

**REPRESENTATIONS OF BLACK WOMEN IN LITERATURE:
A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE**

WOMENSST 295A
Fall 2004 T/R 4:00 – 5:15 p.m.
Office: Bartlett Hall # 7C
Office Hours: T/R 3-4 p.m. & by appointment

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Examining novels by African American women at various junctures throughout the modern and postmodern periods, this course investigates representations of black women and pays particular attention to the ways in which black womanhood is characterized through intersectional paradigms of race, gender, sexuality, and social class. We will explore how selected authors render black female characters in ways that perpetuate, contest, and/or subvert stereotypical images of black women; expand limited constructions of black womanhood; and challenge or destabilize prevailing definitions of “woman” and “normativity” in American society. To help frame critical discussions of these novels, we will also engage a wide selection of black feminist scholarship.

REQUIRED BOOKS:

Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* (1928)
Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937)
Gwendolyn Brooks's *Maud Martha* (1953)
Toni Morrison's *Sula* (1973)
Ann Allen Shockley's *Loving Her* (1974)
Alice Walker's *Meridian* (1976)
(CP) Course Packet of assigned scholarship

RECOMMENDED BOOK:

Ann Petry's *The Street* (1946)

* Books available at Food for Thought Books /106 North Pleasant Street, Amherst

COURSE OVERVIEW AND REQUIREMENTS:

This course is devised to not simply introduce students to representations of black women throughout various historical moments, but to illustrate, by means of the novels and secondary materials, the ways in which images and characterizations of black women in the literature of African American women writers have developed and evolved with time. The sequence of readings is integral to showing this “progression,” as reflected in the lives of the characters, so it is essential that students read the designated assignments in order and not skip books or readings, as not to miss crucial stages in this evolution.

Class discussions are important for establishing the relationship—both disparities and continuities—between the works. As such, students are expected to attend class regularly, be punctual, and participate in discussions—all of which are integral to your overall learning, critical analysis, and “success” in the course. With this in mind, students are allowed two (2) unexcused absences. Please

plan and use them accordingly, as exceeding two absences will affect your final grade by one ½ letter grade deduction per additional absence.

Students are required to write three papers: a short paper (3-4 pages); a midterm paper (5-7 pages); and, a final paper (6-8 pages). At the discretion of the instructor, students may be asked to write one-page response papers at various intervals throughout the semester. All papers should be typed, 12-font, double-spaced. Late papers will be penalized by one grade deduction per course meeting day. I do *not* accept papers on disks or as email attachments.

GRADING POLICY:

Final grades will be calculated accordingly:

Attendance/Participation: 15%

Short Paper: 20%

Midterm Paper: 30%

Final Paper: 35%

SCHEDULE OF COURSE MEETINGS:

September 9 Introduction to the Course

Mary Helen Washington, Excerpts of "Introduction" to *Black-Eyed Susans*

September 14 Patricia Hill Collins, Excerpt of "Mammies, Matriarchs, and Other Controlling Images"

Darlene Clark Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West:

Preliminary Thoughts on the Culture of Dissemblance" (CP)

Barbara Christian, "Trajectories of Self-Definition: Placing Contemporary Afro-American Women's Fiction" (CP)

September 16 Deborah McDowell, Excerpts of "Introduction" to *Quicksand* (p. ix-xvi)

Nella Larsen, *Quicksand*, chapters 1-7 (p. 1-42)

September 21 *Quicksand*, chapters 8-16 (p. 43-93)

September 23 *Quicksand*, chapters 17-25 (p. 94-135)

** SHORT PAPER DUE **

September 28 Mary Helen Washington, "Foreword" to *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (p. iv-xvii)

Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, chapters 1-4 (p. 1-33)

September 30 *Their Eyes*, chapters 5-9 (p. 34-93)

October 5 *Their Eyes*, chapters 10-15 (p. 94-138)

October 7 *Their Eyes*, chapters 16-20 (p. 139-193)

October 12 Gwendolyn Brooks, *Maud Martha*, chapters 1-14 (p. 1-59)

- October 14 *Maud Martha*, chapters 15-23 (p. 60-126)
- October 19 *Maud Martha*, chapters 24-34 (p. 127-180)
Mary Helen Washington, "'Taming All That Anger Down': Rage and Silence in Gwendolyn Brooks' *Maud Martha*" (CP)
- October 21 Toni Morrison, *Sula*, beginning through "1921" (p. 1-48)
Listen to audio excerpts of *Sula* read by Morrison
- October 26 *Sula*, "1922" to "Part Two" (p. 49-85)
** MIDTERM PAPER DUE **
- October 28 *Sula*, "1937" through "1939" (p. 89-137)
Listen to audio excerpts
- November 2 *Sula*, "1940" through "1965" (p. 138-174)
bell hooks, "Revolutionary Black Women: Making Ourselves Subject" (CP)
- November 4 Evelyn Hammonds, "Black (W)holes and the Geometry of Black Female Sexuality" (CP)
Ann Allen Shockley, "The Black Lesbian in American Literature: An Overview" (CP)
- November 9 Ann Allen Shockley, *Loving Her*, chapters 1-4 (p. 1-49)
- November 11 Veteran's Day – No Class !!!
- November 16 *Loving Her*, chapters 5-9 (p. 50-99)
- November 18 *Loving Her*, chapters 10-15 (p. 100-141)
- * November 22 *Loving Her*, chapters 16-21 (p. 142-187)
- November 23 Reading Day – No Class !!!
- November 25 Thanksgiving Day – No Class !!!
- November 30 Film Screening: "A Place of Rage" (featuring Angela Davis, June Jordan, & Alice Walker)
- December 2 Alice Walker, *Meridian*, chapters 1-6 (p. 1-59)
- December 7 *Meridian*, chapters 7-15 (p. 60-125)
- December 9 Synthesis and Summation
** FINAL PAPER DUE **

* Note: Monday, November 22, 2004 follows a Thursday class schedule!