

WOMEN'S LITERATURE OF THE AFRICAN DIASPORA

Instructor: Professor Belinda Edmondson

Class time: Mondays 2:30 – 3:50 pm, Wednesdays 1 – 2:20 pm

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This course shall look at intersecting issues of gender and race in the novels of black women from across the African global community, known as the "diaspora". Some of the guiding questions of this course shall be, Is there such a thing as "diaspora literature", particularly in the case of black writers of various nationalities and cultures? Moreover, is there an identifiable tradition of black women's literature, distinctively different from black men's literature? What are the ramifications, literary, political or otherwise, of conclusions either way? Our readings will necessarily encompass an analysis of contemporary issues in feminist and black nationalist discourses.

Course Requirements:

- 1) You shall be required to take four examinations. Midterm Exam 1 and Midterm Exam 2 together will comprise your midterm examination, and will cover Part One of the course. Final Exam 1 and Final Exam 2 together will comprise your final examination, and will cover Parts Two and Three of the course. The typical exam format will consist of roughly six questions requiring detailed and concise answers on a specific reading, poem or film. The questions will usually involve comparative analysis of two or more items. Final Exam Part 2 will feature both an in-class essay and questions. Your responses must be in full sentences and grammatically correct; points will be taken off for poor grammar. In the case of exceptionally poor grammar, you will receive no points at all.
- 2) You shall give a written three-minute presentation (roughly a page in length) to the class on some aspect of the course materials, some of which may require outside research. (A sign-up sheet will be available the first and second days of class.) *The presentation must be uploaded to SafeAssign **before** it has been presented.*
- 3) Students shall write, *and first upload to SafeAssign **before** handing in a hard copy*, an essay of roughly 1300 words (or 5 pages) on a topic of my choosing. The paper should be in MLA format, with a proper title and all the required formatting of citations, bibliography, etc.
- 4) Proper note-taking is a critical component in writing a good exam; therefore, we will periodically review our notes for the course and discuss ways in which to take better notes. Students will be asked at various points during the class to read out their notes on a preceding lecture. If you are absent for a class, you are still responsible for the notes on that class. Remember: The purpose of note-taking is not merely so that you can recall information, but, more importantly, so that you can recall key points of analysis on that information. Therefore, your notes may record not only my ideas, but also the conflicting opinions within the class on that subject.

Grading Rubric and Policy

I use an alternate grading system so that I have more latitude in issuing grades. Under this system, exams are marked on a scale of 100 points: under 40 is a Fail. 40-49 is a D. 50-59 is a C. 60 – 63 is a C+. 64 - 74 is a B. 75 to 79 is a B+. 80 and over is A. While on your exams and papers I will note whether a paper is an A+ (90 and above), or that your paper is in the B-/C+ territory, the grade that will be recorded is the one that corresponds to the actual percentage grade (a 64 may be a B-, but on your final grade score I will record it as a B, etc.)

For essays, a grade of A+ is scored at 95, an A at 85, a B+ at 75, a B at 70, a C+ at 60, a C at 55, a D at 45, an F at 30.

Midterm Exams (combined): 40 percent of total grade

Final Exam: 40 percent of total grade

Essay: 20 percent of total grade

Presentation: a superior rating adds 3 points to final score

OR

Participation: a superior rating adds 3 points to final score

Please note: you may receive extra points for a superior presentation or superior participation, but *not* for both.

All exams and papers are evaluated in three key areas: content, grammar, and logic. Content is the most important of the three areas (a student may fail an exam or paper for lack of content, for example, even with good grammar and logic) but one cannot attain a grade of C or higher without at least marginally competent grammar and logic.

To attain a grade of A an exam/quiz/essay must attain a superior rating in all three areas. In other words, it must rank as excellent on all three counts, free of grammatical mistakes, with a seamless logical flow from one idea to the next, and with some original interpretation.

B+ is given for an above-average analysis which shows some level of excellence in content and logic with very good or excellent grammar, but has some minor flaws in grammar and logic.

A grade of B is achieved by above average analysis in content with competent grammar and logic.

A grade of C+ is achieved if the analysis is better than average—more than half of what should be there—but with less than competent use of grammar and logic.

A grade of C is achieved if the analysis is middling—roughly half of what should be there—with less than competent use of grammar and logic.

A grade of D represents subpar content—if less than half of the necessary content is present. A grade of D may also represent excessively poor use of grammar and logic, to the point of near-incomprehension.

A grade of F is given if there is no content or almost none. An F is also achieved by extremely poor grammar—to the point of incomprehensibility—and lack of logic. Finally, an F can be given for a late or missed paper or missed exam.

PLEASE NOTE: If you fail to give a presentation, or fail to take *any one of the four* examinations, YOU WILL FAIL THE COURSE. Therefore you cannot, for instance, complete 3 of the required 4 items and hope to pass by averaging out your grade. I do NOT give temporary incomplete grades unless there are extremely good reasons to do so, such as a documentable illness or other such contingencies. In the case of medical or family emergencies, I will need to receive documentation of an official nature that contains the signature of someone who is not related to you: a signed doctor's note, for example. (Please note: a prescription order is not sufficient.) If you foresee problems in completing the course let me know in advance. For those who have documentable reasons for missing any of the exams or the presentation, I will be happy to schedule make-up exams and presentations.

POLICY ON ATTENDANCE: I do not have an attendance policy, save for exams and presentation schedules. You are free to attend, or not, as you choose. I do, however, have a late policy; if you are more than 15 minutes late without a documentable excuse you may not attend class. Late-comers inevitably disrupt the class discussion. Either way, whether or not you attend class, you are responsible for any information that is transmitted during class time, whether that be a change of exam time, a cancellation of a presentation, and so forth. My advice is to partner with another student whose notes you can borrow in case you must be absent. Do not expect me to reproduce an entire lecture during office hours. I simply cannot, and will not.

Since I have a joint appointment in English, students who have registered through African-American/African Studies or Women's and Gender Studies can apply to receive credit for this course in English, provided that they have taken and passed English 101 and 102, or the equivalents.

Plagiarism Policy

Plagiarism is a serious academic offense, for which a student may receive a range of punishments, including failing the course, a permanent record on his or her final transcript, suspension or even expulsion from the University. Please familiarize yourself with the University's definition of plagiarism by reviewing the Rutgers University Policy on Academic Integrity, here: <http://wp.rutgers.edu/courses/plagiarism>.

Some plagiarism is unintentional. Therefore, for the purposes of this class no secondary sources should be used, either through direct quotation or substantial paraphrase, in any student presentation, exam or essay without prior permission of the instructor. If you have been given permission to use secondary sources in your submitted work, please follow the appropriate methods

of attribution.

If I suspect any student of plagiarism I will bring it to his/her attention and report it to the administration. We faculty have a professional obligation to report all instances of plagiarism in our classes. Failure to do so promotes inequity among the student body, given that honest students have not had the advantage of using external sources in preparing their work.

Please read the attached Academic Integrity Policy, and sign and return the attached Rutgers Integrity Pledge.

Disability Services and Accommodations

Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines>. If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus's disability services office will provide you with a Letter of Accommodations. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. To begin this process, please complete the Registration form on the ODS web site at: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/registration-form>. For more information please contact Kate Torres at (973)353-5375 or in the Office of Disability Services in the Paul Robeson Campus Center, in suite 219 or by contacting odsnewark@rutgers.edu.

Required Texts:

Their Eyes were Watching God, Zora Neale Hurston (USA); *Juletane*, Myriam Warner-Vieyra (Martinique/France); *The Joys of Motherhood*, Buchi Emecheta (Nigeria); *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, Edwidge Danticat (Haiti)

Required Readings:

"Womanism", Alice Walker (USA); "Girl", by Jamaica Kincaid; "A Bronzeville Mother", "Emmett Till", Gwendolyn Brooks (USA); "The Arrangers of Marriage", Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (Nigeria); "Women Like Us", Edwidge Danticat (Haiti).

Required Media:

"We Should All Be Feminists", Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (Nigeria) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hg3umXU_q; "Formation", Beyoncé (USA) <https://youtu.be/WfMIFxrMb18>

Books are available at the University Bookstore. All other course materials (poetry, definitions,

film) are posted online on Blackboard under Course Documents.

Course Schedule:

9/7: Introduction. Sign up for presentations.

9/12: Discussion of stereotypes of African-descended women.

9/14: Discussion question: Is Beyoncé a feminist? Watch “Formation” (video). Read definition of “Womanism”.

9/ 19: *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, chs. 1-6.

9/21: *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, chs. 7-11

9/26: *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, chs. 12-end

9/28: *Juletane* pp 1-20

10/3: *Juletane* pp 21- 59

10/5: *Juletane* pp 59 - end

10/10: review/catch-up

10/12: review/catch-up

10/17: **MIDTERM EXAMINATION PART ONE**

10/19: **MIDTERM EXAMINATION PART TWO**

10/24: “A Bronzeville Mother”, “The Last Quatrain of Emmett Till” (poems)

10/26: Gwendolyn Brooks poetry cont’d

10/31: *The Joys of Motherhood*, chs. 1-5

11/2: *The Joys of Motherhood*, chs. 6-9

11/7: *The Joys of Motherhood*, chs. 10-15

11/9: *The Joys of Motherhood*, chs. 16-end

11/14: “We Should All Be Feminists” (video)

11/16: “The Arrangers of Marriage”

11/21: review/catch-up

11/23: NO CLASS

11/28: **FINAL EXAMINATION PART ONE**

11/30: *Breath, Eyes, Memory* chs 1- 10

12/5: *Breath, Eyes, Memory* chs 11 -21

12/7: *Breath, Eyes, Memory* chs 21 - end

12/12: “Women Like Us”

12/14: catch-up/review

12/19: **IN-CLASS FINAL EXAMINATION, PART TWO 3 – 6 pm.**