

# **Renee Alexander Craft, Ph.D.**

**Associate Professor, Department of Communication, and the Curriculum in Global Studies,  
College of Arts and Sciences at UNC-Chapel Hill**

Chapel Hill, NC, US

Analyzes use of black diaspora performance to build community, argue for rights of citizenship & map differential blackness in the Americas.

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Renée Alexander Craft is a performance studies-trained black feminist writer, scholar, and educator interested in the power of creativity and imagination to build community, inspire collective action in the service of social justice, and call new futures into being by troubling the fault lines of structural domination until they break—even if only temporarily or partially so. Broadly, her research analyzes dialectical constructions of “blackness” and performances of black cultural nationalisms in the Americas. She is interested in the ways in which 20th and 21st century African-descended communities use literary and performance practices to argue for rights of citizenship and map differential terrains of “blackness.” Performances of black cultural nationalism such as various carnival traditions in the Americas as well as Juneteenth and Kwanzaa celebrations in the U.S., for example, function as rich intergenerational sites where groups rehearse, debate, revise, and disseminate the values and histories that undergird their cultural and political projects. For the past 16 years, Alexander Craft’s research and creative projects have centered on an Afro-Latin community located in the small coastal town of Portobelo, Panama who call themselves and their carnival performance tradition “Congo.” She has completed both a manuscript and digital humanities project, which reflect this focus. The first is an ethnographic monograph titled “When the Devil Knocks: The Congo Tradition and the Politics of Blackness in 20th Century Panama” (The Ohio State University Press, January 2015). The second project, titled “Digital Portobelo: Art + Scholarship + Cultural Preservation” ([digitalportobelo.org](http://digitalportobelo.org)), is an interactive online collection of ethnographic interviews, photos, videos, artwork, and archival material that illuminate the rich culture and history of Portobelo, Panama. Digital Portobelo was initiated through an inaugural 2013-2014 UNC Digital Innovations Lab/Institute for the Arts and Humanities Fellowship and is currently supported by an inaugural 2016 Whiting Public Engagement Fellowship. In addition to the Portobelo-focused projects, Alexander Craft received a Durham Arts Council Ella Pratt Emerging Artist Fellowship in 2013 for “I Will Love You Everywhere Always,” a children’s book dedicated to helping children cope with death and loss. Alexander Craft will be on research leave for the 2016-2017 academic year.

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Digital Humanities, Black Diaspora Performance, Carnival traditions in Panama, 20th and 21st Century Blackness in Panama, Black Speculative Fiction, Critical Ethnography, Performance Ethnography and Studies

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Association for the Study of the Worldwide African Diaspora : Member, International Association for Qualitative Inquiry : Member, Latin American Studies Association : Member, National Communications Association : Member

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**Northwestern University**  
Ph.D. Performance Studies

**University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill**  
M.A. Communication Studies

**University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill**  
B.A. English

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**Whiting Public Engagement Fellowship**  
Whiting Foundation, 2016

**Digital Innovations Lab/Institute for the Arts and Humanities Fellowship**  
UNC-Chapel Hill, 2013

**Junior Faculty Development Award (2009)**  
Awarded by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

**Fulbright Fellowship**  
Panama (2002-2003)

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