

301--Theorizing Gender, Race, and Power
Fall 2021
Tuesday and Thursday 2:30-3:45pm
Professor Laura Briggs (ljbriiggs@umass.edu)
Office hours on Zoom 12-1 Thursday and by appointment
South College W211

I came to theory because I was hurting—the pain within me was so intense that I could not go on living. I came to theory desperate, wanting to comprehend—to grasp what was happening around and within me. Most importantly, I wanted to make the hurt go away. I saw in theory then a location for healing. --bell hooks, “Theory as Liberatory Practice”

Starting with the Black feminist revolution that took place in the streets in 2020, the Movement for Black Lives, this course moves back and forth between activism and the irreducible work of theory. This is not a history of feminist movements course, but there are moments when feminist theory is given new life and made vital by social movements, including #BLM, #waterislife/#mniwiconi, #mmiw, #NiUnoMas, #MeToo and #TimesUp, and so we will pause our reading of theory at various points to watch video or read interviews with participants and organizers. Theory and activism cannot be collapsed into each other, but they can also be hard to separate.

Feminist theory has been elaborated in relationship to every major theoretical and philosophical system—notably liberalism, Marxism, Foucauldian analysis, poststructuralism, psychoanalysis, Third World liberation—and every significant political movement (in the United States, it was born out of the radical wing of the Abolitionist movement). It has also built independent theories from readings of the body and of sexual violence. One approach to teaching feminist theory is to start from a body of, say, liberal political theory texts and then read feminist theory as a response to them. The trouble with that is that what results is extraordinarily Eurocentric. And, while feminism is a remarkably international assortment of movements, the word “feminism” comes always already marked as the provenance of “the West,” a pernicious development that doesn’t need to be amplified. However, we will read Marx’s *Communist Manifesto*, because the Marxist tradition in feminism is robust and transnational, and of all these intellectual currents, the one you are least likely to encounter in another class.

Instead, this course has chosen a couple of things to focus on. One is what I think of as the “history” problem: the habit of taking something one disagrees with from the 70s or 80s that a feminist said (and it was a wide-ranging movement, there’s always something), and then talking about “70s feminism” or “80s feminism” as uniformly wrong. I want to restore a sense of the deep complexity of these moments, thinkers, and movements. The 90s, the decade of the explosion of queer theory, has been skipped over, perhaps indefensibly, but in hopes you will take a Sexuality/Trans or Queer Theory course. The second emphasis of this course is, as the title suggests, to center the ways feminists—particularly feminists of color—have grappled with questions race, capitalism, and power.

Finally, my hope for this class is akin to bell hooks': I hope that the writing we grapple with here will tell everyone something that they needed to hear. Feminist theory was written with the hope that it could save someone's life, which is why we go on teaching it.

It must also be said clearly that there are no right answers or political orthodoxies in this course. Universities provide us the privilege and pleasure of reading together and learning from each other. Nothing is on the syllabus because it is "right." Our job in this class is to create an intellectual community, one in which we are all enriched by each others' readings. We will be discussing weighty, critical issues, which is why we need each other's help to think well and to try to understand how the reading can (or fails to) speak to our situation in the world. This imposes on each of us the responsibility of coming to class with the reading done, speaking up about our insights and questions, and listening respectfully to each other (which is not to say always agreeing).

For this class to work well, everyone needs to feel free to talk and think out loud. In order to facilitate this, we must exhibit the highest level of respect for each other. Nobody here is disposable (this should go without saying, but sometimes we need to remind each other.) Your class participation grade will rest on how successfully you show engagement with the material and with your classmates. This course is not a competition over who has "good" or "bad" politics (whatever we may consider those to be), it is an honest exploration of various kinds of political and intellectual positions, and the ways these have been historically constituted. Students are encouraged to bring questions, change their minds, make counter-arguments, and voice politically unpopular positions in class. While intellectual and moral passion, as well as lively disagreement (including with the instructor) are valued, ad hominem and ad feminam attacks will not be tolerated, nor will harassment, slurs, or disparagement of any group.

Attendance matters. Learning in this class will develop in significant part through conversation, talking and listening. If you can't attend, please email me to let me know. However, we are in the midst of a pandemic, a crisis of democracy, an economic crisis, and a climate crisis. Lots of people are suffering. We will be generous with each other and our efforts (and failures) to show up.

Unplanned virus issues. We never know what the future holds, but that seems heightened right now. If the class needs to go online for some reason, you will be notified through the "announcements" on the course Moodle page. Make sure you are getting those.

Basic Needs

Your safety and well-being are more important than anything going on in class. And having your basic needs met, like food, housing, appropriate health care, and personal safety, are critical to your learning and success in college. If you are facing difficulties securing sufficient food to eat every day or safe and stable housing or your personal safety, I urge you to contact the Dean of Students for support and assistance. If you are comfortable doing so, please also let me know, which will enable me to provide any resources I may have. Dean of Students:

https://www.umass.edu/dean_students/

Course Policies

Numeric-Letter Grade Conversion

A+	100	B+	87	C+	77	D+	67	F	59 or below
A	95	B	85	C	75	D	65		
A-	93	B-	83	C-	73	D-	63		

Email

All students are required to have a UMass email account, which will be used for all correspondence for this course. (Students from other colleges will be assigned one once they register). Registration for this course will also provide access to Moodle, which we will use for supplementary course materials, e-reserves, extra credit opportunities, to turn in and grade assignments.

As for emailing me: I get a lot of email. If your email requires more than a 2-sentence reply, come to my virtual office hours. Answering student email is a high priority for me. My goal is to answer any email received by 5pm on any weekday before 5pm on the next day, no later than Friday of that week. Any email received over the weekend will be considered to have arrived on Monday. If it's urgent, or I have not answered within this time frame, please don't hesitate to email me again—you're not bothering me. I'm just overwhelmed.

Class Philosophy

Learning is a *process*, both individual and collective. We come to this course with different backgrounds and experiences, yet we are all moving through it together. Though we acquire information, arrive at insights, and develop skills at our own pace, learning is inescapably interdependent. For this reason, we will proceed with respect and patience for each other, especially when we disagree.

Late Assignments

All assignments must be received by their due date. If there is a compelling reason why you cannot hand in your assignment on time—illness, personal or family emergency, varsity athletic commitment—please be in touch with me as soon as possible. In the time of corona, we've all got a lot going on, don't worry.

PLEASE BE PROACTIVE in asking for accommodation. Don't suffer in silence. Too many people wind up taking a lower grade rather than share information about their personal situation. Not to worry, we've heard it all, good crises and bad—gender transition, intimate partner violence, couch surfing, food insecurity, sexual violence, mental health issues, pregnancy (wanted and not). Don't suffer in silence. At the least we can help you plan your work; at best we can even connect you with resources.

Statement Regarding Pronouns There is a long history of dialogue and activism around how we address one another, with respect to both names and pronouns. Students should be referred to by the name they prefer, and with the proper pronunciation, by faculty and other students. We will gladly honor your request to address you by the name you prefer and gender pronouns that

correspond to your gender identity. Please put your preferred name and pronouns in your Zoom profile/window.

Students with Disabilities The University of Massachusetts Amherst is committed to providing an equal educational opportunity for all students. If you have a documented physical, psychological, or learning disability on file with Disability Services (DS), you may be eligible for reasonable academic accommodations to help you succeed in this course. If you have a documented disability that requires an accommodation, please notify me within the first two weeks of the semester so that we may make appropriate arrangements.

Academic Honesty Statement Since the integrity of the academic enterprise of any institution of higher education requires honesty in scholarship and research, academic honesty is required of all students at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Academic dishonesty is prohibited in all programs of the University. Academic dishonesty includes but is not limited to: cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, and facilitating dishonesty. Appropriate sanctions may be imposed on any student who has committed an act of academic dishonesty. Instructors should take reasonable steps to address academic misconduct. Any person who has reason to believe that a student has committed academic dishonesty should bring such information to the attention of the appropriate course instructor as soon as possible. Instances of academic dishonesty not related to a specific course should be brought to the attention of the appropriate department Head or Chair. Since students are expected to be familiar with this policy and the commonly accepted standards of academic integrity, ignorance of such standards is not normally sufficient evidence of lack of intent (http://www.umass.edu/dean_students/codeofconduct/acadhonesty/).

Title IX and Mandated Reporting WGSS classes are a place where issues of sexual violence and other sexual misconduct are discussed as a matter of course. It's not a taboo subject, and feminists have long worked to develop theory and activism around sexualized violence, including rape, dating violence, child sexual abuse, and the like. If you want to discuss your own personal experiences of sexual violence in a class, we don't consider that a "report" covered by Title IX (although if you want faculty help and support in reporting sexual violence, we are here to help you do that). Other available resources on campus for addressing sexual violence include both confidential and non-confidential resources—non-confidential resources will keep your concerns private but will report your concerns to the Title IX coordinator, or, the Dean of Students Office who will provide you with different options to assist you. Confidential resources will keep your concerns confidential and will provide you support, assistance in addressing safety concerns as well as other services such as providing you with an advocate. The resources can be found at www.umass.edu/titleix/.

In-Class Recordings and Selling of Notes Some external vendors (like StudySoup and other outlets) recruit and pay students for their notes from a class which are then posted for any other student to purchase and use; others extend to in-class video recordings of class lectures. Some right-wing news outlets have also sought recordings of faculty lectures with malicious intent. UMass lawyers have advised that sharing notes for money or video of class for other than personal use is a violation of the faculty member's copyright, students' FERPA privacy rights, and laws prohibiting video-recording without consent. Recordings MUST not be shared outside of Moodle or you will be violating all kinds of laws.

Required texts

Barbara Ransby, *Making All Black Lives Matter: Reimagining Freedom in the 21st Century* (University of California Press, 2018).

Keeanga-Yamhatta Taylor, ed, *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective* (Haymarket, 2017).

Assignments and Grading (detailed assignments on Moodle)

2-3pp reading response papers due Sept. 17, and Oct. 1, Oct. 15 (10% each)

Midterm paper due November 12 (20%)

Final paper December 13 (25%)

Discussion—25%

Week-by-week list of readings

Black Lives Matter, Born of Black Queer Feminism

Sept. 2: Barbara Ransby, *Making All Black Lives Matter: Reimagining Freedom in the 21st Century* (University of California Press, 2018), overview, chs. 1-2, pp. ix-28.

Sept. 7--Ransby, *Black Lives*, pp. 29-168.

Matrix of Oppression, Grammar, Metalanguage, Presence: Beyond “Intersectionality” in Black Feminist Thought

September 9: Keeanga-Yamhatta Taylor, ed, *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective* (Haymarket, 2017).

September 14: Hortense Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” *Diacritics*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (Summer 1987): 65-81.

September 16: Elizabeth Brooks Higginbotham, “African American Women’s History and the Metalanguage of Race” *Signs* 17:2 (1992): 251-75.

Toni Morrison, “Black Matters” in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Harvard, UP, 1992), 1-28.

Reading response paper due Friday

What is going on with the Right?

September 21: Lauren Berlant, “The Theory of Infantile Citizenship,” in *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 25-55.

Alexandra Minna Stern, “Cat Ladies, Wolves, and Lobsters: A Menagerie of Biological Essentialism,” ch. 4 in *Proud Boys and the White Ethnostate: How the Alt-Right Is Warping the American Imagination*. Beacon Press, 2019, pp. 71-92.

September 23: “Preface,” to Lisa Duggan, *Mean Girl: Ayn Rand and the Culture of Greed* (UC Press, 2019), xi-xvii.

Jasbir Puar and Amit Rai, “Monster, Terrorist, Fag: The War on Terrorism and the Production of Docile Patriots,” *Social Text* 20, no. 3 (2002), 117-148.

Native/Indigenous Feminisms

September 28: Maile Arvin, Eve Tuck, and Angie Morrill, “Decolonizing Feminism: Challenging Connections between Settler Colonialism and Heteropatriarchy” *Feminist Formations* 25:1 (2013):8-34.

J. Kehaulani Kauanui, “Gender, Marriage, Coverture” in *Paradoxes of Hawaiian Sovereignty: Land, Sex, and the Colonial Politics of State Nationalism*. Duke University Press, 2018, pp. 113-52.

Mishuana Goeman and Jennifer Nez Denetdale, “Native feminisms: Legacies, interventions, and Indigenous sovereignties.” *Wicazo Sa Review* 24 (2009): 9-13.

September 30—Lakota Activisms

Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, “The Big Pipe Case,” in *Reading Native American Women: Critical/Creative Representations* (2005), 77-92.

Bethany Hughes, *Oka Apesvchi: Indigenous Feminism, Performance, and Protest*. *Theatre Journal* 72:2 (2020): 127-142.

Jennifer Weston, “[Water is Life: The Rise of the Mní Wičóni Movement](#),” *Cultural Survival* (March 2017).

Reading response paper due Friday

Latinx Feminisms

October 5—Third World/Chicana Feminisms

Gloria Anzaldúa, “Atravesando Fronteras” *Borderlands/La Frontera* . Spinster/Aunt Lute, 1979 (in the Second edition, 1999, it’s pp. 23-120).

Chela Sandoval, “U.S. Third World Feminism: The Theory and Method of Oppositional Consciousness in the Postmodern World,” *Genders* 10 (1991): 1-24.

Sayak Valencia, “Warning,” “The Beginning” & “Introduction,” *Gore Capitalism* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2018 [2010 in Spain], pp. 9-29.

October 7—Spanish-speaking Caribbean Feminisms

Marisol Lebron, “Security from Below,” *Policing Life and Death: Race, Violence, and Resistance in Puerto Rico* (University of California Press, 2019), pp. 202-231.

Lorgia García Peña, “Dominicanidad in ContraDICTION,” and “The Galindo Virgins,” in *The Borders of Dominicanidad: Race, Nation, and Archives of Contradiction* (Duke, 2016), pp. 1-57.

Asian American Feminisms

October 12--In the United States

Lisa Lowe, “Work, Immigration, Gender: Asian ‘American’ Women,” in *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Duke, 1996), pp. 154-171.

Asha Nadkarni, "Eugenic Feminism: Asian Reproduction in the US National Imaginary." In *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, vol. 39, no. 2, pp. 221-244. Duke University Press, 2006.

October 14—Empire and Asian ‘American’ Feminisms

Genevieve Clutario, “Gendering the trans-Pacific world: Pageant Politics Tensions of Power, Empire, and Nationalism in Manila Carnival Queen Contests” in *Gendering the Trans-Pacific World*, pp. 257-283. Brill, 2017.

Judy Wu, "Rethinking Global Sisterhood: Peace Activism and Women's Orientalism," in *No Permanent Waves: Recasting Histories of U.S. Feminism*. Edited by Nancy A. Hewitt (Rutgers University Press, 2010), pp. 193-220.

Reading response paper due Friday

Transnational Feminisms

October 19: Jacqui Alexander, "Erotic Autonomy as a Politics of Decolonization: Feminism, Tourism, and the State in the Bahamas," *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (Duke, 2005), pp. 21-65.

Chandra Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," *boundary 2* 12:3(Spring-Autumn 1984): 333-358.

Jasbir Puar, "A Transnational Feminist Critique of Queer Tourism," *Antipode* (2002): 935-946.

October 21--Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, 271–313. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988.

Trans Feminisms

October 26: The 70s and 80s

Judith Butler, "Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire," *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* ([1990] 1999), pp. 3-46.

Finn Enke, "Collective Memory and the Transfeminist 1970s: Toward a Less Plausible History." *Trans Studies Quarterly* (2018): 9-29.

October 28—After 2000

Riley Snorton, "Anatomically Speaking: Ungendering Flesh and the Science of Sex," *Black on Both Sides* (Minnesota, 2017), pp. 17-53.

Julia Serrano, "Trans Woman Manifesto," *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity* (Seal Press, 2007), pp. 10-20.

What about the past? Do we know what is meant by 70s feminism? Lesbian feminism? white feminism?

November 2--Claire Hemmings, "Telling feminist stories," *Feminist Theory* 6:2 (2005): 115-139.

Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," "An Open Letter to Mary Daly," and "Man Child," *Sister Outsider* (Crossing Press, 1984), pp. 53-80.

Monique Wittig, "The Straight Mind" *Feminist Issues* 1, no. 1 (March 1, 1980): 103–11.

November 4—Queers and Other Monsters

Cathy J. Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 3, no. 4 (May 1, 1997): 437–65.

Saidiya Hartman, "A Note on Method," "The Terrible Beauty of the Slum," and "Minor Figure," in *Wayward Girls: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (Norton, 2019), xv-xx, 7-47.

Feminist Studies of Science and Biomedicine

November 9: Donna Haraway, "A manifesto for cyborgs: science, technology, and socialist feminism in the 1980s" *Socialist Review* 80, no. 1 (1985): 65-108.

Paula Triechler, "AIDS, Homophobia, and Biomedical Discourse: An Epidemic of Signification." *October* 43 (1987): 31–70.

November 11—Veteran’s Day holiday

November 16—Angela Willey, "A World of Materialisms: Postcolonial Feminist Science Studies and the New Natural." *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 41, no. 6 (November 1, 2016): 991–1014.

Sara Ahmed, "Imaginary Prohibitions: Some Preliminary Remarks on the Founding Gestures of the ‘New Materialism’" *European Journal of Women’s Studies* 15:1 (2008): 23-39.

Liberal Feminism, Legal Regimes and Their Discontents

November 18: Ruth Bader Ginsburg, "The Need for the Equal Rights

Amendment," *American Bar Association Journal* 59: 9 (September 1973), pp. 1013-1019

Pauli Murray and Mary O. Eastwood. "Jane Crow and the Law: Sex Discrimination and Title VII" *George Washington Law Review* 34, no. 2 (1965): 232-56.

Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43:6 (July 1991): 1241-1299.

Materialist (Socialist) Feminisms

Nov. 23—Feminists wrestle with Marx in the ‘70s, 80s, and 20-teens.

"Introduction," and "Downsizing Democracy" *The Twilight of Equality: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon, 2013), pp ix-xxii and 1-21.

Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (linked to Phil Gaspar’s *Road Map to History’s Most Important Political Document* (Haymarket, 2005). Just read the *Manifesto* and also his annotations if they are helpful.

November 30: Heidi I. Hartmann, "The Family as the Locus of Gender, Class, and Political Struggle: The Example of Housework" *Signs*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (Spring, 1981), pp. 366-394.

Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex" in Rayna Reiter, ed., *Toward an Anthropology of Women* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), pp. 157-210.

November 25—Thanksgiving holiday, no class

From Pornography to #MeToo and #NiUnoMas: Radical Feminism and Sexual Violence

If you want a trigger warning, thinking through gendered violence is kind of the whole point of radical feminism...

December 2: Michelle Goldberg, "[Not the Fun Kind of Feminist](#)," *New York Times* (February 22, 2019).

Andrea Dworkin, selections from *Our Blood* (1976). In Johanna Fateman and Amy Scholder, eds. *Last Days at Hot Slit*, pp. 77-112.

December 7: Rebecca Solnit, "[In Patriarchy Nobody Can Hear You Scream](#)," *LitHub* (July 10, 2019)

Rebecca Solnit, "[A Rape a Minute, a Thousand Corpses a Year](#)," *Guernica* (January 25, 2013).

Tarana Burke, "[Me Too is a Movement, Not a Moment](#)" TED talk

Ai-Jen Poo and Mónica Ramírez, "[Female Domestic and Agricultural Workers Confront an Epidemic of Sexual Harassment](#)," *ACLU blog* (May 4, 2018).

Mercedes Olivera, "Violencia Femicida: Violence Against Women and Mexico’s Structural

Crisis,” in Rosa-Linda Fregoso and Cynthia Bejarano, eds. *Terrorizing Women: Femicide in the Americas*. Durham NC: Duke University Press Books, 2010.

La Tesis, “[Un Violador en Tu Camino](#)” (you can check out the many versions of this anthem/performance piece on YouTube. The linked one is from *Vice News*, with English translation and images from many countries where it was performed.)