

## Statement of Research

My research agenda predominately focuses on three areas: race and ethnicity, climate change and migration, and social theory. While all my work is theoretically driven, I approach these areas through a diverse array of methods: historical research, ethnography, interviews, and interpretive analysis. As scholar that works across many areas of the discipline, my work offers theoretical, methodological, and empirical tools for illuminating and dismantling the mechanisms that structure modes of domination and inequality.

The first thread of my work investigates the practices, categories, and mechanisms through which societies become structured in racial domination. My first book, *American Allegory: Lindy Hop and the Racial Imagination*, and related articles, grapples with the enduring questions of race, culture and identity by delving into two dance worlds of Steppin' and the Lindy Hop. By drawing on the interconnection between cultural practices and racial mythologies, we can examine how White bodies learning to dance the historically African American Lindy Hop which simultaneously inculcates both a practical knowledge of dance and racial mythologies which get refracted into the dancers' bodies through their cognitive, emotional, and bodily labor. As the dance movements and steps are learned, this learning is always wrapped up in racial myths of Blackness and Whiteness. By illuminating these racial mythologies at work, we can understand how everyday cultural practices like the Lindy Hop are articulations of material and symbolic contexts that are not immediately present to us in their effects. *American Allegory* exposes what appears innocuous or neutral on the surface as having enormous power in the reproduction of racial mythologies which continue to go unrecognized in their real effects. As a result, cultural practices, and their historically specific forms of expressions and movements, are fundamentally inseparable from the power relationships that have made the racial categories Black and White—and the assumptions and myths surrounding these categories—enduring sociological concerns in the United States.

My current ethnographic work *In-Between Worlds: Mexican Kitchen Workers in Chicago's Restaurant Industry*, also focuses on racial domination. This study supplements the demographic-political-economic understandings of undocumented Mexican immigrants with an ethnographic perspective to provide concrete, on the ground, flesh and blood experiences, of the people who are the objects of those statistical calculations. In doing so, it illuminates the world of undocumented Mexican immigrant kitchen workers and their experience of living in Chicago while working as the backbone of restaurant industry. Mexican kitchen workers' experiences of negotiating work are central for the American economy; understanding how they navigate work while being politically and economically marginalized is vital to uncovering the persistence of racial inequality. This study explores how these immigrants exist in multiple worlds simultaneously; they have left home in pursuit of economic success in a different land, hoping someday to return home. This story of migration leaves them in-between worlds—analytically by drawing the contours of how their political-social-legal status differentiates them from both citizens and documented new immigrants, and experientially by showing how they are tethered to a past, invested in their present situation, and aspiring towards a future. Here cultural labor transforms identity as they cultivate new cultural and aesthetic dispositions, as well as new modes of cultural appreciation and understanding through cooking. As a result, this framework allows us to understand how global dynamics of ethnicity, culture, work and identity are

manifested in their unique complexities in specific locales, and in turn how these locales illuminate the global dynamics at work.

A second research thread explores environmental sociology, specifically the issue of climate change. Connecting this work on climate to threads from my ethnographic research, the next major research project is connecting climate to issues of migration and vulnerable undocumented Mexican populations. Drawing on cases from farmworkers and agricultural laborers to those employed in landscaping, the floral industry, and California's massive viticulture, climate induces the migration of undocumented Mexican immigrants, both in search of both better economic opportunities and living conditions. These patterns of migration highlight a dramatic tension between the economic vitality of regions and industries, and an infrastructure of workers without social or political standing. The defining underlying vulnerability of these populations requires not an assessment of individual factors such as economic or social capital, but a biopolitical assessment—focusing on the regulation and governance of the security, territory, and populations of migrant's milieus- the personal and physical associations they have with their work conditions, their living conditions, and the connections that hold them together as interconnected pieces of the same problem. This biopolitical approach to climate and migration illuminates the implicit relations that form inherent vulnerability of both the foundation for the governance of everyday life, and the shaping forces that define the contours of movement and their locations of destination and desirability.

A third research thread builds on my training in philosophy to develop dialogues amongst theorists and to develop theoretical toolkits. This approach has generated a group of articles that puts different theories and theorists into dialogue to juxtapose concepts to rethink how their ideas help us illuminate everyday life. These juxtapositions produce new perspectives through which to examine social life, to create diagnostics for capturing contemporary historical conditions, and to unearth the cultural currents that give rise to the politics of everyday life and the social forces that momentarily crystallize them in structural relations of domination and inequality. A second set of articles develops a diagnostic approach to highlight the ways that questions of power, forms of social organization, and social shifts are never straightforward and always in need of analysis. This diagnostic approach highlights the ways that questions of power, forms of social organization, and social shifts are never straightforward and always in need of analysis. Theory provides the analytical insights to critique modes of domination, whether it be produced cultural practices, embedded in social structures, or formalized in social institutions. Finally, all theoretical work serves to build analytical tools and concepts that can be directly honed and refined for my own empirical research.

These different areas of research navigate between micro contexts and the particularities of people engaged in everyday practices, and macro level social forces that form, structure, and reconstitute domination. Furthermore, my research establishes dialogues, diagnostics, and critical tools for social analysis, as well as documents the cultural and historical conditions in order to unearth the social circulation of meanings that infuse people's lives with purpose. These three threads of my research reinforce the ways that scholarship can advance a greater understanding of contemporary social problems, as well as to consider their contingency and possibilities of how our conditions may be different from what they currently are.