

WGSS /AFROAM 292: BLACK FEMINIST LITERATURE
FALL 2017 | T/TH 11:30 – 12:45PM
SOUTH COLLEGE W101

INSTRUCTOR: Carlyn Ferrari
EMAIL: ceferrari@froam.umass.edu; carlynferrari@gmail.com
OFFICE HOURS: Tues. 1-3pm and by appointment
OFFICE LOCATION: W406

“Being a Negro Woman is the world's most exciting game of ‘Taboo’: By hell there is nothing you can do that you want to do and by heaven you are going to do it anyhow--”
- Anne Spencer

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course will explore a rich array of canonical and contemporary texts that highlight the nuances of Black Feminisms and analyze the strategies Black women use to articulate their lived experiences. This course explores the implications of gender, race, class, sexuality and other social differentiators on the lives of Black women. While an emphasis is placed on the U.S., the course is global in scope and will consider writings from African-descended women throughout the Diaspora. As an interdisciplinary course, it will examine a representative range of texts depicting issues related directly to the lives of Black women. Some questions we will consider include: What constitutes a Black Feminist literature? How do Black women theorize their lived experiences?

REQUIRED TEXTS

- ❖ Edwidge Danticat, *Breath, Eyes Memory*
- ❖ Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*
- ❖ Gayl Jones, *Corregidora*
- ❖ Nella Larsen, *Passing*
- ❖ Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*

COURSE REQUIREMENTS, GUIDELINES, & POLICIES

SAFE SPACE STATEMENT: As your instructor, I am committed to creating and fostering a safe learning environment for all students. Please feel free to let me know, at any point during the semester, how we can work together to make the classroom a safe space for you.

COURSE CONTENT STATEMENT: In this course, we will be discussing the lived experiences of black women. We will not be debating whether issues of racism, classism, sexism, and other forms of oppression are “real” or whether they impact black women’s lived experiences. Instead, this course will analyze *how* such social categories and differentiators impact black women. If you are unclear or concerned about this statement, please speak with me.

PARTICIPATION: THIS IS A HIGH-PARTICIPATION COURSE, AND YOUR PARTICIPATION IS MANDATORY. Class participation will be a major component of this course (10%); therefore, it is important to complete the assigned readings ***before*** each class. If you are present, it is assumed that you have read the assigned readings and are prepared to discuss them. Nerves can often get in the way of speaking in class, but please keep in mind that you are not being graded on the “rightness” or “wrongness” of your answers. I invite you to share your insights, pose questions, and relate the classroom discussion to contemporary social or political issues.

Please note that I will provide some introductory lecture in order to contextualize material within broader historical and contemporary frameworks, but for the most part I will be eliciting and orienting class discussion by posing questions and suggesting themes and perspectives. It is imperative that you prepare for each class by doing, **AT THE MINIMUM**, the required reading for that class period.

Assigned texts must ***always*** be brought to class each class period (electronic copies are acceptable as well). **IF A STUDENT DOES NOT BRING THE ASSIGNED READINGS TO CLASS, THEY WILL RECEIVE AN ABSENCE FOR THE DAY.**

ATTENDANCE POLICY: DO NOT SKIP CLASS! You are allowed two unexcused absences. You will lose one course letter grade for every class you miss beyond two (2) absences. If you miss three classes and have only two excused absences, you will be penalized. Excused absences will be granted if the student contacts the instructor ***prior*** to class.

Your presence and active participation are essential to your success in this course. It is expected that all students will attend scheduled classes on time (more than 15 minutes late without prior notification will result in an absence). Students must also be prepared to discuss assigned readings and participate in any in-class activities.

Please note that if you are not in class, you cannot actively participate! For example, if you contribute regularly but irregularly attend class, you should not expect to earn the same grade as students who do participate and come to class. Furthermore, if you come to class regularly but do not participate at all, this would equal a grade in the “D” range for the participation portion of your grade.

LATE ASSIGNMENTS: Our course schedule should be strictly followed. The purpose of the course organization is to give each student ample time to complete all assignments and provide meaningful feedback. Please make every effort to complete **all** assignments on time. Late assignments will be penalized half a letter grade for each day past the original due date. If due to extenuating circumstances assignment deadlines cannot be met, please inform me prior to the deadline. Extensions will be granted on a case-by-case basis. The key here is **communication before the assignment is due, not after.**

CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE: As we study and discuss critical and sometimes contentious subject matter, we will adhere to a policy of mutual respect. Please familiarize yourself with the [UMass Code of Student Conduct](#) and the [Affirmative Action and Nondiscrimination Policy Statement](#). Please remember to turn off or silence cell phones (vibrate does not count!). Cell phones cannot be in use while class is in session. If students are seen using cell phones during class, they will be given an absence for the day.

LEARNING ACCOMMODATIONS AND ADJUSTMENTS: Students who need special accommodations or adjustments must provide official documentation from [Disability Services](#). All accommodations must be arranged in advance. I need to hear from anyone who has a disability that may require some modification of seating, assignments, or other class requirements so that I can support your learning needs. If you need accommodations, please see me after class or during my office hours.

PLAGIARISM AND CHEATING: JUST DO NOT DO IT! Plagiarism, cheating, and other forms of academic misconduct are prohibited. Any academic integrity/academic dishonesty violations will result in a grade of “F” for the assignment/examination. A second violation of the academic integrity/academic dishonesty policy will result in a grade of “F” for the course. All University rules governing plagiarism must be observed. Review UMass’s **Academic Honesty Policy** here: [Academic Honesty Policy and Appeal Procedure](#)

A NOTE ABOUT TRIGGER WARNINGS: Be warned, the materials studied in this class often feature, as the movie warnings say, adult language and situations. Please come talk to me if you have any concerns about the course content or need specific trigger warnings.

PLEASE TALK TO ME—I DO NOT BITE: I will be available during my office hours and by appointment to address your concerns with the class and assignments. I encourage you to come see me if you feel you have not been offered a chance to participate in class discussion, you are troubled by a particular assignment, you would like to talk more with me about an issue raised in class, or you have concerns about your performance in the course. Most importantly, please do not wait until the end of the semester to speak with me.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

1. **Discussion Facilitations:** Beginning on week 3, students will sign up to co-facilitate class discussion for specific sessions. On this day, students should come prepared with questions to pose to the class and have something meaningful to contribute about the assigned reading(s). ***Students must email their questions to me by 12pm the day before class.*** Please note that this is not a presentation or a group project. However, you may collaborate with the other co-facilitator(s) if you choose. This is an opportunity for students to participate at a high level and engage their peers in a fruitful discussion. All other students must come to class prepared to discuss those questions, which will count as class participation. The facilitations will count as a part of your overall participation grade. (See guidelines on Moodle for additional information.)
2. **Critical Reading Response** Four times during the semester you will be asked to provide your comprehensive and critical reaction to aspects of gender and race found in an assigned course text. These assignments will be evaluated on your thoroughness, creativity, clarity, and analytical thinking. **COPIES MUST BE UPLOADED TO MOODLE BY MIDNIGHT ON THE DUE DATE**
3. **Midterm Take-home Exam:** Detailed instructions will be provided the week prior to the exam.

4. **Final Project:** Students will also complete a final project research paper (8-10 pages) that will include a research project and a brief in-class presentation. Detailed instructions will be provided. A 1-page proposal will be due **October 5th**. An annotated bibliography will be due **November 16th**.

GRADE DISTRIBUTION

Class Participation—10%
Attendance—10%
Critical Reading Response—30%
Midterm—20%
Final Project - 30%

A	94-100%	C	74-76%
A-	90-93%	C-	70-73%
B+	87-89%	D+	67-69%
B	83-86%	D	63-66%
B-	80-82%	D-	60-62%
C+	77-79%	F	<60%

COURSE SCHEDULE & ASSIGNED READINGS: ALL READINGS SHOULD BE COMPLETED BEFORE EACH CLASS

**NOTE: This syllabus represents current course plans and objectives and is a working document. The syllabus may be subject to amendment. Such changes, communicated clearly, are not unusual and should be expected. The changes will be slight and may occur if a text needs shifting.*

WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION

Sept. 5

- Introduction & Syllabus

Sept. 7

- Ula Taylor, "The Evolution of Black Feminist Theory and Praxis"

WEEK 2 – BLACK WOMANHOOD AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY

Sept. 12

- Patricia Hill Collins, "What's in a Name?"
- Patricia Hill Collins "Black Feminist Epistemology"

Sept. 14

- Marion Vera Cuthbert, "Problems Facing Negro Young Women"
- Elise Johnson McDougald, "The Task of New Negro Womanhood"
- Maria Bonner, "On Being Young—a woman—and Colored"

WEEK 3: NEW NEGRO WOMANHOOD

Sept. 19

- *Passing*, Parts 1 and 2

Sept. 21

- *Passing*, Part 3 (Finale)

WEEK 4: TRIPLE OPPRESSION

Sept. 26

- Claudia Jones, "An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman!"
 - Paula Giddings, "Strong Women and Strutting Men: The Moynihan Report"
- *Critical Reading Response Due***

Sept. 28

- *A Raisin in the Sun*, Act I

WEEK 5: TRIPLE OPPRESSION

Oct. 3

- *A Raisin in the Sun*, Act 2

Oct. 5

- *A Raisin in the Sun*, Act 3
 - The Combahee River Collective Statement
- *1-page project proposal due***

WEEK 6: LEGACIES OF SLAVERY & (MIS)REPRESENTATIONS OF BLACK WOMANHOOD

Oct. 12

- Dorothy Roberts, "Reproduction in Bondage"
 - Guest Lecturer: Kelly N. Giles
- *Critical Reading Response Due***

WEEK 7: LEGACIES OF SLAVERY & (MIS)REPRESENTATIONS OF BLACK WOMANHOOD

Oct. 17

- Sojourner Truth, "Ain't I a Woman"
- Patricia Hill Collins, "Mammies, Matriarchs, and other Controlling Images"

Oct. 19

- **No class: Take home midterm exam due by midnight on Moodle**

WEEK 8: LEGACIES OF SLAVERY & (MIS)REPRESENTATIONS OF BLACK WOMANHOOD

Oct. 24

- *Corregidora*, Chapter 1

Oct. 26

- *Corregidora*, Chapter 2

WEEK 9: WHO AND WHERE ARE BLACK WOMEN?

Oct. 31

- *Corregidora*, Chapter 3-end

Nov. 2

- Carole Boyce Davies, "Introduction" from *Black Women, Writing, and Identity*

- Marnia Lazreg, "Decolonializing Feminism"

WEEK 10: WHO AND WHERE ARE BLACK WOMEN?

Nov. 7

- Patricia Hill Collins "U.S. Black Feminism in a Transnational Context"
Critical Reading Response Due

Nov. 9

- *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, Chapters 1-12

WEEK 11: WHO AND WHERE ARE BLACK WOMEN?

Nov. 14

- *Breath, Eyes, Memory*", Chapters 13-24

Nov. 16

- *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, Chapters 25-end
Annotated Bibliography Due

WEEK 12: WHAT ABOUT BLACK GIRLS?

NOV. 28

- Adrienne Green, "How Black Girls Aren't Presumed to be Innocent"
Corrine Field, et. al, "The History of Black Girlhood: Recent Innovations and Future Directions"
Critical Reading Response Due

Nov. 30

- *The Bluest Eye*, Autumn

WEEK 13: WHAT ABOUT BLACK GIRLS?

Dec. 5

- *The Bluest Eye*, Winter

Dec. 7

- *The Bluest Eye*, Spring and Summer

WEEK 14: BLACK FEMINISM(S) MOVING FORWARD

Dec. 12

- Concluding Remarks
- **Final projects due December 14th by midnight on Moodle**