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Back to Africa: A history of an Idea

The idea of "Africa" as a geographical imaginary, a concrete locale, or an influence on contemporary African American culture has been and continues to be a salient and contested aspect of the black experience. This course explores how the idea of Africa, with all of its ambiguity, has been employed and deployed as a place to relocate African Americans, as an historical agent that has shaped contemporary African American culture, and as a mythical entity that one needs to "reclaim."

We will also explore how many African Americans view the continent as a source of pride, power, and unity while west Africans often do not share the same sense of unity nor sense of identity. The readings do not try to be comprehensive, but touch on a range of issues from pan-Africanism to anti-colonialism to the idea of a modern blackness in a transnational word.

The format will be a seminar where we will reflect and discuss the readings while living in Ghana. Ghana, for a variety of reasons, has played a special role in shoring up, articulating, and catering to the idea of Africa to African Americans in the U.S. We will take the opportunity to critically evaluate and celebrate, explore and critique the many dimensions and ways ideas about Africa play into shaping the history and identity of black experiences. The week’s readings sort of line up with the excursions that we will be undertaking, so your "classroom" will not be limited to a room per se and you will be asked to incorporate your observations into your discussions of the readings. Each week you will reflect in your journal about the week’s readings. I am specifically looking for your ability to integrate discussions in class, the reading material, and any observation you make in Ghana.

Documents are available at
http://www.duke.edu/~ldbaker/classes/backtoafrica/documents/

Assignments include participant observation, discussion, and reader response essays written each week in your journal. Essays are due Friday mornings before noon.

The reader responses should address some of these specific questions:

1. How does the author engage the idea of history, politics, and identity?
2. What was the general argument or point the author or editor made?
3. What major premises, themes, and concepts of culture or race, did the author employ?
4. What evidence did the author use? (i.e. scientific, ethnographic, personal experience)
5. How were ideas about Africa engaged?
6. Who was the audience, why was that audience chosen, and how was it received?

Part of the “credit” for this class will be based on your research paper. We will take time during each class to review various research methods and ethics, strategies, and approaches of each project under taken. You may work with a partner on your research project. Be sure to choose your partner wisely. You will each
receive the same grade on the paper, so make sure that your partner will be willing to share in both the research and writing process.

**Required Text:** *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route.* Saidiya Hartman [Due Date May 20].

**Week ONE: May 20, 21, 22**

**Back to Africa: A Colonial Project?**


**Week TWO May 27, 28, 29**

**The Idea and Ideal of Africa in the Early 20th Century**


Yekutiel Gershoni. 2001. Common goals, different ways: The UNIA and the NCBWA in West Africa - 1920-1930;; Journal of Third World Studies, Americus; Vol. 18, Iss. 2; pg. 171, 15 pgs


**Week THREE June 3, 4, 5**

**The Idea of Africa and African American Identity**

'African-American' Becomes a Term for Debate


**Week FOUR June 10, 11, 12**

**Coming “home” or going abroad: Heritage Tourism in Ghana**

Rites of passage, routes of redemption: Emancipation tourism and the wealth of culture  

Alicia Jefferson. 1997. Memoirs: Our journey home; Alicia Jefferson; Essence, New York; Jun 1997; Vol. 28, Iss. 2; pg. 128, 1 pgs


Edward M Bruner. 1996. Tourism in Ghana; American Anthropologist, Washington; Jun 1996; Vol. 98, Iss. 2; pg. 290, 15 pgs

**Week FIVE June 17, 18, 19**

**Identity, Locality, and the Reason we Go!**

*Read the first two articles, and then choose one of the remaining that interest you.*

Alyssa Cymene Howe. 2001 Queer pilgrimage: The San Francisco homeland and identity tourism; Cultural Anthropology, Washington; Feb 2001; Vol. 16, Iss. 1; pg. 35-62.

Andrea Louie. 2000. Re-territorializing transnationalism: Chinese Americans and the Chinese motherland;; American Ethnologist, Arlington; Vol. 27, Iss. 3; pg. 645, 25 pgs

Choose one of the following:


**Week SIX June 24, 25**

During the class periods during this week, you will present your research to your peers.

Papers are due: Monday June 23rd by 12:00pm. Email them to me and I will print them out and distribute them to Dr. Saah. I want to emphasize that he and I must have time to read and grade them before we depart, so we will not accept late papers.