

**AML 3284 and AFA 3930**  
**African American Women and the Culture Critique**

Professor: Dr. Debra Walker King

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Office hours: MWF 1:00-2:00 (by ZOOM meeting appointment only)

Class Time: MWF 5th period (11:45-12:35)

Place:

<https://ufl.zoom.us/j/95379294926?pwd=RzlkT1czUkVva1JQO0tWdEIMWFRwQT09> (Links to an external site.)

Meeting ID: 953 7929 4926

Passcode: 2b464c

**Statement Regarding Course Recording**

Our class sessions may be audio visually recorded for students in the class to refer back to and for use of enrolled students who are unable to attend live. Students who participate with their camera engaged or utilize a profile image are agreeing to have their video or image recorded. If you are unwilling to consent to have your profile or video image recorded, keep your camera off and do not use a profile image. Not using a profile image may limit my ability to recall you when necessary (participation grading and letters of recommendation, for instance). Likewise, students who un-mute during class and participate verbally are agreeing to have their voices recorded. If you are unwilling to consent to have your voice recorded during class, you will need to keep your mute button activated and communicate exclusively using the "chat" feature, which allows students to type questions and comments live. The chat will not be recorded or shared. As in all courses, unauthorized recording and unauthorized sharing of recorded materials is prohibited.

**Course Description:** This course engages the work of world-renowned literary and cultural theorist Hortense Spillers and, in fact, carries the name of a course she taught while at Emory University. It investigates whether Spillers' theories concerning Black women's literary production articulate the theoretical concepts of Afro Pessimism. By focusing foremost on representations of the captive female body within the social and political context of the United States, it examines the subject positions of African American women and the power of transformative rage. As an inquiry generated by Spillers' work as well as current issues in literary scholarship, it addresses some of the assumptions of womanist and feminist investigation by exploring the following questions—the first asked by Hortense Spillers. “If feminist praxis and epistemology are grounded in notions of ‘freedom,’ ‘individuality,’ and the freedom of the body to ‘labor,’ deeply implicated in the rise of modern capitalism, then what

gaps must be brought to light in order for this discourse to achieve a broader articulation?" If womanism is both a social change perspective and a way of being in the world, how do texts written by African American women engage that perspective and mode of being? Do the surveyed texts engage either? In other words, what do African American women writers offer as survival strategies for those living in environments that appear content with promoting the "social death" of Black women? Finally, the course considers the points of conversion, foreclosure, and difference among the theories of Africana Womanism, Womanism, and White Feminism.

**Format:** The readings and teaching methods of this course are eclectic in pursuit of a variety of twentieth century texts and contemporary experiences. The class sessions include lectures, discussions, group breakout sessions and student reports. We will focus on the critical work of Hortense Spillers, three twentieth century novels and one collection of short stories. As investigators and scholars, our inquiries will play in the spaces between practice and theory in order to address the commonalties, disruptions, gaps, absences, and silences that exist among the primary texts.

### **Required Texts and Materials:**

1. *Sula*, Toni Morrison,
2. *Jubilee*, Margaret Walker,
3. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Zora Neale Hurston
4. *In Love and Trouble*, Alice Walker
5. *Black, White and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture*, Hortense Spillers

### **Course Schedule**

Week 1—Aug. 31-Sept. 4 Purpose and Goals

Mon.: Course Introduction Part 1

Wed.: Course Introduction Part 2

Fri.: Discussion: See the Canvas "Discussion" section for instructions

Week 2— Sept. 7-11 Readings available in Canvas under "Files"

Mon.: **Labor Day—No Class**

Wed. Required Reading: Cixous, Helene. "Laugh of the Medusa" and Henderson, May G.,  
"Speaking in Tongues"

Fri.: Required Reading: Weier, Sebastian. "Consider Afro-Pessimism" and bell hooks,  
"Killing Rage: Militant Resistance"

***In-class graded assignment: Impromptu discussion (1st)***

Week 3—Sept. 14-18

Mon.: Group panel introductions and group assignment brainstorming session. Panel assignments available under "People/Groups" in Canvas.

Wed.: Required Reading: Spillers, Hortense. "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," Sections 1 & 2  
in *Black, White and in Color*

Fri.: Required Reading: Spillers, Hortense. "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," Sections 3 & 4  
in *Black, White and in Color*

***In-class graded assignment: Impromptu discussion (2nd)***

Week 4—Sept. 21-25

Mon.: Required Reading: Walker, Margaret. Part 1: "Sis Hetta's Child—The Ante-Bellum Years," Chapters 1-10, *Jubilee*, 3-118

Wed.: Required Reading: Walker, Margaret. "Part 1: Sis Hetta's Child—The Ante-Bellum Years," Chapters 11-18. *Jubilee*, 119-175

Fri.: Part 1 concluding discussion.

***In-class graded assignment: Impromptu discussion (3rd)***

Week 5—Sept. 28-Oct. 2

Mon.: Required Reading: Walker, Margaret. Part 2: "Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory—The Civil War Years," Chapters 19-29. *Jubilee*, 179-245

Wed.: Required Reading: Walker, Margaret. Part 2: "Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory—The Civil War Years," Chapters 30-40. *Jubilee*, 246-314

***In-class graded assignment: Impromptu discussion (4th)***

Fri.: **HOME COMING--no class--Exam #1 opens today and is due Oct. 9th**

Week 6—Oct. 5-9

Mon.: Required Reading: Walker, Margaret. Part 3: "Forty Years in the Wilderness—Reconstruction and Reaction," Chapters 41-49. *Jubilee*, 317-402

Wed.: Required Reading: Walker, Margaret. Part 3: "Forty Years in the Wilderness—Reconstruction and Reaction," Chapters 50-58. *Jubilee*, 403-502

***In-class graded assignment: Impromptu discussion (5th)***

Fri.: Required Reading: Part 3 concluding discussion

**Exam #1 Due in Canvas today at 11:59pm**

Week 7—Oct. 12-16

Mon.: Required Reading: Walker. "The Child Who Favored Daughter," *In Love and Trouble*

Wed.: Required Reading: Ralph Ellison, "Chapter Two," *Invisible Man*, 27-55.

***In-class graded assignment: Impromptu discussion (6th)***

Fri.: Required Reading: Spillers, Hortense. "The Permanent Obliquity of an In(pha)llibly Straight: In the Time of the Daughters and the Fathers," *Black, White and in Color*

Week 8—Oct 19-23

Mon.: Required Reading: Walker, Alice. “The Revenge of Hannah Kemhuff” and  
“Strong Horse Tea,” *In Love and Trouble*

Wed.: Required Reading: Walker, Alice. “The Dairy of an African Nun” and “The Flowers,” *In  
Love and Trouble*

***In-class graded assignment: Impromptu discussion (7th)***

Fri.: Required Reading: Lee, Jarena. “Jarena Lee’s Call to Preach” and Hurston, Zora Neale. Excerpt  
from Chpt. 24 of *Jonah’s Gourd Vine*

***In-class graded assignment: Impromptu discussion (8th)***

Week 9—Oct. 26-30

Mon.: Required Reading: Spillers, Hortense. “Moving on Down the Line: Variations  
on the African-American Sermon,” *Black, White and in Color*

Wed.: Required Reading: Spillers, Hortense. “Moving on Down the Line: Variations  
on the African-American Sermon,” *Black, White and in Color* (Continued)

***In-class graded assignment: Impromptu discussion (9th)***

Fri.: Group presentation planning meetings slotted for today

Meet via Canvas or by another non-face-to-face venue / medium. If you choose to meet  
face-to-face remember to adhere to COVID-19 safety guidelines--wear your mask, avoid  
large crowds, and stay six feet apart. GOOGLE DOCS is good for shared editing of  
presentations without face-to-face contact. Use PowerPoint, Prezi or video recordings for  
group interactions and final presentations. There are others--use them, but let me know,  
so we can see if they work via Canvas.

Week 10—Nov. 2-6. ***Please note: Exam #2 opens today and is due Monday***

Mon.: Required Reading: Walker, Alice. “Roselily,” and “Really Doesn’t Crime Pay?” in  
*In Love and Trouble*

***In-class graded assignment: Impromptu discussion (10th)***

Wed.: Required Reading: “Her Sweet Jerome,” in *In Love and Trouble*

***In-class graded assignment: Impromptu discussion (11th)***

Fri.: Group planning meetings

Week 11—Nov. 9-13

Required **Group Preparation Sessions this week:**

This week’s class sessions are for the benefit of group panel preparations. Please be prepared to  
work with your group. Attendance is mandatory. Presentations begin next week.

Mon.: **Exam #2 due in Canvas today by 11:59pm --See the Exam #2 page under "Assignments"**

Wed.: Veterans Day --No Class

Fri.: Group Workday

Week 12—Nov.16-20

Mon.: **Group I Presentation: Toni Morrison's *Sula*, "Part One" through "1921"**

Wed.: **Group II Presentation: Toni Morrison's *Sula*, "1922" through "1937"**

Fri.: **Group III Presentation: Toni Morrison's *Sula*, "1939" through ending**

Week 13—Nov. 23-27

Mon.: Class Discussion of *Sula*

Wed.: TBD

Fri.: Thanksgiving Holiday—no class

Week 14—Nov. 30-Dec. 4

Mon.: **Group IV Presentation: Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Chapters 1-5**

Wed.: **Group V Presentation: Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Chapters 6-9**

Fri.: **Group VI Presentation: Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Chapters 10-15**

Week 15—Dec. 7-11

Mon.: **Group VII Presentation: Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Chapters 16-20**

Wed.: Suggested Reading: Spillers, Hortense. "A Hateful Passion, A Lost Love: Three Women's Fiction," in *Black, White and in Color*

**Final papers due in Canvas by 11:59pm tonight**

### **Assignments and Grade Distribution**

#### **100 points: Final Paper (six-page limit not including bibliography)**

You are required to submit a six (6) page term paper. You may consider and discuss any text read this semester, but the paper must be in-line with the focus of the course. This final paper is due by 11:59pm the last day of class.

#### **100 points: Group Report Sessions.**

These forty-minute sessions probe previously discussed questions and explore new ones. Be creative in your presentations. Do not line up and give reports. I repeat: DO NOT. Have fun with this project! Present your analysis and interpretations through narration while acting out a scene or revising a scene (video-taped); stage a debate or a trial; juxtapose the novel with artwork, music, or poems. Be sure to involve the class. Only your imagination limits the possibilities! Several class sessions are dedicated to final panel planning so there should be no excuse for any member's lack of participation. From these

planning periods, the panel is expected to produce a one paragraph abstract of the proposed presentation and submit it to me before the presentation class period. Send the abstract to me via email (dwking@ufl.edu). In addition, **each panel** is asked to write a brief summary of the group's work, individual effort, and the panel's contribution to the class objectives. These two- or three-page summaries (one per group) are due the day of the panel presentation--post in Canvas. I record only the final score.

### **50 points Impromptu Discussion and Papers**

Occasionally, your discussion preparation will be graded for content and delivery so do your best work at all times. I will select participants for impromptu panel discussions randomly. I require impromptu participants to submit a paper one week following their impromptu. See the Impromptu assignment under "Assignments" for additional information. Be prepared at all times.

## **Other Expectations and Assignments**

Points breakdown is available in Canvas under "Assignments"

**Attendance:** I take attendance very seriously and expect you to come to class every session on time. When you enter the Zoom space, please note your attendance in the chat section of the page. I will record only those who record their presence via chat before I end the session. You are allowed **up to three** unexcused absences, your grade will automatically drop a half letter grade after the third unexcused absence. **If you reach nine (totaling three weeks of class) absences you will automatically fail the course and should withdraw from the class or you will receive an "E" for the semester.** No *Incomplete grades* are given for this course.

*Caveat: Excused absences are permitted if you provide a typewritten letter documenting an illness, a family crisis, or participation in a university sponsored event. All students should consult with me to make up material missed during an excused absence. For additional information, please see our University guidelines cited in the "Course Policies" section of this syllabus.*

**Preparation:** All readings and at-home assignments must be prepared and ready for each class session. Everyone should prepare a discussion topic or question for in-class discussion. You may be asked to offer your discussion topic and questions during any class session, so be prepared. When asked to contribute your insights, be brief, intelligent, thoughtful and scholarly. Identify why the material is valuable to our class discussion (or objectives). Ask an engaging discussion question prefaced by brief contextualizing commentary.

**Participation:** Students should complete all readings prior to the class meeting and participate fully in class discussion. Assessment is made in the areas of attendance, interlocutory engagement, leadership, teamwork, and originality.

Strong participation includes:

1. only excused absences with no recorded tardiness
2. adherence to course policies and guidelines

3. evidence that readings are completed and ready for class discussions
4. outside research done and shared with class on multiple occasions
5. clear and respectful exchanges with other students and the professor
6. volunteering to enter or begin discussions (brief presentations included)
7. leadership within small group activities noted by reporting out for the group or taking a guiding role
8. an understanding of teamwork and one's responsibility to advancing positive class or group dynamics
9. originality in thought, discussion and researched information and sharing
10. encouraging others' ability to enter or sustain participation in discussions
11. engaging questions from the professor or other students without hesitation or persuasion

**Rubric**

- “A” level participation is strong in all key areas.
- “B” level participation, albeit promising, is notably weak in *two* key areas.
- “C” level participation is notably weak in *three* key areas.
- “D” level participation is significantly weak in *Three* or more of the key areas.

**Exams, Quizzes and Other assignments:** There may be pop quizzes—no makeup quizzes. Your performance during class, progress evaluations (tests and quizzes) and in-class discussions will determine whether a final exam (during exam week) is necessary. I will inform you of my decision.

**Extra Credit (5 bonus points):** This is an optional assignment. You may submit a PowerPoint presentation to me concerning an issue or author under discussion. You decide what you want to do. All reports must be approved prior to presentation submission, however. Submit a short (one paragraph) proposal describing what you plan to do. The assignment will earn scores ranging from 1/2 to 5 points (added to your overall course score). Bonus points will not be reflected in your Grade Book final score. I add it manually. I will accept this bonus assignment before November 25th.

**Grade Distribution and Grading Method**

All papers and short essay quizzes are evaluated on content, originality, creativity, connections to course objectives, and form (grammar, spelling, bibliography, etc.). Grades will be calculated in terms of possible score percentages with no curve. You are guaranteed an A or A- if you earn 450 points or more out of 500 possible points (90 %<sup>+</sup>).

435 to 449 (87% <sup>+</sup> )	B <sup>+</sup>	385 to 399 (77 % <sup>+</sup> )	C <sup>+</sup>	335 to 363 (67 % <sup>+</sup> )	D <sup>+</sup>
415 to 434 (83% <sup>+</sup> )	B	365 to 384 (73 % <sup>+</sup> )	C	315 to 334 (63 % <sup>+</sup> )	D
400 to 414 (80 % <sup>+</sup> )	B <sup>-</sup>	350 to 364 (70 % <sup>+</sup> )	C <sup>-</sup>	300 to 314 (60 % <sup>+</sup> )	D <sup>-</sup>

**Grading Criteria**

**Assignments will be graded on how proficiently they meet expectations in the key areas of content, organization, and grammar/mechanics.**

**Strong content includes:**

- a clearly delineated and/ or interpreted topic
- a strong, clear, and logically developed thesis that is supported by fully developed ideas in the form of relevant textual evidence and research
- ideas that show evidence of independent thinking
- commentary that explains how the concrete details support the thesis. Commentary may include interpretation, analysis, argument, insight, and/or reflection.
- research supporting materials (note: Google and Wikipedia searches are fine for starters, but please use academic journals and books for strong research effort)

**Strong organization includes:**

- the effective arrangement of points that reveals itself in very good incorporation of evidence (use of summary, paraphrase) and the sparing and judicious use of quotations
- rounded and well-connected paragraphs
- the use of appropriate transitions

**Strong grammar, mechanics, and prose style is characterized by:**

- mature sentence structure, syntax, and diction
- strong audience awareness as evidenced in the use of appropriate style, register, tone, and vocabulary
- little to no errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation
- the formatting of document in keeping with prescribed guidelines—including length of journal entries

**Rubric**

The “A or A-” submission has strong content, strong organization, AND strong grammar/mechanics. To receive an “A or A-,” work needs to offer support in the form of textual evidence and secondary research materials (using direct quotes and paraphrase), present original insight in argumentation, and be organized clearly and logically with sources documented using MLA style guidelines.

A “B” submission is notably weak in ONE of the above key areas.

A “C” submission, albeit promising, is notably weak in TWO or more of the above key areas.

A “D” submission is significantly weak in TWO or more of the above key areas.

Additional information concerning UF grading policies may be found on the undergraduate catalog web page <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx> (Links to an external site.)

## Course Policies

- *“Fatal Errors” Policy:* Students must meet high standards in writing. To this end, all written assignments must meet minimal presentation criteria to be acceptable. These standards address spelling, punctuation, format and basic grammar. The term *Fatal Errors* refers to formal writing errors of form. Specifically, they include the following and will be identified in evaluated written assignments by error number:
  1. Each different word misspelled,
  2. Each sentence fragment,

3. Each run-on sentence or comma splice,
4. Each mistake in capitalization (capitalize Black and White when referring to individuals, communities, or ideas),
5. Each serious error in punctuation that obscures meaning, including errors in the use or failure to use italics and quotation marks,
6. Each error in verb tense or subject/verb agreement,
7. Each instance of ending a sentence with a preposition,
8. Each improper citation, or lack of citation, where one is needed
9. Each misuse of words (*who* for *that* or unwarranted use of clichés, for instance) and reference problems,
10. Poor Paragraphing or lack of paragraphing,
11. Lack of conformity with assignment format.

Papers with more than **three (3) fatal errors on any one page** or more than **seven (7) for the entire document** will be returned to the student and will suffer a half letter grade deduction. Only one resubmission is allowed. Penalties for final course papers (where there is no time for a resubmission) will be based on the relative importance of the assignment to the determination of the final course grade. This policy applies to all assignments, excluding entrance cards and portfolio progress grading.

- Cell phones and computers: Cell phones must be muted during the class session. If an emergency occurs and you have to respond to calls or texts, please leave the classroom. Computers (iPads or other electronics) are allowed for note taking, access to eBooks and presentations only. Anyone using a computer for any other purpose will be asked to deliver the device to me for retrieval after class. You may record the class (presentations, for instance) with my permission only.
- Papers / Journals: All papers must be typed and double spaced using the 8 1/2 x 11 page layout with one inch margins all around. Use Courier or Times font at 12 point size. Documentation and form should follow the MLA style manual. Number all pages after the first within the upper right margin.
- Grade Disputes: Questions about assigned grades are acceptable during my office hours only. If my written responses do not address your concerns, I will explain why a grade was earned. With the exception of miscalculation or oversight, I will not consider grade changes. **Please do not ask; I consider it harassment.** You may consult the English Department Associate Chair, for grade appeals, however. Please note: appeals may result in a higher, unchanged, or lower final grade.
- Midterm assessment Report: Individual grades will be available after midterm indicating your current status in the class. These reports will offer information on all graded aspects of the course, including attendance, as recorded in the e-learning grade book. You should consider these performance tracking reports carefully and govern yourself accordingly.
- Missed class sessions: Make up work for approved absences must be addressed within one week of your return. See me for submission deadlines for missed work within this time frame.

- Journal Submission guidelines: This assignment **must be submitted electronically**. Microsoft Word compatible documents only please. Unreadable documents will be returned ungraded. Submit your project via Canvas upload by 1:30 p.m. on the due date. Late submissions will suffer a half letter grade reduction.
- *“Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found in the online catalog at: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx> (Links to an external site.)”*

## University Policies

### Campus Resources

#### *Health and Wellness*

- *U Matter, We Care*: If you or a friend is in distress, please contact [umatter@ufl.edu](mailto:umatter@ufl.edu) or 352 392-1575 so that a team member can reach out to the student.
- *Counseling and Wellness Center*: <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc>, and 392-1575; and the University Police Department: 392-1111 or 9-1-1 for emergencies.
- *Sexual Assault Recovery Services (SARS)*  
Student Health Care Center, 392-1161.
- *University Police Department* at 392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies), or <http://www.police.ufl.edu/> ([Links to an external site.](#)).

### Academic Resources

- E-learning technical support, 352-392-4357 (select option 2) or e-mail to [Learning-support@ufl.edu](mailto:Learning-support@ufl.edu).  
<https://lss.at.ufl.edu/help.shtml>.
- Career Resource Center, Reitz Union, 392-1601. Career assistance and counseling.  
<https://www.crc.ufl.edu/>.
- Library Support, <http://cms.uflib.ufl.edu/ask>. Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.
- Teaching Center, Broward Hall, 392-2010 or 392-6420. General study skills and tutoring.  
<https://teachingcenter.ufl.edu/>.
- Writing Studio, 302 Tigert Hall, 846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.  
<https://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/>.
- Student Complaints Campus: [https://www.dso.ufl.edu/documents/UF\\_Complaints\\_policy.pdf](https://www.dso.ufl.edu/documents/UF_Complaints_policy.pdf).
- On-Line Students Complaints: <http://www.distance.ufl.edu/student-complaint-process>.