

Women's Studies 295A
"Diaspora Women's Texts: Africa, African-American, Afro-Hispanic"



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Wednesday, 3:35-6:00, Bartlett Hall 212

Mailbox: Bartlett 208 Office Hours: Monday 1-3pm Bartlett (7C)

..Being a woman and writing is ceasing to exist in order to Live. It is living in order to understand. It is learning in order to know. It is knowing in order to reveal, it is revealing in order to transform.¹

Welcome! This course seeks to explore/complicate theoretical and literary texts written by women from Africa and the African Diaspora namely texts by Africans, African Americans, and Afro-Hispanics. The above excerpted lines symbolize the important task of the "woman" writer to exhibit the creative and critical consciousnesses and political struggles that plague many African descended women writing in and of Africa and the African Diaspora. These women are actively engaged in representing/re-representing black womanhood in these former colonized spaces [that remain colonial in nature], which require that they examine and transform the historical narrative, as it is *the signifying* event that shapes their presences in these societies. This course will therefore consider as concepts/issues:

- How writers root their texts in an African -centered self based on historical circumstances.
 - The development of the "black woman-centered self" as depicted in oral histories and written texts.
 - Thematic complexities of these women's texts: alliances to nation, family, community, and issues of race/class/gender/sexuality as depicted in particular narratives.
 - Politics, religion, spirit, and voice.
 - Activism.
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Throughout this course, we will also integrate and employ:

- Integrative Analysis:** It is crucial that we understand "women" and "gender" as multiple and diverse, embedded in the complex network of interlocking variables of race, class, sexuality, ethnicity, and nationality.
 - Feminism(s):** There is no unitary "feminism" but rather "feminisms." Feminisms must be understood as multiple, shifting, and contesting movements—from the historical and contemporary perspectives.
 - Knowledge Construction:** Exploring feminist interventions in the politics of knowledge—as indicated in theoretical and literary texts.
 - Feminist Theory:** Emphasizing a notion of feminist theorizing that includes *description* and *analysis* as well as thinking that imposes *vision* and *change*.
 - Activisms:** Exploring women's resistance to oppression and inequities.
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Required Texts :

All texts are available at *Food for Thought Books* in downtown Amherst, 106 North Pleasant Street

¹ Excerpted from "Being a Woman and Writing," Yvonne-America Truque (Translated by Miriam DeCosta Willis)

- *Homegrown: Engaged Cultural Criticism*, bell hooks & amalia mesa bains
 - *Theorizing Black Feminism, the Visionary Pragmatism of Black Women*, Stanlie M. James & Abena P.A. Busia
 - *Women Writing Resistance, Essays on Latin America and the Caribbean*, Browdy & de Hernandez
 - *The Joys of Motherhood*, Buchi Emecheta
 - *Nervous Conditions*, Tsitsi Dangerembga
 - *Mama Day*, Gloria Naylor
 - *Gorilla My Love*, Toni Cade Bambara
 - *Somewhere in Advance of Nowhere*, Jayne Cortez
 - **E-reserves:** Available at <http://ereserves.library.umass.edu>, password: **"Duafe"**
 - Supplemental Handouts
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Attendance Policy

- Because this class only meets once per week, it is important that you avoid missing classes, **therefore students will only be penalized after they have acquired more than one (1) absence**. Regular and consistent attendance is mandatory due to the participatory requirements and discussions of course materials.
- **Five (5) points** will be deducted from your final grade for every subsequent absence, *whether it is an unexcused or an excused absence*. If you miss **two or more classes**, you will be in danger of failing.

If there is a pressing need to be absent from class, the provision for excused absences is explained as follows:

- **Excused absences include events of sickness with medical documentation, a valid family emergency, or religious observance.** If you need to miss class in any of these cases, you should notify me in advance of your absence via email. Only those with excused absences have the opportunity to make-up the points deducted from your grade; this can be done by completing a make-up assignment in lieu of your participation, explained further below.
- **Make-up assignments**—If your absence is excused and documented, you must submit a written response analysis that will help you to synthesize what you missed involving the themes of the readings for the week of your absence. Satisfactory completion of this response analysis will result in your earning back the points deducted for your absence. **If you have an excused absence, you are responsible for contacting me for the assignment and for completing the response analysis within a week of your absence.**

Student Responsibilities

- You are expected to complete all reading assignments. Preparation and participation are essential for maximizing learning and critical analysis.
- Submit your assignments on time.
- No assignments will be accepted by E-mail without permission. Assignments must be submitted to me personally or via my mailbox.
- Late papers without prior permission will be subjected to grade reduction.
- Always provide in text citations and a works cited page following the **MLA** documentation style.
- Plagiarism will be treated as a serious offense. Please read and familiarize yourself with the Undergraduate Rights and Responsibilities code:
http://www.umass.edu/dean_students/rights/acad_honest.htm
- Our learning community must always be positive, and as such, I expect you to practice respect and consideration for your peers. You may be presented with material that is unfamiliar to you. As we are negotiating complex histories and issues, you may hear diverse opinions from the

instructor and other students. You may not always agree with discussion points, but it is important to respond with reflection and respect when offering an opinion.

☐☐ Office hours are a time when we can discuss things individually, and you can touch base about any points you would like clarified from class or if you would ever like to discuss your progress in the class. Additionally, you may contact me via e-mail if you ever have questions or concerns about your academic performance.

☐☐ If any student has a condition, such as a physical or sensory disability which will make it difficult to complete the work as outlined, please inform me at once, so that we can make the appropriate arrangements.

Grading Criteria :

- 1) **Participation/Attendance 20%:** Attendance is mandatory. Your physical presence and your active participation make up a sizable portion of your grade in this course. You are expected to complete assigned readings before the session in which it is scheduled and to come to class prepared to discuss the main points and ask/answer relevant questions.
- 2) **Critical Responses (3) 30 %:** Students are required to complete three critical response [thought papers]. Part of this process will be to respond to a critical question or issue rooted in the topic by incorporating the readings. [See guidelines.]
- 3) **Discussant Presentation/Paper 25%:** Once during the semester, you will sign up to lead the class in discussion. To complete this task examine the readings for the designated date, pick out the main themes and important ideas for the week, and develop a short presentation and essay on the topics. For the presentation, develop a clear presentation that demonstrates mastery of the readings. Focus on one or two key concepts or debates and pose specific questions to promote discussion. Please bring discussion questions to class. Presentation should be 7-10 minutes long.
- 4) **Final Paper 25%**

Grades are determined according the following scale:

A: 94-100	B-: 80-82	D+: 67-69
A-: 90-93	C+: 77-79	D: 60-66
B+: 87-89	C: 73-76	F: 59-0 F: 59-0
B: 83-86	C-: 70-72	

Guidelines for Critical Analysis/ Response Papers

The importance of discussant presentations/questions and the critical analysis/response papers is 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) that you 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, comment on the contributions of the work, critically examine the "soundness" of the arguments, and discuss insights gained or limitations to the analysis. Essentially, I want to know that you have read, understood, and analyzed the readings. Additionally, as we are examining literary pieces that may function as a way to also make meaning of a particular theory, it is important to also interpret the literature while keeping critical theories in mind. Grades will be based on the quality and the clarity of your interpretations/analyses as well as how you have organized these ideas.

Text Key: *Theorizing Black Feminisms (TBF); Homegrown (HG); Women Writing Resistance (WWR); The Joys of Motherhood (JM); Nervous Conditions (NC); Mama Day (MD); Gorilla, My Love (GML); Somewhere in Advance of Nowhere (SAN)*

Course Calendar

Date	Topic	Readings (to complete by this date)	Assignments Due (on this day)
1/31	Introductions, Course Requirements & Expectations --		
2/7	Situating the Dialogue, Theory, and the Writers	[ER] Corcoran,-Nantes, "Female Consciousness or Feminist Consciousness" pp. 126-137; Hill Collins, "The Politics of Black Feminist Thought" pp. 318-333; Mikell, "African Feminism" pp. 103-111 hooks, mesa-bains, "preface" & "Family" pp. 2-26	
2/14	Theorizing Black Feminisms	TBF , "Intro" pp. 1-7; ch. 1 pp. 13-30; ch. 2 pp. 31-42; HG , pp. 27-60; GML , Stories pp. 1-43	
2/21	Latina & Afro-Latina Identities	Guest Lecturers: Cruz Caridad Bueno & Shelly Perdomo Supplemental Handouts; WWR "Preface"; "Introduction"; "Revision"; "The Silent Witness"; "Everything I Kept"	Critical Response #1
2/28	Politics, Language, Identity, & Voice	WWR , Part II: "The Politics of Language & Identity;" TBF , pp. 55-73; 203-213; [ER] DeCosta-Willis "Introduction" <i>Daughters of the Diaspora</i> ; GML Stories, pp. 47-96	Discussants: 1) 2)
3/7	Afro-Hispanic Poets [Cuba]	Complete GML [ER] Georgina Herrera Parts I & II; Handout: Nancy Morejon.	Discussants: 1) 2) 3)
3/14	African Voices	TBF , pp. 31-43; 102- 116; NC chap. 1-5 Film	Critical Response #2
3/21		Spring Break	
3/28	African Voices	NC , chap. 6-end TBF ; 228-256	Discussants: 1) 2)
4/4		JM TBF , pp. 44-53 Film	Discussants: 1) 2) 3)
4/11	African American Voices	SAN TBF , pp. 118-140 Film	Critical Response #3 Final paper Proposal
4/18		MD , pp. 1-140 HG , pp. 97- 130	Discussants: 1) 2)
4/25		MD pp. 140-end Film	Discussants: 1) 2)
5/2	Afro-Brazilian Voices	[ER] Lima pp. 17-25; Alves pp. 8-15; Afolabi, "Beyond the Curtains"	
5/9		TBF , pp. 77-88; 90-101; HG 75-95 Last Class Final Conclusions	
		Final Paper Due: Friday 5/19/07 Bartlett 208	