

**Women St. 394H**  
Spring 2006

**Theorizing Black Feminisms**  
Thu: 1:00–3:45 pm

**Instructor: Shelly Perdomo**  
Bartlett Hall, Room 310

Office: **Bartlett 7C-- Monday:** 10:00am-11:30am, **Thursday** 9:00am-11:00am or by Appointment  
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### **Course Description, Goals and Objectives**

To understand Black Feminist thinking, it is important to explore the context out of which it emerges. We will analyze the evolution of Black Feminist consciousness and thought in the U.S. from the 1930s to contemporary time, since the struggle for black women's liberation which emerged in the mid-1960s is a construction of both intellectual and activist tradition during slavery and during the anti-slavery movement. This course will also be an interpretative analysis of the work and thought produced by a range of leading black women writers, scholars and intellectuals in everyday and alternative locations for knowledge production. *For purposes of this course, Black Women encompasses all women of African descent/heritage in the diaspora.*

This seminar is designed to introduce and familiarize students with the theoretical contributions of African American and African Diasporan feminists working in a variety of disciplinary fields. These women all rely upon the notion that issues of race, gender, sexuality and social class are central, rather than peripheral to any history, analysis or assessment of life. During the course we will outline the basic principles and practices of Black Feminism, contextualize the emergence of contemporary feminist work in historical perspective and also examine the written and spoken texts of nineteenth-century feminist foremothers. We will identify and characterize the major issues which black feminists address as well as the various forms of resistance to social structures. Black women will be viewed as producers of knowledge and as transforming agents. We will study the works and contributions of early feminists as well as later and contemporary scholars and activists.

Once an understanding of black feminist traditions is established, we will revisit the question of Black Feminism, as well as the continuities and discontinuities in the various definitions and analyses as they have emerged over time. We will discuss the theoretical and methodological assumptions underlying the intellectual and political traditions upon which these scholars rely. And most importantly, the course will also explore **(a)** realistic obstacles Black women encounter; **(b)** ways in which Black women have (re)defined self and community; **(c)** building a community by explicating the interface between the feminist struggle of women of color in the U.S. and outside the U.S.; **(d)** examining feminist expressions in the African Diaspora; and **(e)** identifying ways in which we can serve as social change agents. Special attention will be given to linking Black Feminist thought and Black Feminist activism (theory and practice).

### **Course Requirements and Grading**

- You are expected to complete your reading assignments. Preparation and participation are essential for maximizing learning and critical analysis. On occasion, you will be asked to develop discussion questions based on the reading assignments. For a deeper exploration of the material discussed in class, you will be encouraged to facilitate a class discussion.
- Regular and consistent attendance is mandatory due to the participatory requirements and discussions of course material in class. Since we meet one a week, in-class activities cannot be easily made up, therefore unexcused absences will affect your final grade. Guidelines for excused absences must be followed as outlined by University Policies **(20%)**.

### Course Requirements and Grading (Cont'd)

- Written assignments are to be submitted by the due dates as outlined in the syllabus. They must be typed double-spaced. Please note that mechanics of writing are important factors in your assignments. **Three (2-3 pages) critical analysis papers.** Due dates are in the course calendar. See guidelines below. **(30%)**
- ***Analysis of Sexuality and Contemporary Issues.*** Select a magazine advertisement, movie clip, video clip, lyrics of a song, or TV show. Submit a 2-3 page paper with a detailed gendered and racial analysis of the content of a song, video, magazine advertisement, etc. This includes analyzing the advertisement/movie clips or translating the song or lyrics, analyzing its meaning, and providing an argument about the overall effect of the song, video, advertisement in its portrayal of Black women. Then place this analysis of the song, video, magazine advertisement etc. within a discussion of contemporary race and gender politics in America society. Examine the way in which women's sexuality is discussed including differences you see along the lines of race, class, ethnicity and so forth. What are the consequences of these messages? What are your ideas about sexuality? **(10%)**
- ***Theorizing Feminisms.*** You will be required to attend one presentation/discussion (calendar of presentations will be distributed), and write a 2-3 page response paper on the value of the inter-textual resonance of feminist theorizing. **(10%)**
- There will be one (1) ***Final project/research paper*** in this course. Guidelines and topics will be distributed and discussed. **(25%)**

### Guidelines for Content and Critical Analysis Response Papers

Your discussion questions and occasional critical analysis/response papers are suggested as a way to promote critical thinking, to monitor comprehension of the readings, to challenge your own thinking, and to help you engage in intellectual and practical discussions. Suggestions for writing the papers include (a) choose two or three points to help focus your response or critique and (b) take risks and incorporate your ideas about the subject, *but remember this is not about your opinion.* You *must* include content from the readings, you must comment on the contributions of the work, critically examine the "soundness" of the arguments, discuss insights gained or limitations to the analysis. Essentially, I want to know that you have read, understood, and analyzed the readings. Grades will be based on the quality and clarity of your arguments as well as the organization of your ideas.

### Class Policies

- No assignments will be accepted by email without permission. Please inform me in advance if you expect to miss a session, be late, or leave early. Please bring your books to class. Papers submitted late without prior permission will be penalized by half a grade for every day. **ALWAYS provide in text citation and work cited page following MLA or APA documentation styles.** Plagiarism will be treated as a serious offense. Read and familiarize yourself with the Undergraduate Rights and Responsibilities booklet.
- Practice respect and consideration for your peers. Throughout the quarter, you may be presented with material unfamiliar to you. During lecture and discussion, you may hear very diverse opinions from the

instructor and other students. You are not expected to agree, but before commenting on a practice or belief foreign to you, please reflect on how to present your opinion in a respectful and open manner.

- As competent students, I expect you to take full advantage of my office hours. Please feel free to email me or speak with me for further clarification of assignments, if you have questions about the material, or if you have personal concerns that will affect your academic performance.

- If any student has a condition, such as a physical or sensory disability, which will make it difficult to carry out the work outlined, please inform me at once in order to make appropriate arrangements.

**Turn off all cellular phones during the duration of this class.**

**TEXTS**

[Required Text]:	Patricia Hill Collins. <i>Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment</i> . (2 <sup>nd</sup> Edition). New York: Routledge, 2000.
	Angela Davis, <i>Blues, Legacies, and Black Feminism</i> . First Vintage Books, 1998.
	Audre Lorde. <i>Sister Outsider</i> . CA.: The Crossing Press, 1996.
	Margo V. Perkins. <i>Autobiography as Activism: Three Black Women of the Sixties</i> . Mississippi: University Press, 2000.
	E. Frances White. <i>Dark Continent of Our Bodies: Black Feminism and the Politics of Respectability</i> . Temple University Press, 2001.
[Recommended]:	Patricia Hill Collins, <i>Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism</i> . Routledge, 2004.
	Beverly Guy-Scheftal, <i>Words of Fire</i> . New York: The New Press, 1995.
Resource	Black Feminism Bibliography: <a href="http://www.library.ucsb.edu/subjects/blackfeminsm/">http://www.library.ucsb.edu/subjects/blackfeminsm/</a>
[Other texts of interest]:	Katie Geneva Canon, <i>Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community</i> . Continuum, New York, 1996.
	Valerie Smith, <i>Not Just Race, Not Just Gender: Black Feminist Readings</i> . Routledge, 1998.
	bell hooks, <i>Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center</i> . South End Press, 1984.
	bell hooks, <i>Ain't I A Woman</i> . South End Press, 1981.
	bell hooks, <i>Black Looks: Race and Representation</i> . South End Press, 1992.
	Kimberly Springer, <i>Still Lifting, Still Climbing: African Women's Contemporary</i>

	<i>Activism</i> . New York University Press, 2001.
	Bettye Collier-Thomas, <i>Daughters of Thunder: Black Women and Their Sermons, 1850-1979</i> . Jossey-Bass, 1998.
	Gail Elizabeth Wyatt, <i>Stolen Women: Reclaiming our Sexuality, Taking Back our Lives</i> . John Wiley & Sons, 1997.

Available at Food For Thought Book-Shop, North Pleasant Street, Amherst  
and also on reserve in the library

**Course Calendar**

<p>Thu February 02<sup>nd</sup></p> <p>Readings:</p>	<p><b><u>Black Feminisms: Definitions, Objectives, Frameworks, Early Expressions of Black Feminism</u></b></p> <p>Introductory Exercises, Syllabus, Goals, Expectations.</p> <p>Operational Definitions: Feminism, Black Feminism/Womanism, Feminist Scholarship, Gender, Race and Representation, Black Sexual Politics.</p> <p>[Handout/E-Reserve]–Maria W. Stewart, “<i>Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality, the Sure Foundation of Which We must Build, and Lecture Delivered at Franklin Hall</i>”, (Guy-Scheftall), pp. 23-33.</p> <p>[Handout/E-Reserve]–Ana Julia Cooper, “<i>The Status of Women in America</i>”, (Guy-Scheftall), pp. 43-49.</p>
<p>Thu February 09<sup>th</sup></p> <p>Readings:</p>	<p><b><u>Black Women (Re) naming, (Re) writing, (Re) claiming Feminism Feminism &amp; Contributions to the Rhetoric</u></b></p> <p>[Text]–Patricia Hill Collins part 1, “<i>The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought</i>”, Chapters 1 &amp; 2.</p> <p>[Text]–E. Frances White, “<i>Black Feminist Interventions</i>”, pp. 25-80.</p> <p>[Highly Recommended]–bell hooks, “<i>Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center</i>”, pp. 1-65.</p>
<p>Thu February 16<sup>th</sup></p> <p>Readings:</p>	<p><b><u>Black Feminist Theory as an Epistemic Site</u></b></p> <p>[Text]–Patricia Hill Collins Part 2, “<i>Core Themes in Black Feminist Thought</i>”, Chapters 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8.</p> <p>[Handout/E-Reserve]–Michael Awkward, “<i>A Black Man’s Place in Black Feminist Criticism</i>”, <i>The Black Feminist Reader</i>, pp. 88-108.</p> <p>[Web Reading] Mark Anthony Neal “<i>My Black Male Feminist Heroes</i>” <a href="http://www.popmatters.com/features/030226-blackfeminists.shtml">http://www.popmatters.com/features/030226-blackfeminists.shtml</a></p>
<p>Thu February 23<sup>rd</sup></p> <p>Readings:</p>	<p><b><u>Social Construction of Whiteness: Theorizing the Historicity of Race, Gender, Sexuality</u></b></p> <p><b>Video Screening: Stuart Hall, Race, A floating Signifier and/or selections from “Without Sanctuary”</b></p> <p>[Handout/E-Reserve]-Nellie Y. McKay, “<i>Acknowledging Differences: Can Women Find Unity Through Diversity?</i>” James and Busia, pp. 267-283.</p> <p>Selected Readings to be researched.</p> <p><b>***Critical Analysis Paper 1 Due***</b></p>
<p><b>Intersectionalities, Interdisciplinaries, Conflicts, and Tensions: Always Race, Class, Gender, Sexuality and More</b></p>	
<p>Thu March 02<sup>nd</sup></p> <p>Readings:</p>	<p><b><u>Feminism In and Out of the Academy: Emancipatory Praxis</u></b></p> <p><b>Guest Lecture: Parsilla Page</b></p> <p>[Text]–Angela Davis, “<i>Blues, Legacies and Black Feminism</i>”.</p> <p>[Web Assignment]-Contemporary Black Female artists.</p> <p>Group In-Class Assignments.</p>

Thu March 09 <sup>th</sup>	<b><u>Writing the Personal, Writing the Political</u></b>
Readings:	[Text]–Margo V. Perkins, “ <i>Autobiography as Activism</i> ”. *** <i>Critical Analysis Paper 2 Due</i> ***
Thu March 16 <sup>th</sup>	<b><u>Sexuality, Historicities, Identities: Refuting Black Women as Spectacle</u></b>
Readings:	[Text]–E. Frances White, “ <i>The Evidence of Things not Seen: The Alchemy of Race and Sexuality</i> ”, pp. 81-114. [Handout/E-Reserve]–Anne Fausto-Sterling, “ <i>Gender, Race, Nation. The Comparative Anatomy of ‘Hottentot’ Women in Europe</i> ”, 1815-1817 in Terry & Urla, <i>Deviant Bodies</i> , 1995, Indiana University Press, pp. 19-48. [Recommended]–Paula Giddings, “ <i>The Last Taboo</i> ”, Beverly Guy-Sheftall, <i>Words of Fire</i> , pp. 414-428.
March 18 <sup>th</sup> – 26 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Spring Break Recess</b>
Thu March 30 <sup>th</sup>	<b><u>Contemporaneous Issues, Silences, Tensions: (Re) Framing Race and Sexuality: Black Feminist Expansions and Queer Theory</u></b>
Readings:	Undergraduate Students: [Text]–E. Frances White, pp. 151-182. [Handout]Patricia Hill Collins, “Black Sexual Politics,” Chpt. 2 & 3 *** <i>Analysis of Sexuality and Contemporary Issues Paper</i> ***
Thu April 06 <sup>th</sup>	<b><u>Black Feminism: Intersectionalities and Intertextualities</u></b>
Readings:	Undergraduate Students: Selections from “ <i>Back to the Drawing Board: African-Canadian Feminisms</i> ” edited by Njoki Nathane Wane, Katerina Deliovsky, and Erica Lawson.
Thu April 13 <sup>th</sup>	<b><u>Sisterhood(s)-Dialogues and Conversations</u></b>
Readings	<b>Guest Lecture: Dr Alexandrina Deschamps</b> [Text]–Audre Lorde, “ <i>Sister Outsider</i> ”. Small Group Discussions and write up.
Thu April 20 <sup>th</sup>	<b><u>Counter Discourses: Diasporan Discourses</u></b>
Readings:	[Text]–E. Frances White, “ <i>Africa on My Mind</i> ”, pp. 117-150. [Handout/E-Reserve]–Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, “ <i>African Feminism: A Theoretical Approach to the History of Women in the African Diaspora</i> ”. *** <i>Critical Analysis Paper 3 Due</i> ***
Thu April 27 <sup>th</sup>	<b><u>Knowledge as Power of Praxis</u></b>
Readings:	[Text]–Patricia Hill Collins, Part 3, pp. 227-290. In Class Assignments and discussions. *** <i>Last date to submit Theorizing Feminisms response papers</i> ***
Thu May 04 <sup>th</sup>	<b><u>A New Generation of Activism: Further to Fly</u></b>
Readings:	<b>Panel Discussion: UMASS Undergraduate and Graduate students</b> [Handouts/Ereserves]-Wendy G. Smooth and Tamelyn Tucker, “ <i>Behind But not Forgotten: Women and the Behind-the Scenes Organizing of the Million Man March.</i> ” P. 241-258. Vanessa Tait, “ <i>Workers Just like anyone else,</i> ” <i>Organizing Workfare Unions</i>

*in New York City*", p.297-324.

Thu May 11<sup>th</sup>

**Synthesis and Summaries**

Wed May 17<sup>th</sup>

**\*\*\**Final Assignment Due*\*\*\***

**WOST 394H/594 BLACK FEMINIST/WOMANIST THEORY PROF. A. DESCHAMPS**  
**SPRING 2005 TOPICS AND GUIDELINES FOR FINAL ASSIGNMENT**

Choose *one* of the following topics and write a 10 - 15 page paper. As already mentioned, all papers must be typed double-spaced, and well documented (footnotes, bibliography as per agreed style). Indicate specific references and resources whether from texts, class discussions, films and videos, or other research areas. Be sure to speak and consult with me on your choice of topic. ***You must have your topic selected no later than March 09, 2005.*** You will also have access to a \*beginning\* bibliography of Black Feminist/Womanist Works and Writings. ***Be creative with your paper. You may incorporate visuals with your final project. The paper should be rhetorically appropriate for the purposes of the class. It should include scholarly research, analysis of texts, and original thought.*** You will also be graded on content and analysis, presentation, style, format, mechanics, applicability and transferability.

1. You may select a topic of your choice related to the material discussed in the course with focus on a theme or issue in regards to argumentation, identity, difference and epistemology. Be sure to discuss this with me. I would like to suggest some relevant and contemporaneous topics such as Sexuality, Religion, Diasporan, Activism, Politics of Representation, Identity Politics.
2. Select at least one book or some articles, by a non black feminist and a black feminist, writing on the same topic. Contrast the ideas/issues/concerns of the black feminist with those of the non black feminist. Discuss these feminists' efficacy in addressing concerns of women of African descent. How applicable are these theories and issues on the micro, meso, macro levels?
3. Perspectives on Black Women Writers. This is a great way to do intersectionality and intertextuality. Historically, until the 1940s, black women in both Anglo- and Afro-American literature have been usually assigned stereotyped roles and images usually as context for some societal dilemma or problem. Research and report on a collection of literary essays or a selection of books which present ideas central to black feminist views; essays that articulate the development of a black feminist perspective; essays that speak to the development of the self in Black women's literature. You could use fiction as well. You may want to read Tony Morrison. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*.
4. Write (A) a biographical essay on Audre Lorde's contribution to feminist scholarship generally, and to academic feminism in particular, or (B) pick two or three primary theories of Audre Lorde to illustrate in an original paper or project. Here are two recent texts about Audre Lorde. (1) "Warrior Poet: A Biography of Audre Lorde" by Alexis De Veaux, 2004. (2) "Conversations with Audre lorde" edited by Joan Wylie Hall, 2004.
5. Theory Outside The Box. Using the Text, *Autobiography as Activism* and Angela Davis' *Blues, Legacies and Black Feminism* as templates, (or other choices) choose a topic, theme, issue, an activist, a writer, .....and do a creative project ( photographic essay, documentary, play, media critic, art critic.....) something creative that will draw on the theoretical themes of the course. Here is your chance to "do" theory, to demonstrate "other" forms of making theory accessible, to develop your own thinking. Please bear in mind that you would be expected to "theorize" and submit a theoretical analysis of this project, at least 8 pages.

**Bibliography of Additional Readings**

1. Patricia Hill Collins. *What's In A Name? Womanism, Black Feminism, and Beyond*.
2. Ann Ducille. *The Occult of True Black Womanhood: Critical Demeanor and Black Feminist Studies*.
3. Ula Taylor. *The Historical Evolution of Black Feminist Theory and Praxis*.
4. Maria W. Stewart. *Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality, the Sure Foundation of Which We must Build and Lecture Delivered at Franklin Hall*. (Guy-Scheftall) 23-33.
5. Anna Julia Cooper. *The Status of Women in America*. (Guy-Scheftall) 43-49.
6. Joy James. *Ella Baker, Black Women's Work and Activist Intellectuals*.
7. Deborah K. King. *Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology*. (Guy-Scheftall). 294-312.
8. Deborah E. McDowell. *New Directions for Black Feminist Criticism*. African American Literary Theory. 167-178.
9. Sherley Anne Williams. *Some Implications of Womanist Theory*. African American Literary Theory. 218-222.
10. Hazel V. Carby. *Woman's Era: Rethinking Black Feminist Theory*. African American Literary Theory. 242-256.
11. Barbara Christian. *The Race for Theory*. The Black Feminist Reader. 11-22.
12. Michael Awkward. *A Black Man's Place in Black Feminist Criticism*. The Black Feminist Reader. 88-108.
13. bell hooks. *Black Women Shaping Feminist Theory*. The Black Feminist Reader. 131-145.
14. Kimberle Crenshaw. *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Anti-discrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Anti-racism Politics*. The Black Feminist Reader. 208-238.
15. June Jordan. *A New Politics of Sexuality*. (Guy-Sheftall) pp. 405-411.
16. Paula Giddings. *The Last Taboo*. (Guy-Scheftall) pp. 414-428.
17. Evelyn Hammonds. *Black (W)holes and the Geometry of Black Female Sexuality*. African American Literary Theory. 482-497.
18. Cheryl Clarke. *Living the Texts Out: Lesbians and the Uses of Black Women's Traditions*. (James & Busia) 214-227.
19. Deborah E. McDowell. *Black Feminist Thinking: The "Practice" of "Theory"*. African American Literary Theory. 557-579.
20. Robert F. Reid-Pharr. *Tearing the Goat's Flesh: Homosexuality Abjection, and the Production of a Late Twentieth-Century Black*. African American Literary Theory. 602-622
21. Nellie Y. McKay. *Acknowledging Differences: Can Women Find Unity Through Diversity?* (James & Busia). 267-282.
22. Rosalyn Terborg-Penn. *African Feminism: A Theoretical Approach to the History of Women in the African Diaspora*.
23. Cindy Courville. *Re-examining Patriarch as a Mode of Production* (James & Busia). 31-42.
24. Stanlie James. *Mothering: A Possible Black Feminist Link to Social Transformation?* James & Busia. pp. 44-54.
25. Frances White. *Africa on my Mind: Gender, Counter Discourse and African American Nationalism* (Guy-Sheftall) 503-522.
26. Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie. *African Women, Culture and another Development*. (James & Busia) 102-116.

