which is not entirely our own, unless otherwise improved by the instructor. If in doubt about any of these provisions, please seek advice from Prof. Smith.

## COURSE CALENDAR

### **Mon. 1/27/14 INTRODUCTION**

Gill, Jonathan, *Harlem: The Four Hundred Year History from Dutch Village to Capital of Black America*, New York: Grove Press, ch. 7 – 111, pp. 131 – 421

Fell, Gilbert, “What Has Athens to Do with New York?”. *Contemporary Philosophy XIX* (1997), **CourseWorks**

### *Urbs Urbis*

### **Mon. 2/3/14 Whose Harlem?**

Baldwin, James, “Whose Harlem is This?”, CLIO

Bradley, Stefan, *Harlem vs. Columbia University: Black Student Power in the Late 1960s*, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009, selections

### **Mon. 2/10/14 Whose Harlem?**

Harlem Urban Development Corporation, **Harlem: the next 10 years, a proposal for discussion : report of the Harlem task force**, 1974, selections

Student Coalition on Expansion and Gentrification, *Columbia’s West Harlem Expansion: A Look at the Issues*

Harlem Tour (scheduled some time this week)

<http://www.harlemheritage.com/category/tours/walking-tours/> cost: \$20.00 per ticket

### **Mon. 2/17/14 Whose Harlem?**

Spivak, Gayatri, *Harlem*, Calcutta: Seagull Press, 2012, All

Vergara, Camilo, *Harlem the Unmaking of a Ghetto*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013, All

**Mon. 2/24/14 Whose Harlem?**

Barthes, Roland, *Mythologies*, New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1972, selections

*Assignment One: Writing in Response to Barthes*

Choose FIVE pictures from the Spivak or Vergara texts or photographs of your own making. Drawing up Barthes, identify and explain the *signifier*, the *signified*, and the *signification* for each one. 4 - 6 pages DUE 3/3/14

**Mon. 3/3/14 When Harlem Was in Vogue**

Thurman, Wallace, *Infants of the Spring*,  
Various reviews of novel TBD  
Selections from

**Mon. 3/10/14 When Harlem Was in Vogue**

Fausset, Jessie, *Plum Bun*,  
Various reviews of novel TBD

**Mon. 3/17/14 When Harlem Was in Vogue**

Locke, Alain, *Survey Graphic: the March 1925 Number Harlem Mecca of the New Negro*,  
Baltimore, MD: Black Classic Press, 1980, All  
Bonner, Marita, "On Being Young, Coloured and a Woman" \*Courseworks  
Bennett, Gwendolyn, "The Future of the Negro in Art" and "Negros: Inherent Craftsmen"  
\*Courseworks  
Simmel, Georg, "The Metropolis and Mental Life" \*Course Works

**Mon. 3/24/14 Showtime at the Apollo**

Apollo Theater Oral History Project, listen to selections on Course Works  
Geertz, Clifford, "Thick Description: Toward and Interpretive Theory of Culture" and "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight" \*Course Works

Amateur Night at the Apollo visit, date TBD cost \$10.00 - \$20.00

*Assignment Two: Writing in Response to Geertz*

Write a short (4 – 6 pp) "Geertzian" analysis of Amateur Night at the Apollo. Due 4/7

## *Civitas Civitatis*

### **Mon. 3/31/14 Knowledge and Power**

Foucault, Michel, *The Michel Foucault Reader*, New York: Pantheon, 1984, “Truth and Power,” “Panopticism,” “Complete and Austere Institutions, and ” “The Carceral”

### **Mon. 4/7/14 Inequality**

New York City Police Departments “Stop and Frisk” Practices: a Report to the People of the State of New York from the Office of the Attorney General \*CourseWorks

Peruse NYCLU Stop and Frisk reports for first quarter 2012 for PSA 6 (housing), and Harlem Precincts, 26, 28, 30, 34 ([http://www.nyclu.org/files/2012\\_1st\\_Qtr.pdf](http://www.nyclu.org/files/2012_1st_Qtr.pdf))

Weiss, Murray, “African Americans Command Harlem’s NYPD Precincts,” (<http://www.dnainfo.com/new-york/20121119/central-harlem/for-first-time-ever-african-americans-command-harlems-nypd-precincts>)

Bickford, Susan, “Constructing Inequality: City Spaces and the Architecture of Citizenship,” \*CourseWorks

Gooding-Williams, Robert, “Citizenship and Racial Ideology” \*CourseWorks

### **Mon. 4/14/14 Inequality**

Tough, Paul, *Whatever it Takes: Geoffrey Canada’s Quest to Change Harlem and America*, 2009, Selections

#### *Assignment Three: Writing in Response to Foucault*

In 4 – 6 pp, apply Foucault’s argument about the Panopticon to a Harlem institution, which you have observed. Consider Grant Houses at 1320 Amsterdam Ave (with the permission of Housing Police, P.S.A. 6),\* one of the Harlem Children Zone facilities (with permission), or another Harlem institution of your choosing. DUE 4/21

### **Mon. 4/21/14 TBD**

**4/28/14 Thesis Presentations**

**5/5/14 Thesis Presentations**