

# Queer of Color Theory

## Prof. Robin Bernstein

African and African American Studies 183x  
Harvard University  
Tuesdays 1-3 pm, Fall 2012  
Barker Center, room 316

Course website: <http://isites.harvard.edu/k89610>

Prof. Bernstein's Office:  
email: <rbernst@fas>  
Phone: 617.495.9634



Boylston G31  
Office hours:  
Tuesdays 3-5pm

Marlon Riggs (left) and Essex Hemphill (right),  
*Tongues Untied* (1989)

In *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique*, Roderick A. Ferguson defines queer of color analysis as an

interrogat[ion] of social formations as the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and class, with particular interest in how those formations correspond with and diverge from nationalist ideals and practices. Queer of color analysis is a heterogeneous enterprise made up of women of color feminism, materialist analysis, poststructuralist theory, and queer critique. (Ferguson, 149)

Proceeding from this definition, our seminar investigates the theoretical work of queer people of color, primarily in the U.S., from the 1970s to the present. We begin with queer of color theory as a critical response to racism in (white) queer theory and to heterocentrism in ethnic studies and in communities of color. We then move back in time to study queer of color theory's roots in radical feminism in the 1970s and 80s and in AIDS and related experiences of loss during the 1980s and 90s. In the early twenty-first century, a critical mass of queer of color scholars began investigating the ways in which gender and sexuality figure in global economic and cultural structures. As David Eng, Judith Halberstam, and José Esteban Muñoz asked in their introduction to *Social Text* 84-85 (2005), "What does queer studies have to say about empire, globalization, neoliberalism, sovereignty, and terrorism? What does queer studies tell us about immigration, citizenship, prisons, welfare, mourning, and human rights?" (Eng, Halberstam, and Muñoz, 2). These questions have defined queer of color theory for the twenty-first century, and they frame the very recent scholarship that we read in the second half of our course—cutting-edge books about nationalism, diasporic migration, everyday life, and revolution.

## Assignments and requirements:

Discussion leadership (varying dates)	20%
Two meetings with professor (graded full credit/no credit)	5%
Mid-semester Paper, due Monday, October 22, 3pm	10%
Proposal for Final Project, due Monday, Nov. 12 (graded full credit/no credit)	5%
Final Project, due Wednesday, December 12	35%
Thoughtful, engaged, and respectful classroom participation	25%

### Discussion leadership:

In this exercise, you will place our reading in direct conversation with a primary text. Students will work in teams of two to bring into the classroom a primary text that relates in some complex way to one or more of the week's reading assignments. For example, the team might distribute a poem, manifesto, or work of visual art; play a song; or screen a brief film clip, YouTube video, television commercial, or music video. The team will contextualize the material for the class and will suggest ways in which the week's reading and the primary text might inform or challenge each other. *The primary text should not merely exemplify some point in the reading, nor should the primary text be one that the assigned reading analyzes in depth.* The reading, hearing, or viewing of the primary text **and** the initial contextualizing remarks should run between **10 and 15 minutes total**. Please do not exceed this limit. After the contextualizing comments and the reading, hearing, or viewing of the primary text, the team will facilitate the class's discussion of the text in relation to the week's reading. The team should expect to take primary responsibility for the seminar's first hour of discussion and secondary responsibility for the second hour.

### Mid-Semester Paper:

Each student will write a 5-7 page paper that will accomplish EITHER of the following: a) critically engage with one or two assigned texts (for example, critique an argument, read one argument against or through another, etc.) OR b) use the ideas in one of our assigned reading to analyze a short primary text (for example, a poem, song, manifesto, sermon, legal decision, theatrical performance, interaction in everyday life, or work of visual art). Each paper must have a clear thesis and must support that thesis with thoughtfully-chosen evidence from the text and/or performance. No outside research is necessary or desirable. With the professor's permission, a graduate student may complete this assignment by writing a publishable book review. Due MONDAY, October 22, 3pm, to Prof. Bernstein's mailbox in AAAS (Barker Center).

### Final Project:

Each student will complete a substantial final project that engages deeply with the concepts in this course. An undergraduate student may write a 15-page paper or may propose an alternative form of engagement (the professor will work with students to craft viable alternative projects but ultimately reserves the right to decline any proposal). A graduate student's final project must consist of a 20-25 page scholarly paper. Each student must submit a proposal for a final project—regardless of form—by 3pm on MONDAY, November 12, in Prof. Bernstein's mailbox in AAAS (Barker Center).

### General information:

All books are on reserve at Lamont Library and for sale at the Harvard Coop.

Late assignments will be docked one third of a letter grade for each day or partial day overdue.

Please note that failure to complete any assignment can lower your final grade in excess of the stated percentage.

If you need reasonable accommodations for a disability, please let Professor Bernstein know as soon as possible.

Professor Bernstein holds office hours from 2-3pm every Wednesday and 3-5pm every Tuesday (except when Harvard holds a faculty meeting, in which case Prof. Bernstein holds office hours from 3-4pm). You are welcome to drop in, but students with appointments receive priority. You may reserve time online at <http://wgs.fas.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k53419&pageid=icb.page449095>. If you have class during both sets of office hours, please email Professor Bernstein at <rbernst@fas> to make alternative arrangements.

This course adheres to Harvard University policy on permitted collaboration, which reads as follows:

Discussion and the exchange of ideas are essential to academic work. For assignments in this course, you are encouraged to consult with your classmates on the choice of paper topics and to share sources. You may find it useful to discuss your chosen topic with your peers, particularly if you are working on the same topic as a classmate. However, you should ensure that any written work you submit for evaluation is the result of your own research and writing and that it reflects your own approach to the topic. You must also adhere to standard citation practices in this discipline and properly cite any books, articles, websites, lectures, etc. that have helped you with your work. If you received any help with your writing (feedback on drafts, etc), you must also acknowledge this assistance.

## SCHEDULE

September 4. Introductions. Watch and discuss in class: Cheryl Dunye, dir., *She Don't Fade* (1991)

### Unit I: Queer of Color Critique

September 11. Critiques of theory, of queerness, of queer theory

- Barbara Christian, "The Race for Theory," *Cultural Critique* 6 (Spring 1987): 51-63. Access online through JSTOR.
- Gloria Anzaldúa, "To(o) Queer the Writer—Loca, escritor y chicana," originally published 1991; in AnaLouise Keating, *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, 163-175.
- Evelyn Hammonds, "Black (W)holes and the Geometry of Black Female Sexuality," *differences* 6.2+3 (1994): 126-145. Access online through EBSCOhost.
- Cathy Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* vol. 3., no. 4 (1997): 437-465. Access online through GLBT Life with Full Text (EBSCOhost).
- OPTIONAL: Sharon Marcus, "Queer Theory for Everyone: A Review Essay," *Signs* vol. 31, no. 1 (August 2005): 191-218. Access online through JSTOR.

September 18 The Queerness of Hip Hop/The Hip Hop of Queerness

- Readings TBD
- Guest speakers: C. Riley Snorton and Scott Poulson Bryant

FRIDAY, September 21: The Queerness of Hip Hop/The Hip Hop of Queerness Symposium.

See <http://qohh.tumblr.com/> for detailed program. Register for free at <http://www.eventzilla.net/web/event?eventID=2138969194>.



### September 25. Re-Imagining Genealogies

- Audre Lorde, “I Am Your Sister: Black Women Organizing across Sexualities,” in Lorde, *A Burst of Light: Essays* (Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books, 1988): 19-26. Access online through Hollis.
- E. Patrick Johnson, “‘Quare’ Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know About Queer Studies I Learned from My Grandmother,” *Text and Performance Quarterly* Vol. 21 Issue 1 (January 2001), 1-25. Access online through Hollis.
- Michael Hames-García, “Queer

Theory Revisited,” in *Gay Latino Studies: A Critical Reader*, ed. Michael Hames-García and Ernesto J. Martínez (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 19-45.

- FILM: Marlon Riggs, dir., *Black Is... Black Ain't...* (1994). On reserve at Lamont Library.
- RECOMMENDED: Barbara Smith, “A Rose,” in Smith, *The Truth that Never Hurts: Writing on Race, Gender and Freedom* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998): 191-210. Access online through Hollis.

October 2. Roderick Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

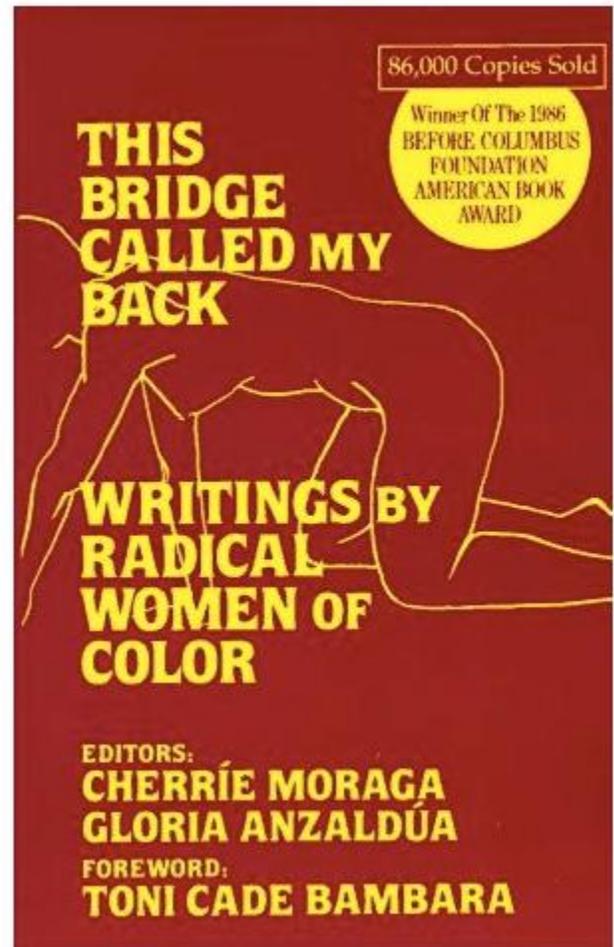
Tuesday, October 2 and Wednesday, October 3: One-on-one meetings with professor

## Unit II: Queer of Color Theory: Origins

October 9. Radical Feminists of Color

- Familiarize yourself with two books: Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga, eds., *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Watertown, MA: Persephone Press, 1981) and Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera* (San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books, 1987). You may have already read part or all of these books, either in your personal reading or in your other classes. Both are on reserve in Lamont. Pick up both books; read the parts that draw you in; see what people are saying about these books on the internet. When you feel you have a handle on what these two books are and what they have meant to several generations of readers, dive into this week’s reading.

- AnaLouise Keating, *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009). Read the following:
  - “Introduction: Reading Gloria Anzaldúa, Reading Ourselves... Complex Intimacies, Intricate Connections”
  - “La Prieta”
  - “Foreword to the Second Edition of *This Bridge Called My Back*”
  - “Spirituality, Sexuality, and the Body”
  - “En Rapport, In Opposition”
  - “Haciendo caras, una entrada”
  - “On the Process of Writing *Borderlands/La Frontera*”
  - “Memoir—My Calling; or, Notes for ‘How Prieta Came to Write’”
  - “Transforming American Studies”
  - “(Un)natural bridges, (Un)safe space”
  - “Disability & Identity: An E-mail Exchange & a Few Additional Thoughts”
  - “Let us be the healing of the wound”
  - “Glossary”
  - “Timeline.”
- Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1984). Access online through Hollis. Read the following:
  - “Poetry is Not a Luxury”
  - “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power”
  - “An Open Letter to Mary Daly” (also appears in *This Bridge Called My Back*)
  - “The Master’s Tools will Never Dismantle the Master’s House” (also appears in *This Bridge Called My Back*)
- RECOMMENDED: Barbara Smith, “A Press of Our Own Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* Vol. 10, No. 3 (1989): 11-13. Access online through JSTOR.



#### October 16. AIDS, Loss, and Memory

- Charles Henry Rowell, “Calling (Out) Our Names: An Editor’s Note,” *Callaloo* 23.1 (2000): 1-5. Access online through Project Muse.
- Melvin Dixon, “I’ll Be Somewhere Listening for My Name,” *Callaloo* 23.1 (Winter 2000): 80-83. Access online through Project Muse.
- Thomas Glave, “(Re-)Recalling Essex Hemphill: Words to Our Now,” *Callaloo* 23.1 (2000): 278-284. Access online through Project Muse.
- Sharon P. Holland, “Bill T. Jones, Tupac Shakur and the (Queer) Art of Death,” *Callaloo* 23.1 (2000): 384-393. Access online through Project Muse.

- RECOMMENDED: All of *Callaloo* 23.1 (2000).
- RECOMMENDED: Marlon Riggs, dir., *Tongues Untied* (1989)
- Note that this week's reading runs fewer pages than that of most other weeks. Pause, take a breath, catch up, read ahead, work on your paper.

**MONDAY, October 22, 3pm**: Mid-semester paper due to Prof. Bernstein's mailbox in AAAS (Barker Center).

## Unit III

### What's Queer Now?

### Queer of Color Theory for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

October 23. All of *Social Text* 84-85 (Fall/Winter 2005), "What's Queer about Queer Studies Now?," themed issue edited by David L. Eng, Judith Halberstam, and José Esteban Muñoz. Access online through Academic Search Premier (EBSCOhost).

October 30. Sharon Holland, *The Erotic Life of Racism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

Tuesday, October 30 and Wednesday, October 31: One-on-one meetings with professor to discuss final papers

November 6. Martin F. Manalansan IV, *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

**MONDAY, November 12, 3pm**: Prospectus for final paper due to Prof. Bernstein's mailbox in AAAS (Barker Center).

November 13. All of *GLQ* Volume 18, Number 2-3 (2012), "Black Queer Diaspora," themed issue edited by Jafari S. Allen

November 20. Urvashi Vaid, *Irresistible Revolution: Confronting Race, Class and the Assumptions of LGBT Politics* (Magnus Books, 2012).

November 27. Chandan Reddy, *Freedom with Violence: Race, Sexuality, and the US State* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

December 4. No reading: share works in progress.

**WEDNESDAY, December 12, 3pm**: Final papers due to Prof. Bernstein's mailbox in the Department of African and African American Studies, Barker Center.

***Enjoy your break!***