

Introduction to Black Feminist Thought

GSWS 390
AFST306

Dr. Bettina Judd
bjudd@wm.edu
@b_judd
#BlackFemWM
Office Hours: TTH 4:00-5:00pm or
by Appointment

Course Description

In order to understand the growing body of scholarship that is Black feminist theory, we will analyze the development of Black women's feminist consciousness from the mid-19th century to the present through the essays, speeches, and creative work that has named the complex systems of power which affect the lives of Black women on the primary intersections of race, gender and class. We will examine closely the important contributions of Black feminist thought to the fields of African American and Africana Studies and Women's and Gender Studies through concepts developed by Black feminist scholars such as intersectionality.

Course Readings

Words of Fire by Beverly Guy-Sheftall

Ain't I a Woman – bell hooks

Black Peculiar – Khadijah Queen

Learning Responsibilities

- Reading - This is your education. Make the best of it, make it yours. Students are required to be prepared for every class discussion. You are expected to have read the materials listed in the course outline by the class session specified. You are also required to bring that reading material with you to class. This is imperative to facilitate discussion and for your own reference during class.
- Discussion – Some individuals may have strong feelings about one topic or another in this class. This is expected. However, speaking over and interrupting individuals is not conducive to a learning environment. Furthermore, talking and chatting while someone is speaking is downright disrespectful and

hampers your ability to understand the person who is speaking. In the spoken word community we have a saying: "respect the mic." That is, engage with whomever is speaking with interest and attentiveness. I expect you to respect the mic/classroom so that we can have a respectful and efficient learning environment.

- Community Responsibility - This classroom places a big emphasis on community learning through group interaction. In this way, not only are we learning from the texts and the professor, but from each other—together. This requires a certain amount of responsibility to yourself and your cohorts to keep up with the readings so that you can contribute to the best of your abilities in class. This also means doing the work agreed upon in group interactions so that your fellow group mates are not forced to pick up your slack. It also means being assertive about a group member who may be slacking. You all have a responsibility to each other and there are no "outs" with group work assignments.
- Technology - Laptops are admissible for reading and note taking, but please try to keep social media habits under control in the classroom. With the exception (and within reason) we use Twitter and may use it as class discussion and in addition to class discussion.
- Cell Phones - Turn them off, or on vibrate. DO NOT SEND TEXT MESSAGES IN THE CLASSROOM. I REPEAT: DO NOT SEND TEXT MESSAGES IN THE CLASSROOM. No exceptions. Not even if you are telling your friends how great this class is. There is an exception to this. You are welcome to tweet what is going on in class discussion. Note above.
- Violation of any of these rules will be reflected in your participation grade.

Accommodations For Students With Disabilities

The College of William and Mary has resources to help students with disabilities. If you have any provisions for your learning needs, please contact Disability Services so that they can be in contact with me regarding accommodations. Do not wait until the first writing assignment to do this. In addition, you are welcome to talk to me about any aspects of the classroom environment that would better serve you. You may set up an appointment with Disability Services at 757-221-2510. You may also go directly to the center at the Campus Center, Room 109.

Assistance with Academic Writing

Because there may be writing assignments in this course, I encourage you to be in contact with the Writing Resources Center. There, you can make an appointment to go over any written assignments prior to their submission. This is a fantastic service that helps writers at all levels and can only serve to better your writing skills. You may set an appointment with the Writing Resource Center online at:

<http://www.wm.edu/as/wrc/>.

Religious Observances And Student Body Participation

It is my own policy that students not be penalized in any way for participation in major religious observances. This is a very important aspect in many of our lives. However, you must inform me in writing by about such observances by the end of add/drop so that proper arrangements can be made for assignments and readings.

Absences

This class is about participation. If you are not present, you cannot participate. I do take note when students are missing or are not present in class discussion. If there is an assignment that was due on a day that you were absent, you are responsible for making sure that I receive the assignment on time.

A note on contagious (airborne) illness: As much as your fellow classmates and I love your presence in class, we care more about your health and the health of our whole community. If you have unfortunately caught an airborne illness such as the flu or a cold please stay at home and get well. Contact me via email, check in at our class hashtag on Twitter (see first page of this syllabus), and ask fellow classmates for updates on class discussion and any important information that you may have missed. Always let me know that you're out because of an illness.

Grading and Assignments

All assignments should be typed, double spaced with one-inch margins with a reasonable font such as Times New Roman. Script type is unacceptable. Works should be cited under an appropriate citation style. When assignments are to be posted online they should be in .doc or .docx (Word) format. Please do not post documents in Word Perfect or any other format, you will risk my not being able to view and read them. Although assignments will be uploaded to Blackboard for grading, please have them with you in class.

Class Structure

This class is structured around ways of learning that are both analog and digital. We will meet regularly in our designated classroom for class discussion, however our learning and communication will continue online via Twitter (see hashtag and my user name above) and resources will be available on our Blackboard site at <http://blackboard.wm.edu>.

I will occasionally recap class discussion, make class announcements, and suggest supplemental readings on our twitter hashtag.

If you are unfamiliar with Twitter you may find this document useful: <http://www.icc.edu/innovation/PDFS/resources/TwitterBasics.pdf>. We will also go over Twitter basics in class.

Blackboard: Documents and other resources are available online through our school's course management system of choice: Moodle. This site is located at <http://blackboard.wm.edu>.

Grade Distribution, Assignments and Expectations

Participation and Attendance (30%) is a very important part of our class dynamic here. Because the material in this class affects how we view ourselves and the world around us, it is important that we be able to articulate what we are learning to ourselves and to each other in a respectful yet engaged manner. This process allows for a group dynamic wherein we are learning from each other in community rather than struggling with material on our own. Every day of class will count in your final participation grade. When discussion board assignments are due on days we do not meet, those will count as participation grades as well. Participation also includes our mid-semester meeting.

Class Leadership 20% Throughout the semester you will be expected to lead the class in a discussion about the readings assigned. How you choose to lead class discussion is up to you. For example, you could prepare a series of questions with which to launch class discussion that are related to the readings. You could also create a simple assignment that your fellow classmates will complete during our class meetings.

Pop Quizzes (15%) From time to time short quizzes will be administered on recent reading materials.

Interdisciplinary Analytical Assignment 20%

This final assignment will allow you to creatively engage with the academic texts we read as well as the creative texts we have engaged with in class. In this assignment you will be expected to propose not the final topic, but the medium by in which you will engage with the final topic selected. Think beyond the final research paper. You will have an opportunity to be creative. Perhaps you would like to explore the topic using a blog, a bibliographic database, a short film, a series of poems, or a journal. How you execute this assignment is up to you. However, you are expected to engage in research in order to complete this assignment. You will be given instructions on October 15. You will propose how you choose to explore the topic by October 29. You will turn in a bibliography of at least ten preliminary sources, three of which will be annotated on November 10. You will present your final project on either December 1 or December 3. Finally, you will turn in a completed assignment by December 3.

Course Outline

August 27

Introductions and Syllabus Overview

The Right to Claim Womanhood Early Feminism

Introduction: Black Women and Feminism?

September 1

Read Before Class: "The Politics of Black Feminist Thought" - Patricia Hill Collins {Bb}
and "Black Women and Feminism" in hooks' *Ain't I A Woman*

In Class: Discussion

September 3

Read Before Class: Introduction to *Words of Fire* Beverly Guy-Sheftall, "Racism and
Feminism" bell hooks *Ain't I A Woman*

In Class: Discussion

Before "Feminism"

September 8

Read Before Class: Introduction to Chapter 1, Readings by Maria Miller Stewart,
Sojourner Truth and Francis Harper in *Words of Fire*

In Class: Discussion

September 10

Read Before Class: Readings by Anna Julia Cooper, Gertrude Mossell and Mary
Church Terrell and Ida B. Wells Barnett in *Words of Fire*

In Class: Discussion

September 15*

Read Before Class: Alice Dunbar Nelson, Amy Jaques Garvey, and Sadie Tanner in
Words of Fire

In Class: No Class Meeting, Online discussion

September 17

Read Before Class: Florynce Kennedy, Claudia Jones, and Lorraine Hansberry in
Words of Fire

In Class: Discussion

Between Movements and Creating A New One

Naming the Unnamed

September 22

Read Before Class: Introduction, and readings from Francis Beale, Mary Ann
Weathers and Linda LaRue in *Words of Fire*

In Class: Discussion

September 24

Read Before Class: Pauli Murray, "A Historical and Critical Essay for Black Women," by
Patricia Haden, Donna Middleton, and Patricia Robinson in *Words of Fire*

In Class: Discussion

Emergence of a Black Feminist Identity and Discourse

September 29

Read Before Class: Introduction to Chapter Four, "A Black Feminist Statement" by the
Combahee River Collective, Cheryl Clarke's "Lesbianism: An Act Of Resistance"
and "Some Home Truths on the Contemporary Black Feminist Movement" by
Barbara Smith

In Class: Discussion

October 1

Read Before Class: "Womanist" by Alice Walker, "Must I be a Womanist" by Monica A.
Coleman in *Still Brave*, and Introduction to *The Womanist Reader* by Layli
Maparayan (Phillips) {Bb}

In Class: Lecture and Discussion

October 6 - No Class, Mid-semester Meetings**October 8 - No Class, Mid-semester Meetings****October 13 - Fall Break**

October 15

Read Before Class: "African American Women in Defense of Ourselves" Elsa Barkley Brown in *Still Brave* and "A Black Man's Place in Black Feminist Criticism" Michael Awkward in *Still Brave*

In Class: Discussion

Between Theory and Praxis

Black Women's Studies**October 20**

Read Before Class: "Towards a Black Feminist Criticism" by Barbara Smith {Bb} "But Who Do You Really Belong To—Black Studies or Women's Studies?" Barbara Christian in *Still Brave* {Bb}

In Class: Discussion

October 22

Read Before Class: "The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought" – Patricia Hill Collins *Words of Fire* and "African Feminist Scholars in Women's Studies" – Josephine Beoku-Betts and Wairimu Ngaruoya Njambi {Bb}

In Class: Discussion

On Black Women's Sexuality**October 27**

Read Before Class: "Sexism and the Black Female Slave Experience" in *Ain't I a Woman* by bell hooks "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West: Preliminary Thoughts on the Culture of Dissemblance" Darlene Clark Hine in *Words of Fire*

In Class: Discussion

October 29 - Topic Proposal Due

View and read: *Pariah* by Dee Reese and "Black (W)holes and the Geometry of Black Female Sexuality" – Evelyn Hammonds {Bb}

Class Discussion: Online NO IN CLASS DISCUSSION

November 3

Read Before Class: "A New Politics of Sexuality" by June Jordan in *Words of Fire*, "Punks, Daggers and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" – Cathy Cohen in *Still Brave* {Bb}

In Class:

November 5

Read Before Class: "Olympia's Maid: Reclaiming Black Female Subjectivity" – Lorraine O'Grady, {Bb} and "Which Bodies Matter? Feminism, Post-Structuralism, Race and the Curious Theoretical Odyssey of the 'Hottentot Venus'" by Zine Magubane in *Hottentot 2010* {Bb}

In Class: Discussion

Imaginations and Futures

Re-Imagining Black Women's Subjectivity

November 10 - Bibliography Due

Read Before Class: Read Before Class: "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference" by Audre Lorde and "In the Closet of the Soul" by Alice Walker

November 12

View: *Watermelon Woman* by Cheryl Dunye

In Class: Discussion

November 17

Read Before Class: "Feminist and Material Concerns" – Lil' Kim, Destiny's Child and "Questions of Consciousness" by Heather Duerre Humann and "Con-di-fication': Black Women, Leadership, and Political Power" – Carole Boyce Davies in *Still Brave* {Bb} and "Beyonce's Fierce Feminism" by Janell Hopson {Bb}

In Class: Discussion

November 19

Read Before Class: *Black Peculiar* – by Khadijah Queen

In Class: Discussion

Black Girls Are From the Future

November 24

Read Before Class: Interview: On Afrofuturism + Gender

<<http://aisforafrofuturism.tumblr.com/post/67961105106/interview-on-afrofuturism-gender>> and Poems by Bianca Spriggs:
<http://www.unionstationmag.com/2010/07/poems-bianca-sprigg/>

In Class: Discussion

November 26 - Thanks Taking Holiday No Class Meeting**December 1**

Presentations

December 3 - Final Assignments

Presentations