

Fall 2007
Black Feminist & Womanist Theory
African American Studies 3930-3459
T 6-7, 121 Flint Hall / R7, 2350 Turlington Hall

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Course Description

This course offers an interdisciplinary survey of African-American and other African-descendant women's contributions to feminist theory as a heterogeneous field of knowledge encompassing multiple streams of gender- and race-cognizant articulation and praxis. Among these are the interventions and projects known as "multiracial feminism," "critical race feminism," "transnational black feminism," and "womanism." Caribbean, Afro-Latin American, and Black British feminisms are also included when we map feminist consciousness and practice across the Black Atlantic and African Diaspora. The central concerns of diverse Black feminists and womanists include: the "intersectionality" of race, gender, sexuality, class, and national or transnational identity; reproductive health; sexual violence; homophobia and heteronormativity; the historicity and cultural specificity of the subordination Black women face; and the effects of racism, colonialism, unequal forms of economic development, and globalization on Black communities. We will examine these concerns through a critical reading of a wide range of texts—from memoir to cultural criticism and sociopolitical analysis. While Black feminism's historical development will be sketched, our focus will be on contributions of the past 25-30 years. In other words, we will concentrate on the period since the height of the civil rights and second-wave women's movements, and the time since the early decolonization period in the Caribbean. These are the contexts within which Black Women's Studies emerged along with various subaltern feminisms mobilized by other women of color in the Global North and South.

Objectives

The key objectives of the course are: 1) to expand students' awareness of the contributions that African American, Caribbean, Black British, and other African Diaspora women have made to feminist scholarship and mobilization; 2) to expose students to African descendant women's role as feminist theorists, interpreting and explaining the raced, gendered, classed, culturally conditioned experience of women, particularly Black women; 3) to educate students on the diversity and commonality among Black women intellectuals, both academic and nonacademic; 4) to promote greater understanding of the multiple modalities of social inequality of which African descendant women have had to make sense and to which they have had to adapt, resist, contest, and politically mobilize against; 5) to expose students to some of the interpretive, theoretical, and methodological tools that Black feminists have constructed and deployed; and 6) to cultivate critical thinking and the interrelated ability to articulate ideas with clarity and cogency in both oral and written communications.

Requirements

Readings

bell hooks. 2000. *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press.

Beverly Guy-Sheftall, ed. 1995. *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*. New York: The New Press.

Layli Phillips, ed. 2006. *The Womanist Reader*. New York: Routledge.

Gwendolyn D. Pough, Elaine Richardson, Aisha Durham, and Rachel Raimist, eds. 2007. *Home Girls Make Some Noise: Hip Hop Feminism Anthology*. Mira Loma, CA: Parker Publishing, LLC.

All other readings are available on the library's e-reserve site or on the web.

Participation (25 points)

Learning is a shared collaborative endeavor. For this class to be successful, students must all accept responsibility for meeting the professor half way. This means they must attend class regularly and actively participate. A record of attendance and unexcused absences will be kept. Frequent unexcused absences will lower the score received for this requirement. At minimum, participation involves asking an occasional question and displaying attentiveness. Throughout the semester, there will be opportunities to give informal presentations, assume responsibility for leading class discussions on particular readings, and participate in small-group activities. Some of the weekly readings may be divided up among work groups, which will contribute to class discussions based on their respective readings. Small group discussions and presentations will bring the course to closure.

Examinations (50 points)

There will be two take-home exams: a mid-term (due **October 16**) and final (due **Dec 11**). Both will require short essay answers to question-sets generated from lectures and class discussions on the readings. Exams as well as all other written assignments must be typed and double-spaced. Each exam is worth a total of 25 points.

Critical reflections (25 points)

Students are required to write five short essays expressing their reflections on the readings. These are due **every two weeks** (except for when the mid-term is due) and must be at least 800 words each. They must be double-spaced, typewritten, and submitted in hard copy on the days they are due. Students are to examine some aspect of the readings they have done over a space of two or three weeks. Although the professor may suggest possible writing topics, students will have the academic freedom of writing about whatever most interests or concerns them. Essays may focus on a single text; however, generally these assignments should examine issues that run across several texts. Students may express their personal reactions; however, personal opinions and experiences should always be informed by the conceptual and empirical substance of the assigned readings. These essays will be evaluated for both their form and content. Students, therefore, are to respect the principles of both English composition and critical thinking. Critical feedback from the professor on these several assignments is meant to have a cumulative effect, providing constructive lessons and guidelines for subsequent assignments.

Grading

Categories of Evaluation

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|--------------------------|-----------|
| Participation | 25 points |
| Critical reflections (5) | 25 points |
| Mid-term exam | 25 points |
| Final exam | 25 points |

Grade/Point Scale

A=93-100 points, B+=87-92, B=80-86, C+=76-79, C=70-75, D=60-69.

Extensions on Assignments

Students will be allowed extensions on writing assignments and exams ONLY if there are serious extenuating circumstances that can be documented (e.g., illnesses, deaths in family). Otherwise, due dates are written in stone. You are to manage your time accordingly.

Academic Honesty

An implied honor code is observed in all academic work at the University. Every student must operate according to an implied pledge that “any work submitted for credit the student has neither received nor given unauthorized aid.” In other words, cheating and plagiarism are breaches of academic honesty subject to disciplinary action, which may include a failing grade for the course. For further details, consult the honor code website:

<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/studentguide/studentrights.php#studenthonorcode>.

Accommodations to Students with Disabilities

Students needing classroom accommodation should register with the Dean of Students Office, where the necessary documentation will be issued. Students must submit their documentation to the professor when requesting accommodation

Class Schedule, Topics, and Reading Assignments

- Aug 23** First class meeting, introductions to each other and to the course’s objectives and requirements
- Aug 28-30** What is feminism? Is it for everybody?

bell hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* (2000)
- Sept 4-6** Perspectives on the significance of gender—and its intersections with race, class, and other dimensions of difference—for diverse Black women and communities
- Sept 6** *Critical reflection #1 due*

Pauline Terrelonge, “Feminist consciousness and Black women” (in *Words of Fire*, Beverly Guy-Sheftall, ed. Pp. 490-501)

Barbara Ransby and Tracye Matthews, “Black popular culture and the transcendence of patriarchal illusions” (in *Words*, pp. 426-535)

Layli Phillips, “Womanism: on its own terms” (in *The Womanist Reader*, Layli Phillips, ed. xix-lv)
- Sept 11-13** Feminist thought and practice in Caribbean and Pan-African contexts; historical continuities and more recent trends
- Sept 11** *Dr. Rhoda Reddock’s guest lecture on women’s praxis in the Pan-Africanist Movement, 1920s-1950s*

Rhoda Reddock, “Women’s organizations and movements in the

Commonwealth Caribbean” (*Feminist Review*, 1998)

Rhoda Reddock, “Conceptualizing ‘difference’ in Caribbean feminist theory” (in *New Caribbean Thought*, Brian Meeks and Folke Lindahl, eds., 2001)

Recommended: Rhoda Reddock, guest editor, “Diaspora Voices,” *Feminist Africa* 7 (2006) (www.feministafrica.org)

Sept 18-20 Nineteenth century Black women’s proto-feminist consciousness & practice; from Maria Miller Stewart and Sojourner Truth to Ida Wells-Barnett

Sept 20 *Critical reflection #2 due*

Beverly-Guy-Sheftall, “Introduction: the evolution of feminist consciousness among African American women” (in *Words*, pp.1-22

Words of Fire chapter 1, Beginnings,” pp. 23-76

Sept 25-27 Twentieth century trials, tribulations, and triumphs, part 1; breakout group assignments

WF chapter 2, “Triumph and tribulation” pp. 77-142

Oct 2-4 Black women’s challenges to the civil rights and women’s movements in the U.S. and U.K.

Oct 4 *Critical reflection #3 due*

WF chapter 3, “Civil rights & women’s liberation,” pp. 143-227

Hazel V. Carby, “White woman listen! Black feminism and the boundaries of sisterhood” (in *Black British Feminism*, Heidi Mirza, ed., 1997)

Oct 9-11 Claiming feminism

WF chapter 4, “Beyond the margins,” pp. 229-357

Mid-term exam distributed on Oct 11

Oct 16-18 Expanding the space for Black women-centered praxis; listening to the voices of womanism; debating womanism

Oct 18 *Mid-term exam due*

Womanist Reader, part 1, “Birthplaces, birthmothers: womanist origins,” and Part 2, “Womanist kinfolk, sisters, brothers, daughters, and sons on womanism,” pp. 3-113

- Oct 23-25** Womanist theorizing in multidisciplinary perspectives
- Selected chapters from *WR*, part 3 “Womanist theory & praxis: womanism in the disciplines,” pp. 117-358 [students will be assigned selected chapters based on interests]
- Oct 30** Critiques of womanism
- WR*, part 4, “Critiquing the womanist idea,” pp. 361-401
- Nov 1** Feminism for the Hip Hop generation
- Nov 1** *Critical reflection #4 due*
- Marlo David Azikwe, “More than baby mamas” (in *Home Girls Make Some Noise*, Gwendolyn D. Pough et al., eds. Pp. 345-367)
- Nov 6-8** Further explorations of Hip Hop feminism
- Home Girls*, foreword, introduction, Section 1, pp. 1-109
- Nov. 13-15** More from *Home Girls*
- Nov 15** *Critical reflection #5 due*
- Selections from Sections 2 & 3
- Nov. 20** Perspectives from other parts of the diaspora
- Marie-José N’ Zengou-Tayo, “‘Fanm se poto mitan’: Haitian women, the pillar of society” (*Feminist Review* No. 59, special issue, “Rethinking Caribbean Difference,” pp. 118-142)
- Eudine Barriteau, “Theorizing gender systems and the project of modernity in the 21st century Caribbean (*FR*, pp. 186-210)
- Beverly Bryan et al., “Chain reactions: Black women organizing” (in *The Heart of the Race: Black Women’s Lives in Britain*, pp. 123-181)
- Nov 22** Thanksgiving holiday break begins
- Nov 27-29** Small group work assignment: groups will be assigned a question that will require them to review, reflect critically upon, and synthesize material covered during the semester. Groups will give presentations on their respective topics during the breakfast session scheduled for the final exam.
- Dec 4** **Last day of class; final exam distributed**
- Dec 11** ***Final Exam due; small group presentations, 7:30-9:30 am. Bring something to share for breakfast.***