Growing anxieties about Indigenous and Black territorial claims and the threat they pose to the Honduran state’s extractivist designs, rooted in the inalienable rights of the majoritarian mestizo population, have fueled widespread conflicts over land and resources. I draw on ethnographic research conducted in a coastal community to examine why some Garifuna, a people of African and Indigenous descent, embrace the opportunities offered through state-backed development projects while others reject these projects altogether. In the eyes of the “pro-development” faction, the community’s exquisite beachfront is perceived as a vehicle to achieve the progress promised by international financial institutions and state agencies promoting Honduras as the next Caribbean hotspot. However, for the defensores de la tierra (land defenders), the privatization of communal lands is propelling a “loss of culture.” I argue that Garifuna resistance, including land recovery efforts, is articulated through the practice of what I call “Black autonomy”: an ethico-political proposal that refuses dominant narratives of progress and that instead asserts a notion of autonomy as collectivistic action and social good.

Christopher Loperena’s research examines indigenous and black struggles for territorial autonomy in Central America, land, race, ethicality and subject formation, and the socio-spatial politics of development. In addition to his current book project, A Fragmented Paradise: Blackness and the Limits of Progress in Honduras, he is co-editing a themed issue on the role of cultural evidence in the adjudication of black and indigenous rights.

Monday, February 11th, 3:30-5:00 PM
Building 50-51A