

Black Women in the United States
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Class Meeting Times: Monday-Thursday, 10:15 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.
Class Location: Conklin Hall, Room 445

Instructor: Shana A. Russell
Office: 245 Conklin Hall
Office Hours: Thursday 1-3 p.m.
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Course Title: Black Women in the United States

Course Description

This course is a broad survey of the history of black women's work, activism, artistic production, and reproductive labor from slavery to the present. It explores common themes such as sexuality, feminism, reproductive rights, and identity. The purpose of the course is to examine major themes in black women's history and their relationship to certain contemporary issues. The course begins with enslaved women, continues on to black women's activism during reconstruction, the Depression, Civil Rights, and Black Power, and finishes with the role of black women in contemporary popular culture.

Course Policies

Attendance and Punctuality: Students are expected to come to each class on time. This course is discussion driven and participation counts for a significant portion of your grade. Because we have very little time to cover a significant amount of material it is important that you try to attend every class. If you must be absent from class please let me know in advance if possible. Only students with documented excused absences will be permitted to submit assignments after their designated due date.

Academic Integrity: Plagiarism will not be tolerated under any circumstances. This includes using another's ideas in a written assignment without proper citation or cheating on an exam. The University takes plagiarism very seriously. All students are required to sign and submit the University's Academic Integrity Agreement, which will be available via blackboard. For more information see the Academic Integrity Policy at: <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu>.

Classroom Courtesy: Please be respectful of the classroom space by minimizing the number of disruptions. This means showing up on time, not having side conversations, not bringing food into the classroom, and silencing all electronic devices. You are permitted to use electronic devices for the purposes of taking notes and accessing the readings if necessary. Anyone who is caught using a computer or tablet for anything other than class work or similarly using your cell phone to text or talk will be asked to leave and your participation grade will be lowered.

This class covers a significant number of controversial ideas and you are all encouraged to disagree with the assigned texts or with each other. This is both healthy and productive. However, you must remain respectful at all times. Failure to do so will result in removal from the classroom and possibly a lower grade.

Students with Disabilities: If you are impacted by a documented disability and require special

accommodations please contact me as soon as possible.

Course Requirements

Response Paper: (Due Date: 7/18) Every class period we will begin with a brief discussion of a contemporary news item that relates to the experiences of black women. Choose one article, and in one page (single space, 12 point font) explain why the intersection of blackness and womanhood is important to a critical analysis of its content. It is not necessary to summarize the article since you will attach a copy of it with the paper. Make sure to examine the article with a critical eye. Your summary should include a clear thesis explaining your argument about why the analytical lens of black womanhood is necessary to understanding the article. In other words, how should we read it?

Essay: (Due August 5) You will write one major essay for this semester examining *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, by Harriet Jacobs. In a 5 page essay, consider the following quote by Jacobs from the book's preface: "I do earnestly desire to arouse the women of the North to a realizing sense of the condition of two millions of women at the South, still in bondage, suffering what I suffered, and most of them far worse." (Jacobs 1) Thinking about the text as a conversation between and among women answer the following questions: What is the argument that Jacobs is making about slavery? In other words, what methods does she use to engage in abolitionist discourse? Is she effective at accomplishing her goal as outlined by the statement quoted above. In your response consider major themes such as spirituality, sexuality, family, labor, identity, etc. Do not use outside sources. Please refer to specific examples in the text using in text citations.

Grading: Grading will be as follows: Participation - 20%, Essay - 30%, Response Paper - 20%, Final - 30%.

Note on the reading: There are two required texts for this class. All other articles and book chapters will be made available via blackboard.

Required Texts:

Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*
Endesha Ida Mae Holland, *From the Mississippi Delta*

Schedule of Reading and Assignments

July 8: Introduction to Course

Slavery and Reconstruction

July 9: *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Chapters 1-10)

July 10: *Incidents* (Chapters 11-20)

July 11: *Incidents* (Chapters 21-30)

July 15: *Incidents* (Chapter 31-end)

July 16: Elsa Barkely Brown, "To Catch the Vision of Freedom: Reconstructing Southern Black Women's Political History, 1865-1880"

Twentieth Century Black Women's Activism

July 17: Hazel Carby: "Policing the Black Women's Body in an Urban Context"

July 18: Ella Baker and Marvel Cooke: "The Bronx Slave Market" (**ONE PAGE ESSAY DUE**)

July 22: *From the Mississippi Delta* (Chapters 1-5)

July 23: *Mississippi Delta* (Chapters 6-8)

July 24: *Mississippi Delta* (Chapters 9-11)

July 25: *Mississippi Delta* (Chapters 12-14)

July 29: *Mississippi Delta* (Chapters 15-end)

July 30: Danielle McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance—a New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (Chapter 1)

July 31: Angela Davis, "Joanne Little: The Dialectics of Rape" (From Ms. Magazine 1975)

August 1: Angela Davis, *Women, Race, and Class* (Chapter 12)

August 5: **5 PAGE ESSAY DUE!**

August 6: Ruth Feldstein, "'I Don't Trust You Anymore': Nina Simone, Culture, and Black Activism in the 1960s"

Contemporary Issues in Black Feminist Studies

August 7: Constance M. Carroll, "Three's a Crowd: The Dilemma of the Black Woman in Higher Education"

August 8: Mireille Miller-Young, *Hip-Hop Honeys and Da Hustlaz: Black Sexualities in the New Hip-Hop Pornography*

August 12: Beyonce and Feminism (Reading TBA)

August 13: Final Review

August 14: Final Part 1

August 15: Final Part II