DAN 284: Dancing Diaspora: The African-American Theatrical Dance Tradition  
Fall 2016  
Tuesday/Thursday 9:40-10:55am  
Chambers 2130

Professor Alison Bory  
Office: Chambers 2257  
Phone: (704) 894-2745  
Office Hrs: Tues 11am-12:30pm, Wed 1-3pm, Thurs 1-2pm, & by appointment  
Email: albory@davidson.edu

COURSE SYLLABUS

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Drawing on scholarship about performance in the African diaspora, this course examines how United States dance performance has shaped—and been shaped by—ideas about Africanist aesthetics and cultural identities. Exploring entertainment and concert performances from minstrelsy to the present day, the class will investigate both how black dance artists have staged their cultural experiences, and how those theatrical representations have been received and interpreted. Throughout our study, we will continually attend to the way in which the black body in performance is ‘read,’ analyzing a range of projected formulations, including stereotypical notions of the primitive and more empowering constructions of diasporic embodiment. Considering performance and the presentation of the body as potent sites for imagining (and re-imagining) black identity, this course will take up an interdisciplinary approach to our study by intermingling readings in Dance Studies and Africana Studies with performance viewings.

In order to analyze how performance functions within a larger sociocultural context, we will consistently return to the following questions:

--- How do dancing bodies stage their own identities?
--- How do dancing bodies create, define, or develop communities?
--- How do dancing bodies reinforce social norms?
--- How do physical practices subvert systems of power?
--- What are the intersections between individual artists and social movements?

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Though the course, students will:

--- Learn about individual dance and performance forms, developing knowledge of influential figures in the development of the studied practices
--- Understand fundamental concepts in Dance Studies and Africana Studies
--- Articulate an understanding of the cultural contexts of dance practice and performance and the role that dance can play in society
--- Become adept at describing, discussing, and analyzing performances and dance practices in both written and spoken contexts
REQUIRED TEXTS
--Additional readings will be made available via Moodle. Please be sure that these readings are available to you during our class discussions, either in printed form or on a tablet reader.
--Course screenings will be available as links via Moodle or on reserve in the Little Library.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

**Attendance and Active Participation**
Your attendance and active participation are necessary for your success in this course. Additional material, outside of that found in the course screenings and readings, will be presented in every class meeting, and discussion will be integral to your negotiations with the subject matter. As a result, it is imperative that you attend each and every class.

Two excused absences are permitted. Each additional absence will result in lowering your participation grade by the equivalent of a letter grade (10 points). Students are expected to arrive on time and stay through the duration of the class; anything other than that will be considered a tardy. Three tardies translate into one absence. If a student arrives after roll is taken, it is his/her responsibility to make sure that the instructor has recorded his/her attendance. As a reminder, Davidson College guidelines dictate that students who miss more than 25% of the class of an individual course can automatically fail the class. **Students are responsible for any and all material and assignments missed due to absence.**

Discussion is an essential part of this class. Students should be prepared to make thoughtful contributions about the readings/screenings scheduled for each class period. While I do not expect (or even hope) that you will all agree on your analyses and assessments and our readings/viewings, I do expect that your contributions will be considered and respectful of your fellow classmates. Your participation grade will be a reflection of your preparation for our conversation, your attentive, willing participation in our discussions, and your continued attempts to articulate your ideas.

**Content Analysis Presentation (CAP)/Discussion Leading:** Twice during the semester, you and a partner will facilitate the introduction of our assigned reading/viewing for an individual class. Your presentation should provide the class with a short synthesis of the article/performance due for that session and offer thoughtful questions that will launch the class discussion, in a format of your choosing. In lieu of conversation questions, you may devise a movement/performance exercise that explores the ideas examined in the readings and/or screenings. Details of the expectations of these presentations will be outlined on another handout.
Assignments

In addition to your active participation and presentation, you will have several assignments that will allow you to demonstrate your knowledge and your active grappling with the course materials.

It is expected that all of your written work will be thoroughly spell-checked, proofread and properly cited. Dance Studies primarily uses MLA citation, but you are welcome to use any citation system in which you feel comfortable, so long as you remain consistent throughout your paper. All written assignments should be typed with standard fonts and formatting (1” margins, double spaced). Resources for your writing can be found on the following website: http://davidsonwriter.redbrickroad.net/

Online Conversations: To encourage multiple modes of conversation and to share developing insights, you will be required to submit online responses to the readings/screenings/discussions engaged in our class. These writings should address the material assigned for the recent weeks, considering the ideas that the readings/screening/class discussions offered in conversation with other topics covered. This will provide a space for ongoing conversation outside of the classroom, as well as allow you synthesize your ideas and track your developing thoughts about the primary concepts discussed. Your entries need not be formal essays, but should be thoughtful reflections on the material—with each being between 250 and 350 words.

For these assignments, students will engage in the various roles outlined below:

Provocateur: Initiating the conversation, these students will offer a question, propose an alternative reading, address a troubling concept, or outline an aspect of one of our readings that feels confusing.

Respondent: Replying directly to the ideas offered by at least one of the provocations, these students will respectfully disagree, offer an alternative analysis, explain an aspect of the text that hasn’t been understood, or articulate further development of the argument suggested.

Supporter: Using the previous posts as fodder, these students will locate and post outside resources (short articles, video links, photographs, quotations from other scholarly work, etc.) that contribute to the conversation. The post should then explain how and why these supporting documents/ideas relate to the themes of the class and the ideas being explored.

You will submit three (3) posts throughout the semester, by the times outlined in our course schedule, to the created Moodle forum. You will sign up for each of the roles in the first few classes of the semester.
Performance Response: As we are studying dance performance, it is highly recommended that you attend as much live dance as possible. You are required to attend at least one of the performances in the area. Within a week of seeing the performance, please submit a paragraph that responds to the themes, ideas, and representations offered in the performance. Additional information about the assignment will be provided on another handout.

The following shows will be offered in the area this fall:

Nov 10:  Nora Chipamuire, *Portrait of myself as my father* (7:30pm @ UNC Chapel Hill)*
Nov 14:  Savion Glover’s *Stepz* (7:30pm @ Knight Theatre, Charlotte)

*Group tickets and shared transportation are being arranged for the Nora Chipamuire performance. Once details are posted, please let me know as soon as possible, if you’d like to attend.

Essays: You will submit two short (approximately 4 pages) essays that put the ideas presented in the class in conversation with your own ideas and experiences. While these papers will not require outside research, you will be asked to critically engage and assess how these ideas function in contemporary society. The first is due in Week 7; the second is due in Week 12.

Final Research Project: You will put together a final research project that investigates a topic of your choosing more deeply, drawing upon the ideas we are dealing with in class. Your project will be comprised of a paper and a presentation, but you may choose the composition of those elements, by either completing:

- An 8-10 page critical analysis, for which you will informally present the argument and discussion of to the class
- A short (3-5 minute) performance, which will be analyzed and supported by a short written discussion of your ideas and process

Presentations/performances will be given in the final class sessions; the final papers will be due during exam week. You must, however, turn in a project topic and prospectus before the presentation/performance.

You are welcome to consult with me on any (or all) of these assignments, but should you need additional assistance, please avail yourself of the services of The Writing Center (davidson.edu/ctl/students/tutoring/writing-center). Register for an appointment at: Davidson.mywconline.com.
**COURSE POLICIES**

*Late Assignments*
Any assignments submitted beyond the due date will be docked one letter grade (10 points) for each day that they are late.

*Accommodations*
Disabilities: Full accommodations are the legal right of students with all kinds of disabilities, whether learning disabilities or physical disabilities. If you are a student with a learning disability documented by Davidson College who might need accommodations, please identify yourself to me within the first week or two of classes, so that I can learn from you as early as possible how to best work with your learning style. Students with other disabilities are also encouraged to self-identify if there is any way in which I can make accommodations that will enhance your learning experience. All such conversations will be fully confidential unless you stipulate otherwise.

Religious Holidays: Full accommodations will be made for the major religious holidays in your faith. Please look carefully at the syllabus during the first week of classes. Should any of our assignments conflict with your observance, please let me know so that we can agree on alternative submission date/process.

**Additional College Resources & Support**
In addition to the academic resources listed above, the college offers free counseling to all enrolled students. To find out about what is available and to make an appointment, you can visit the ‘Counseling’ section of the Health Center’s webpage: http://www.davidson.edu/student-life/health-and-counseling/counseling.

Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender are Civil Rights offenses subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, etc.

Davidson College is committed to providing maximum support for all students who have experienced sexual misconduct and strongly encourages students to report any incident. All college services are available to survivors of sexual misconduct regardless of whether or not a student intends to files a formal complaint. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you can get support and resources from the Dean of Students office and Campus Safety. Campus resources include:
- Campus Police 704-894-2178
- Student Health/Counseling: 704-894-2300
- Dean of Students Office: 704-894-2225
*Navigating Course Content*

The readings and performances we will consider deal with complex and sometimes controversial subjects, which reflect aspects of the world in which we live (that might not be familiar to you), envision alternate ways of imagining the world, or serve as a challenge to the status quo. It would be impossible to create meaningful dialogue about art and society that did not include challenging materials or unconventional approaches. As a result, we will each take responsibility for creating a space of open-minded, thoughtful discussion of issues and art. As a community of individuals with diverse backgrounds, different experiences, and a wide range of beliefs, the classroom environment will be one based on mutual respect. This policy encourages you to voice distinct opinions, to share still-forming ideas, and to look to each other for guidance and feedback, but requires that you remain civil and inquiring.

*Davidson’s Honor Code*

Each student is expected to be familiar with and abide by the Honor Code, which is fully supported and endorsed by the instructor. Remember that anything that you submit is pledged work, whether you have signed the document or not. Please make sure that you understand the honor code, especially the definition of plagiarism. If you have any questions, doubts, or concerns about any aspect of your work in relationship to the honor code, please do not hesitate to ask.

*Evaluation:

Grades will be calculated as follows—

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content Analysis Presentations (2)</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Conversations</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Performance/Response</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Short Papers</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Research Project</td>
<td>30%</td>
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*Grading Scale*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Score Range</th>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>94 and above</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-93</td>
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<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>84-86</td>
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<td>B-</td>
<td>80-83</td>
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<td>C+</td>
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<td>C</td>
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<td>D-</td>
<td>60-63</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>59 and below</td>
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In my course, grades are earned based on the following expectations:

A = Excellent; thoughtfully developed and supported ideas, artfully executed.
B = Very Good; compelling ideas with adequate support.
C = Average; demonstrated grasp of ideas.
D = Below Average; lacking clear ideas and/or sufficient support.
F = Failing to meet requirements of the assignment.
To this end, please note that I often assign grades that can be situated in between those typically assigned (i.e., A-/B+). The numerical points awarded to those grades are the average of the two earned (i.e., A-/B+ = 89.5).

You may meet with the instructor at any time to discuss your progress and grade.

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

*Readings and screenings are due on the day they are listed. Readings can be found in either the course text [Gottschild] or as links on Moodle [MD].

Readings and/or due dates may be changed (with advance warning) at the discretion of the instructor. Those days marked with [+]) are available for Content Analysis Presentations.

**THE POWER OF THE BODY: Cultural Positioning & the Current Moment**

**WEEK 1**

Aug 23: Introductions

Aug 25: Bodies of Meaning, Choreographies of Protest

*READ: Susan Foster, “Choreographies of Protest” [MD]

Anusha Kedhar, “‘Hands Up! Don’t shoot!’: Gesture, Choreography, and Protest in Ferguson” [MD]

*WATCH: Shamell Bell, “Living is Resisting: Street Dance Activism in Black Lives Matter”

**WEEK 2**

Aug 30: Choreography as Protest, Dance & Politics, or What do We Expect from Art?

*READ: A. O. Scott, “Is Our Art Equal to the Challenges of Our Times?” [MD]

David Simon et al., “Race, Class, and Creative Spark” [MD]

Christian L. Frock, “Hell No, We Won’t Go: Outstanding Radical Art and Global Movements in 2014” [MD]

Sarah Seltzer, “Looking for Art’s Response to ‘The Challenge of Our Times’? You’ll Find it in Mainstream Pop Culture” [MD]

**THEORETICAL FRAMES: Diaspora, Body, Cultural Identity, & Africanist Aesthetics**

Sept 1: Locating the Conversation: Geography

*READ: Paul Gilroy, “The Black Atlantic as a Counterculture of Modernity” (p49-80) [MD]
WEEK 3
Sept 6: Locating the Conversation: Cultural Identity
*READ: Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” (p233-246) [MD]

Sept 8: Locating the Conversation: The Body as Object and Subject
*READ: Harvey Young, “The Black Body” (p1-25)
Anthea Kraut, “The Black Body as Object and Subject” (p91-126) [MD]

WEEK 4
Sept 13: Cultivating Africanist Aesthetics [+]
*READ: Gottschild, “Introduction” (xiii-xvi), Ch1: “Up From Under: The Africanist Presence” (1-10), Ch 2, “First Premises of an Africanist Aesthetic” (11-19)

Sept 15: Assigning a Name, Wrestling with Representations, Writing about Dance?
*READ: Thomas DeFrantz, “African American Dance: A Complex History” [MD]

***ONLINE CONVERSATION:
Provocations posted by Sept 15th, 11:59pm
Responses posted by Sept 17th, 11:59pm
Supporting statements posted by Sept 19th, 11:59pm

THE MINSTREL TRADITION: AN ENDURING LEGACY?

WEEK 5
Sept 20: Creating an American Performance Culture
*READ: Gottschild, Ch 6: “Performance, Power, & the Politics of the Minstrel Stage” (p81-128)
*IN CLASS VIEWING: Marlon Riggs, Ethnic Notions

Sept 22: Minstrelsy & Authenticity [+]
DEVELOPING A THEATRICAL TRADITION

WEEK 6
Sept 27: From the Floor to the Stage [+]
*READ: Nadine George-Graves, “‘Just Like Being at the Zoo’: Primitivity and Ragtime Dance” (p55-71) [MD]
Brenda Dixon Gottschild, “‘You didn’t go downtown: everything was uptown’: Harlem, USA” (p57-81) [MD]

Sept 29: Modernism, Primitivism, & Agency—Josephine Baker [+]
*READ: Wendy Martin, “‘Remembering the Jungle’: Josephine Baker & Modernist Parody (p310-325) [MD]
Anthea Kraut, “Whose Choreography? Josephine Baker and the Question of (Dance) Authorship” (p1-5 online) [MD]

WEEK 7
Oct 4: Modernism on the Concert Stage? [+]
*READ: Alain Locke, “The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts” (p254-267) [MD]
John Perpener, “Early Influences on Black Concert Dance,” (p1-24)
*WATCH: Asadata Dafora, The Ostrich, on Dancing in the Light

Oct 6: Performing the Diaspora
*READ: Katherine Dunham, “The Negro Dance” (p66-74) [MD]
VeVe Clark, “Performing the Memory of Difference in Afro-Caribbean Dance: Katherine Dunham’s Choreography, 1938-87 (p188-204) [MD]
*WATCH: Dunham, “Shango”

*DUE: Paper #1: Legacies of Minstrelsy

CREATING A CONCERT TRADITION

WEEK 8
Oct 11: FALL BREAK

Oct 13: (Re)Defining Genres [+]
*READ: Pearl Primus, “Africa” (p265-275) [MD]
Richard Green, “(Up)Staging the Primitive: Pearl Primus and ‘the Negro Problem’ in American Dance” (p105-139) [MD]
*WATCH: Primus, “Negro Speaks of Rivers”
WEEK 9
Oct 18: Artistry, Agency, Activism [+]
*READ: Rebekah Kowal, “The Uses of Action I: Talley Beatty, Katherine Dunham, and Donald McKayle” (p194-225) [MD]
*WATCH: Beatty, “Mourner’s Bench”
McKayle, “Rainbow Round My Shoulder”

Oct 20: Staging a Revelation?: Alvin Ailey’s American Dance Theatre [+]
*READ: Thomas DeFrantz, “Revelations 1962” (p3-25) and Revelations II: 1969” (p75-92)
*WATCH: Alvin Ailey, Revelations

WEEK 10
Oct 25: Black Masculinity & Ailey [+]
*READ: Thomas DeFrantz, “Gender and Spectatorship”
*WATCH: Alvin Ailey, Cry

Oct 27: It’s not Anger, It’s the Truth: Eleo Polmare [+]
*WATCH: Polmare, “Junkie”

WEEK 11
Nov 1: Post-modern Interventions? [+]
*READ: Gottschild, Ch 4: “Barefoot and Hot, Sneakered and Cool: Africanist Subtexts in Modern and Postmodern Dance” (p47-58)
Gottschild, “Black White Dance Dancers” (p12-40) [MD]

Nov 3: Library Session: Meetings with Research Librarians

**ONLINE CONVERSATION:
Provocations posted by Thurs, Nov 3rd, 11:59pm
Responses posted by Sat, Nov 5th, 11:59pm
Supporting statements posted by Mon, Nov 7th, 11:59pm

WEEK 12
Nov 8: Situating the Present
IN CLASS: Free to Dance, Part 3, “Go For What You Know” and Selections from Dance Black America

*DUE: Essay #2: Assessing the Ailey Legacy
Nov 10: Performing “The Promised Land” [+]
*READ: Jacqueline Shea Murphy, “Unrest and Uncle Tom: Political Movement in Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Company’s Last Supper at Uncle Tom’s Cabin/The Promised Land” (p81-105) [MD]
*WATCH: Bill T. Jones, “Dancing to the Promised Land”
*DUE: FINAL PROJECT PROPOSAL

RE/DE/CONSTRUCTING HISTORIES, RE/DE/CONSTRUCTING LEGACIES

WEEK 13
Nov 15: Representation and Re-imagining Identities [+]
*READ: Gottschild, “Butt” (p144-187)
*WATCH: Urban Bush Women, Batty Moves

Nov 17: Re-imaging Diaspora [+]
*READ: Ralph Lemon, Excerpts from Geography [MD]
*WATCH: Ralph Lemon, Geography

WEEK 14
Nov 22: Staging the Contemporary Moment [+]
*READ: TBD
*WATCH: Kyle Abraham, Pavement and When the Wolves Came In

Nov 24: THANKSGIVING BREAK

WEEK 15
Nov 29: Staging the Contemporary Moment [+]
*READ: TBD
*WATCH: Okwui Okpokwasili, Bronx Gothic

Dec 1: Student Presentations

***ONLINE CONVERSATION:
Provocations posted by Thurs, Dec 1st, 11:59pm
Responses posted by Sat, Dec 3rd, 11:59pm
Supporting statements posted by Monday, Dec 5th, 11:59pm

WEEK 16
Dec 6: Student Presentations [as needed]

FINALS WEEK
Dec 15: Final Papers Due (By 5:15pm)