



Ntozakhe II (Parktown), 2016, printed 2022  
Zanele Muholi, artist (South Africa)



*"The law is meant to be my servant and not my master, still less my torturer and my murderer. To respect the law, in the context in which the American Negro finds himself, is simply to surrender his self-respect."*

~ James Baldwin, *The Nation*, July 11, 1966

University of Pittsburgh  
School of Education  
Department of Educational Foundations, Organization, and Policy, Fall 2024

## ***Urban Education Law, Social Policy, and School Reform (EDUC 3013/3014)***

3 Semester Hours  
In person, CUE auditorium  
If virtual, <https://pitt.zoom.us/my/tedancy2>  
<https://pitt.zoom.us/my/tedancy2>

August 26 to December 17  
Zoom meetings, Saturdays, 1-5 pm: Sept. 7, Oct. 5, Nov. 2, December 7

### **Living Course Syllabus**

#### **PROFESSOR:**

T. Elon Dancy II, Ph.D. (he/him)  
*Helen S. Faison Endowed Chair*, Urban Education, Professor by courtesy, Africana Studies, and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies  
*Executive Director*, Center for Urban Education  
E-mail address: [tedancy@pitt.edu](mailto:tedancy@pitt.edu)  
Office location: 4318 Wesley W. Posvar Hall, 230 South Bouquet Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15260  
Office telephone number: 412.624.6071  
Office Hours: By appointment

#### **CO-INSTRUCTORS:**

Chetachukwu U. Agwoeme (he/him)  
*PhD Student*, Urban Education  
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Office location: Virtual Office  
Office Hours: By appointment

Stacey Akines (she/her)  
*PhD Candidate*, History Department, Carnegie Mellon University  
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Office Hours: By appointment

## **Course Description**

In this seminar, we study the theory of education law and, by extension, what is known as American jurisprudence through the lenses of power, domination, and struggle. We engage the law critically, as pathology, education and schooling discourse, as a popular-cultural idea, and as an area of intellectual thought and scholarly study. To advance a critical engagement of education law, policy, equity, and politics, our supplemental course readings will include critical social and cultural theory drawing from such areas as Critical Race Theory, Black critical and cultural studies, Indigenous studies, Afro-Latinx studies, Black and Indigenous education histories, and empirical analyses and policy studies related to educational opportunities, experiences and outcomes. Poetry, music, film and other art forms will also serve as texts to help us in our pursuit to think about law, policy, and education interventions (e.g., school “reform”) through critical studies, particularly critical race studies.

## **Assumptions about the Field and Study of Education:**

In this course, we deliberately move from education law cases to theoretical texts in critical race studies, many outside of the field of education, to rather standard, even hegemonic narratives about education and the schooling of Black and Indigenous children and adults. Paying attention to course aims as well as the mix of people attracted to this class requires dual engagement of work in critical studies and in the field of education.

We begin in our work together with the following knowledge – education is a decidedly applied field. That is, we are inherently invested in practice, not simply as an idea, but as implementable operations, either by us directly, or through our students and other partners in the communities within which we work. The theoretical work we engage in is deeply committed to the idea of freedom with some taking up the challenge of imagining what practices might move us toward realization of these imaginations of freedom. Here, we believe, is an opportunity to explore the tensions between theory and praxis, and between theory and the applied – the impulse in education toward what are called “Monday morning solutions.” Theory should facilitate deeper consciousness and understanding (of the precise nature) of suffering, death, deception, control. It may also help us envision what refusal, resistance, life, and freedom looks like (and requires). Education as an applied field offers the possibility of praxis. However, it is also a field replete with violence and threat of violence against those who might wish to engage in liberatory practice, either as students, educators, or as cousins and aunties. In this tension, we decide what knowledge informs radical educational praxis, in and outside of schools (and colleges).

Let us check-in frequently—as a class and in one-on-one meetings (as needed)—about how you are experiencing the course, and how you are progressing with the readings and assignments. As initial authors of a living syllabus, we invite you to co-author: to review what is proposed here, and we can make revisions based on our collective interests, and our sense of what we need to do together. We, the course instructors, also invite you to interact with this syllabus, posing questions and sharing resources. Also, if at any time, it seems that the reading is excessive, we can talk about learning/engagement approaches (which are various); if there are additional readings we believe necessary to add, let us, as a community, find a way to familiarize ourselves.

For dialogical framing, consider:

Catherine A. Lugg (2007) Separating Theory from Practice: We're All Circus Seals Now, *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy*, 4:1, 50-54, DOI: [10.1080/15505170.2007.10411622](https://doi.org/10.1080/15505170.2007.10411622). Link:

McKittrick, K. (2020). *Dear science and other stories*. Duke University Press.

### **Course Objectives:**

1. *Think* critically about education law as an idea, as an area of study, and as a cultural-political praxis
2. *Examine* how variously situated Black and Indigenous social actors make meaning of the law in relation to education, schooling, knowledge/knowing, and learning
3. *Explore* the desires and yearnings of variously situated Black and Indigenous social actors within formal and informal educational spaces struggling for access, equity, justice, and freedom through and against the law.
4. *Interrogate* the law in relation to antiBlackness, colonialism, and white supremacy as violent ideological and material forces.
5. *Examine* the possibilities and impossibilities of freedom within the context of the state and the role of education.
6. *Develop* deep(er) knowledge of the cultural politics of education, of education law as a site of contestation over the meaning of humanness and beingness.

### **Course Methods/Professor Relationality<sup>1</sup>:**

1. The rigorous praxis of a collective learning community will:
  - aspire to close readings of the assigned texts, and discussion of the primary arguments advanced in the texts, and how they relate to arguments in other texts (both from our reading and your own reading outside of this class).
  - support individual students in: developing emerging lines of inquiry into the principles, storytelling, and themes of a small set of knowledge traditions.
  - nurture the intellectual practices to generalize these to specific educational and/or schooling contexts
  - enhance collaborative and independent critical-analytical writing skills
  - build collaborative, advanced writing skills, in the traditions of insurgent knowledge exchange
  - deepen familiarity with the complex relationship between ideologies and practices within and outside schools (and colleges)
2. We encourage students to openly communicate with us and provide thoughts about their experience in the course. You may find us most easily reached by e-mail. However, we are available if appointment is needed. If, for any reason, you feel you are unable to meet responsibilities (see below), please communicate with Professors Dancy, Akines, and Agwoeme in advance so we might discuss supportive ways we might move forward in the interest of your learning.

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<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Dr. Sabina Vaught for her collaboration and thinking.

## **Responsibilities/Principles<sup>2</sup>**

1. It is your responsibility to co-create a rigorous and productive learning environment in which you challenge one another's ideas in a scholarly manner, but never insult or disparage one another.
2. It is your responsibility to engage the ideas, discussions, and materials provided in this class in ways that *enhance and strengthen your own interests*.
3. It is your responsibility to submit only your own original work and abide by the University of Pittsburgh academic integrity guidelines. Please visit:  
[https://www.provost.pitt.edu/sites/default/files/academic\\_integrity\\_guidelines.pdf](https://www.provost.pitt.edu/sites/default/files/academic_integrity_guidelines.pdf)  
and familiarize yourself with codes of academic integrity. Here are helpful videos provided on academic integrity:
  - Academic integrity: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MDFHd\\_31e\\_o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MDFHd_31e_o)
  - Plagiarism: <http://en.writecheck.com/blog/2013/10/16/3-ways-to-avoid-plagiarism-summary-paraphrase-and-quote-video>
4. It is our responsibility to engage with difficult readings and ideas as we undertake the study of repressive systems and oppressive institutions. Not all members of the class will respond to the readings in the same manner, and some readings will upset some students more than others. In light of this, there is no clear way to warn students in advance. Moreover, we as a community do not want to unintentionally engage in censorship (<http://signsjournal.org/currents-trigger-warnings/halberstam/>  
[https://www.salon.com/2014/05/20/no\\_trigger\\_warnings\\_in\\_my\\_class\\_why\\_you\\_won%E2%80%99t\\_find\\_them\\_on\\_my\\_syllabi/](https://www.salon.com/2014/05/20/no_trigger_warnings_in_my_class_why_you_won%E2%80%99t_find_them_on_my_syllabi/)).

*What we can do as a community is:*

- Recognize and affirm that affective responses to readings and discussions are part of a just intellectual project
- Check in with one another in ways that honor our differences but affirm our membership in a community of conscience
- Excuse ourselves when needed and without explanation in order to take necessary space
- Listen carefully and attentively to one another's experiences and ideas, recognizing those as gifts to the community
- Make culturally specific requests as soon as you realize you need to

## **A Framework for Shared Inquiry<sup>3</sup>**

One framework for how we ask questions comes from Ruth Wilson Gilmore:

• ***Stretch*** enables a question to reach further than the immediate object without bypassing its particularity—rather than merely asking a community, “Why do you want this development project?” one asks, “What is development?”

• ***Resonance*** enables a question to support and model nonhierarchical collective action by producing a hum that, by inviting strong attention, elicits responses that do not necessarily adhere to already existing architectures of sense making. Ornette Coleman's harmolodics exemplify how

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<sup>2</sup> Thanks to Dr. Sabina Vaught for her collaboration and thinking.

<sup>3</sup> Gratitude to Sabina Vaught for this thinking/writing.

such a process makes participant and audience a single, but neither static nor closed, category (Rycenga 1992).

• **Resilience** enables a question to be flexible rather than brittle, such that changing circumstances and surprising discoveries keep a project connected with its purpose rather than defeated by the unexpected. For example, the alleged relationship between contemporary prison expansion and slavery falls apart when the question describes slavery in terms of uncompensated labor because very few of the 2.2 million prisoners in the United States work for anybody while locked in cages. But the relationship remains provocatively stable when the question describes slavery in terms of social death and asks how and to what end a category of dehumanized humans is made from peculiar combinations of dishonor, alienation, and violent domination (Patterson 1982; Gordon 2006).

*passage from:* Ruth Wilson Gilmore, pp. 37-38, “Forgotten Places and the Seeds of Grassroots Planning” in Charles R. Hale, Ed., *Engaging Contradictions: Theory, Politics, and Methods of Activist Scholarship*, University of California Press, 2008, pp. 31-61)

### **Resources & Accommodations<sup>4</sup>**

*COVID Testing (Same-day results):* [Rapid COVID-19 Resources | Center for Urban Education/ID-19 Testing | The COVID-19 Testing Center of Pittsburgh, PA \(covidtestpittsburgh.com\)](#)

*Pitt non-discrimination policy:* <https://www.diversity.pitt.edu/about/notice-non-discrimination>

*Parenting and pregnant student rights:*  
<https://www.titleix.pitt.edu/resources/pregnant-and-parenting-students>

*LGBTQIA rights:*  
<https://www.diversity.pitt.edu/resources/resources-diverse-populations/lgbtqia-resources>

*Codes of conduct and violence against women:* <https://www.titleix.pitt.edu/policies-procedures>

*Gender transition and inclusion guidelines:*  
<https://www.diversity.pitt.edu/resources/resources-diverse-populations/lgbtqia-resources/guidelines-inclusion-relating-gender>

*Disability accommodation.* Any student who needs accommodations should inform me at the beginning of the course or as soon as one needs accommodations. To receive accommodations, you must apply for services with the Pitt Office of Disability Resources and Services, 140 William Pitt Union, 3959 Fifth Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15260, Phone: 412-648-7890, Monday – Friday: 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., Email: [DRSRECEP@pitt.edu](mailto:DRSRECEP@pitt.edu)

**NOTE:** It is possible that university language around equity and inclusion follows antiquated frameworks. For instance, you may find that the parenting and pregnant students policy does not speak to various pathways of parenting and family. Should you be adopting, fostering, or otherwise significantly shifting your dependent care demands, or should you be a student whose gender is not clearly covered by the policy and is pregnant, etc., and would like accommodations, please let me know as soon as possible so we can work together to establish a fair plan. Let us also work together

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<sup>4</sup> Thanks to Dr. Sabina Vaught for collaborative thinking.

to establish plans anywhere and when institutional policy and guidelines do not accommodate needs.

*Absences.* Please notify the professor of any anticipated absences. This will support in the organization of class.

*Writing resources and support.* Call upon CLOE. Seek:

- C**      **Clarity** with respect to expression, grammar, meaning, sentence structure, and paragraph structure.
- L**      **Logic** in the presentation of arguments, positions, treatment of issues, and conclusions
- O**      **Organization** that builds a coherent structure (consider an outline)
- E**      **Evidence** to support statements and opinions of the writer/speaker. Ask yourself, ‘on what basis am I making claims?’

The most recent edition of APA will articulate more specific guidelines. Please note that dissertations in the education field and publications in education journals usually require APA formatting.

Additionally, the Pitt Writing Center offers services for graduate students. You may schedule appointments at [writingcenter.pitt.edu](http://writingcenter.pitt.edu). Location: 3178 O’Hara Student Center, 4024 O’Hara Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15260, Phone: 412-624-6556.

*Assignment due dates.* All work is due on the due date. Please contact the instructor if the assignment will be late to discuss context and possibilities.

*Inclement weather policy.* If Pitt is closed due to inclement weather or other conditions, students are to assume that all classes on and off campus are canceled and all offices in all units will be closed.

*Formatting.* American Psychological Association. (2019). Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (7th ed.). Washington, DC.

### **Resources for Life Circumstances**

For any of the below, if you believe your circumstances may affect your performance in the course, please advise Dr. Dancy (if comfortable):

*Campus Police.* If you are accosted or harassed by campus police, resources are available here: [Cops Off Campus Coalition – an abolition network to get cops off campus and cops off the planet](#)

*Hunger.* Pitt Pantry offers the following: “All members of the Pitt community are welcome to visit the pantry. Through a self-certification form, shoppers are eligible to use the pantry if they earn less than 150% of the federal poverty line, a state regulation, which equals \$18,090 for a household of one and \$24,360 dollars for a household of two.” For questions regarding eligibility, please email [pantry@pitt.edu](mailto:pantry@pitt.edu). Additional resources are the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank ([pittsburghfoodbank.org](http://pittsburghfoodbank.org)).

*Safe and stable shelter.* Please see resources at the following links:

Housing and housing justice: [honorscollege.pitt.edu](http://honorscollege.pitt.edu)

Housing resources: [pitt.libguides.com](http://pitt.libguides.com)

*Women's Center & Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh.* The 24-hour hotline is 412-687-8005. The website is [wcspittsburgh.org](http://wcspittsburgh.org)

*SisTers PGH Community Center* is a safe space for trans people of color. Phone: 412-259-3091, Website: [www.sisterspgh.com](http://www.sisterspgh.com)

*Racialized and gender-based discrimination.* Contact the Pitt Title IX Office. Community members may visit the office during scheduled office hours without an appointment. Students, staff and faculty can also call 412-648-4034 or email to schedule an appointment. For more information, go to <https://www.titleix.pitt.edu/policies-procedures>.

*Sexual violence.* The Pitt Student Affairs site offers several resources and contact numbers. Visit [studentaffairs.pitt.edu](http://studentaffairs.pitt.edu).

### **Course Readings:**

A collection of readings has been selected for our consideration. All (except required books) readings or links to the source's Pitt Libraries site will be uploaded to an online platform (Googledocs).

### **Required Texts:**

Readings are available electronically through our shared syllabus and follow the readings calendar below.

## **COURSE CONTRIBUTIONS**

### **Dialogue**

Much of the work in this class is shared and interdependent. Hence, our learning is contingent upon your reading and writing deeply to support our dialogue. Preparation (particularly close reading) and participation are the highest values.

*Reflective journaling, dialogue with thought partners, and class dialogue.*<sup>5</sup> As you prepare for class discussion, think about the questions and ideas that emerge. As you are expected to read closely, save quotes to read to us. Bring your thoughts on a complex idea. Feel free to share something in process and ill-informed, half-baked, or messy and complex. Engage, consider, contemplate, storytell, question, but do not hold forth. **We are not experts.** As you read, you might keep a reflective journal with substantive entries and reflections about your learning and you should dialogue weekly or bi-weekly with your thought partner about the ideas in the course. Again, ask your partner their thoughts on a complex idea. We will discuss your reflections over the time of the course (in-class and one-on-one through meetings with the professors) and how dialogue contributed to your thinking. These activities will be studied as a part of course dialogue. This exercise will also support writing contributions. Share from these activities with the class as you feel comfortable.

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Identify a thought partner, exchange contact information and enter pairs here: [Urban Ed Law \(3013/3014\)](#)

### **Invitations to Meet with Professors**

We will reserve time during the semester for you to meet with us as you think through the readings in this course and how they inform inquiry projects.

### **Written**

For this class, you should make an argument related to urban education law and policy and engage multiple assigned texts. Ideally, this brief paper will advance your own specific intellectual and research projects as well. That is, we ask that this paper illustrate how you have used course texts to further thinking in your own area of interest, in ways that also make connections between your area of interest and critical educational legal studies, as always, broadly and complexly conceived.

The paper should not exceed 10 pages and is due December 7.