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Topics in U.S. Women's History:
African American Women's History, Slavery to the Present

Fall 2016
 HIL-104

Tuesday, 2:30-5:10

Summary

Welcome to this writing-intensive seminar in African American Women's History. This semester, we will explore aspects of African American women's lives from slavery to the present. Issues we will consider include: family life, work, political activism, and sexuality. Our starting point is that there is no one African American woman's voice, and no single or definitive African American woman's perspective. Consequently, we will explore the very different kinds of experiences black women have had over time, and across lines of class, region, and sexual orientation. It is thus worth emphasizing what is perhaps obvious: this is NOT a comprehensive survey and there is so much that we could cover that we will not get to this semester.

Throughout, we will focus on how other groups have sought to represent and control African American women's lives and bodies, *and* how African American women themselves have worked to represent themselves. We will also be asking how historians, novelists, filmmakers and others interpret the past. In other words, we will ask how stories about African American women have taken shape, and how certain myths developed and persisted. One important goal of this class, then, is for you to *think as historians*: we will read and analyze both primary and secondary sources, paying careful attention to who and what is included and excluded from these sources.

The format of the course will be a combination of discussion, lectures, and small group activities. We will often read, watch, and discuss together primary sources together. As well, this is a writing-intensive course and we will often work --in and out of class --on writing exercises. Because of the central role discussion will play, **it is essential that you complete the required readings and the required film viewings by the date indicated.**

Required Texts:

Books. For sale at R-N Bookstore, at Bradley Hall, 110 Warren Street. (973) 353-5377; also available on reserve at the Dana Library.

Fields, Mamie Garvin (with Karen Fields). *Lemon Swamp and Other Places: A Carolina Memoir* (NY: Free Press, Macmillan, 1983).

Jacobs, Harriet. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, edited by Nellie McKay (New York: Norton, 2001).

Moody, Anne. *Coming of Age in Mississippi* (NY: Bantam Doubleday/Dell, 1968).

Royster, Jacqueline Jones, ed., *Southern Horrors and Other Writings: The Anti-Lynching Campaign of Ida B. Wells, 1892-1900* (Boston: Bedford Books, 1997).

Plus online Readings, available either as links from this syllabus or on the course blackboard site under Course Documents, organized according to the date at which the readings are required.

Please bring all required readings to class.

Required Films. These films are available for rental through a variety of online sources, and will also be on reserve at the Dana Library (where they are NON-circulating). I encourage you to team up and watch together.

Wild Women Don't Have the Blues (1989)

Imitation of Life (1934)

Grading, Requirements, and Expectations:

- Attendance and Class Participation (20%)
- Response papers (10%)
- 4 Quizzes (10%)
- 3 Midterms Exams (30%)
- 5 page paper (draft and revision) (30%)

1. **Attendance and Class Participation (20%).** This crucial component of the course includes:

- Showing up prepared (with required readings). If you must miss a class for family/personal/health reasons, please let me know in advance if at all possible. If you miss more than one class for medical reasons, you must provide a doctor's note. I will usually take attendance twice each week—once at the outset of class and again after the break. Missing more than **two classes total**, will affect a final grade. **Any student who misses four or more class sessions through any combination of excused and unexcused absences may not earn credit in this class.** Such students should withdraw to avoid getting an F.

- Participation. You must complete the reading each week and be ready to contribute to discussions and other class exercises in a thoughtful and consistent manner. Discussion questions on the syllabus can help to guide your reading. For certain weeks, you will also have specific assignments required for that class. We will often do group work and writing exercises in class and your work in all of these settings will count toward your participation grade.

- Tumblr Posts.

Students are required to create an African American Women's History Tumblr page for the course. This is intended to be a fun way to keep up, and to plug into social media for educational purposes. Over the course of the semester, students are required to post a minimum of **ten** entries. Of the ten, **eight** entries should be in direct conversation with course readings. The remaining two can be of any medium (Youtube, image, audio, web link, quote, ect.) and on any topic that is in some way related to the themes of the course. Of the eight course-related posts, please do not post more than **two images** or more than **four quotes** (these should come directly from class readings). Please curate your space thoughtfully, as this is good place to track your interests over the semester. This is also a space for you to highlight topics and texts that stood out to you. You are encouraged (but not required) to enter more than ten posts as this space might be helpful to you over the course of the semester as you formulate response papers and your final paper. Please have at least four entries posted and plan to share the link to your Tumblr page October 4th. If you are unfamiliar with Tumblr, please set up your account (tumblr.com) well in advance of October 4 in case of technological difficulties. If you are having trouble creating a Tumblr, please get in touch with the TA, Naomi Extra (ne100@rutgers.edu).

2. **Three Response papers (10%).** At three points during the semester, you must email me a response to that week's required readings. There are two options for when you may submit each of these three response papers; see the syllabus for the dates and the questions to answer. I must receive these responses by 9 pm on Monday nights, and they **must relate to the material we will be covering in class the next day.** (In other words, you may not turn in a response to a question about Harriet Jacobs in November.) These response papers are the first step toward your final essay and are essential building blocks in this writing intensive seminar.

- Response paper I (1-page, on slavery): September 13 or September 20
- Response paper II (2-pages, close reading of a scene): September 27 or October 4

- Response paper III (2-3 pages, film analysis): October 18 or October 25

Note: You will not get a letter grade on response papers; you will receive comments and a check, check +, or check -.

2. **Four unannounced quizzes** (10%).

- During the first—OR THE LAST—15 minutes of **four** classes, there will be a quiz, based on the material required for that day of class, or based on the material that we've covered in class that day. The lowest quiz grade may be dropped at the end of the semester. Please note that class will begin promptly each week and we will meet through 5 or 5:10. If you arrive late or leave early on a quiz day, you may not take the quiz, and you will receive an F for that quiz.

3. **3 Exams** (30%). There will be three short in-class midterm exams: October 11, November 8, and December 13. These exams are designed for you to be keep up with the material and to think about themes and change over time. More TBA.

4. **Essay**, 5 pgs., 12 pt font (30%)

- Every one must write an essay, **and then revise** it as a final writing project. The essay topics will be based on your response papers, and will give you a chance to elaborate on the ideas that you begin to develop in those short ungraded assignments.
 - Writing Workshop and brainstorm session: November 8
 - Paper topics: due between Nov 8-15
 - Draft: November 22
 - Final revised essay: December 22 (at the latest)

Your grade will be based on how you engage with the essay-writing process as a whole and not just your final essay.

All assignments are due on the dates indicated. **Grades will be lowered on late papers** unless you have talked with me in advance and received an official extension.

A few other points.

--Rutgers University treats cheating and plagiarism as serious offenses. In your papers, you must cite and provide reference for all language **and/or** ideas that are not your own. Violations of the university honor code will be prosecuted to the full extent that is permitted.

--In this course, we will be reading and discussing material on which we may not all agree; some of the themes and imagery we encounter in the sources may seem offensive or otherwise controversial. In this context especially, it is crucial for us to combine the free expression of ideas with respect for each other.

--Please turn cell phones off and **PUT PHONES & ALL OTHER DEVICES AWAY** before class begins. If you want to take notes on a laptop, you must email me in advance to receive written permission, and remember that only that document (or related required sources) may be open. Texting or emailing or otherwise using technology in an inappropriate way at any time during class is absolutely **prohibited**. If your phone rings during class, I will ask you to leave the room to turn it off. If this becomes a recurring problem, a student will be counted as absent for that entire day. If any phones are visible during class, this will create an impression of texting, etc. That student will be counted as absent for that day.

--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.

CLASS SCHEDULE

September 6: Introductions. Why African American Women's History?

September 13: Slavery, I

• Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents*, BEGIN: Preface-Chapter 21. (NOTE: This is the main reading for this week.)

• Deborah Gray White, "Jezebel and Mammy: The Mythology of Female Slavery," in *Ar'n't I a Woman?* (1985, revised 1999), pp. 27-61.

Response Paper I, option 1: What scene or episode stands out to you in the first half of *Incidents*, and why? Briefly *describe* what happens in that scene (1-2 paragraphs); below that summary, please *list* 2-3 quotes from Jacobs which highlight the significance of what you are saying and describing.

Discussion Questions: How do Harriet Jacobs and Lydia Marie Child (in her preface) each claim rights for enslaved women? How do they use common ideas about "womanhood" to fight for emancipation? What are some of the ways that Harriet Jacobs resists slavery or describes other enslaved people resisting slavery? What are the stereotypes that Deborah Gray White describes?

September 20: Slavery II

• Jacobs, *Incidents*, finish.

• Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave* (1845): Preface, by William Lloyd Garrison, p. ix-xix (see blackboard), and chapter 10, pp. 61-75; focus in particular on p. 65, "I have already intimated" (near the bottom of the page), through p. 73, "...he suffered me to go unpunished":

<http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/douglass/douglass.html>

Response Paper I, option 2: What scene or episode stands out to you in the second half of *Incidents* or in the chapter by Frederick Douglass, and why? Briefly *describe* what happens in that scene (1-2 paragraphs); below that summary, please *list* 2-3 quotes from either Jacobs or Douglass which highlight the significance of what you are saying and describing.

Discussion Questions: What strategies does Harriet Jacobs use in *Incidents* to resist slavery as compared to those that Frederick Douglass describes in this chapter from his autobiography? How does motherhood shape the experiences of slavery that Jacobs has? How does being a man shape the experiences of slavery that Douglass has? How does Jacobs feel after she has escaped from the South?

September 27: Reconstruction, Jim Crow, and Reform

• Royster, *Southern Horrors and Other Writings*: Introduction (pp. 1-41, plus illustrations on pages that follow), and *Southern Horrors*, pp. 50-100, pp. 133-138.

• Tera W. Hunter, "Domination and Resistance: The Politics of Wage Household Labor in New South Atlanta," (1993), reprinted in Darlene Clark Hine, et.al., eds., *We Specialize in the Wholly Impossible: A Reader in Black Women's History* (NY: Carlson, 1995), pp. 343-357.

- Constitutional Amendments, 13-15 (Reconstruction-era amendments):

<http://www.blackpast.org/?q=primary/reconstruction-amendments>

Response Paper II, option 1: Choose one specific passage by Ida B. Wells (and *not* the editor of the volume, who wrote more recently), and in 2 pages (about 4 paragraphs), discuss its significance. Consider WHAT Wells writes (the content of her argument) and HOW she writes it (the style of her argument... her words, images, language, tone, etc.). Draw on at least two quotes from Wells to support your ideas about how/why that passage is significant.

Discussion Questions: How did black women activists like Wells work to change the ways that many white people viewed African Americans? What was Ida B. Wells angry about? What is Tera Hunter's thesis? How did the women she writes about resist discriminatory labor practices? What are the similarities and differences between the women that Tera Hunter writes about and enslaved women?

October 4: Ordinary Life and the Politics of Respectability

- Mamie Garvin Fields, *Lemon Swamp*, excerpts TBA.
- TBA.

Response Paper II, option 2. Choose one specific incident that Mamie Garvin Fields describes in *Lemon Swamp* that illustrates how Fields (and/or her relatives/friends) portrayed themselves as respectable, and in 2 pages (about 4 paragraphs), discuss its significance. Consider WHAT Fields describes (the content of this passage), and HOW she writes (the style of her presentation, her tone, language, words, images, etc.). Draw on at least two quotes from Fields to support your ideas about how/why this incident is significant and revealing.

Discussion Questions: How and why do *appearances* matter to Mamie Garvin Fields? Come to class with one example/passage in mind from the text through which to explore this question. What are some of the big turning points in her life? What does she include in this memoir? What does she not include?

October 11: Exam, I

- Exam I.
- In class film: *Wild Women Don't Have the Blues*
(You will need to take notes on this film... see Response Paper question below).

October 18: Sexuality and Morality; Migration and the Harlem Renaissance

- Hazel Carby, "It Jus Be's Dat Way Sometime": The Sexual Politics of Women's Blues," reprinted in *Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women's History* (1994)
- TBA.
- Music. TBA

Response Paper III, option 1 (2-3 pages): How does the documentary film *Wild Women Don't Have the Blues* characterize the experiences of African American women? How would you assess the film in light of of the other readings?

Discussion Questions: TBA

October 25: The Depression and WWII: Black Women, Work, and Popular Culture

- Alice Childress, *Like One of the Family* (1956, excerpts)
- Darlene Clark Hine, "The Housewives League of Detroit: Black Women and Economic Nationalism," in Nancy Hewitt, ed., *Visible Women: New Essays on American Activism* (1993), pp. 223-242.

- Ella Baker and Marvel Cooke, “Domestic Slavery: The Bronx Slave Market (1935),” in Thomas R. Frazier, ed., *Afro-American History: Primary Sources*
- **Required Film:** *Imitation of Life* (1934)

Note: There are two versions of *Imitation of Life*; please make sure that you watch the 1934 version.

Response Paper III, option 2. How does the 1934 feature film characterize the experiences of African American women? How would you assess the film in light of the other readings?

Discussion Questions. How do these sources depict black women’s relationships to community, and how do they depict the labor that African American women do? Come to class with a specific scene from the film and a specific passage from *Childress* that you think is important to discuss.

OPTIONAL/EXTRA CREDIT: (More on this TBA)

Explore some of the images of black women and World War II located in the National Archives and the Library of Congress. (pics 141-159) Based on the images, what conclusions can you draw about black women and World War II? How do you make sense of these images in relation to representations of black women from this period in popular culture (that is, in the films)?

<http://www.archives.gov/research/african-americans/ww2-pictures/#women>

November 1: Civil Rights/Black Power, I

- Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, through page 250

Discussion Questions: How or why does Moody’s relationship with her mother matter to the first half of the book? What are some of the turning points for Moody as she moves from childhood to adolescence and to more sustained activism? Choose one passage from each section (Childhood, High School, etc.), that helps you to consider that question.

November 8: Exam II

- Exam II
- Writing Workshop (you will receive paper topics that will allow you to build on one of your three response papers for your final paper assignment, and will brainstorm). You must submit your paper topic between November 8-15.

November 15: Civil Rights/Black Power, II

- Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, finish if you did not do so already.
- Fannie Lou Hamer, speech to the credentials committee and the Democratic National

Convention (1964):

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G-RoVzAqhYk> (audio)

<http://www.infoplease.com/t/hist/hamer-dnc1964/> (text)

- TBA

Discussion Questions: How or why does Moody’s relationship with her mother matter to the second half of the book? How does Moody feel at the end of this memoir, and why? What stands out about *what* Hamer claims in the way of rights and power, and what stands out about *how* she makes these claims?

November 22. NO CLASS

Tuesday is Thursday at R-N

Paper Drafts Due, via bb.

November 29. Black Women and Feminism in the 70s and 80s.

• Frances Beale, Mary Ann Weathers, Linda LaRue, Patricia Haden et.al., Pauli Murray, excerpts from *Words of Fire* (1995), pp. 145-197.

• “A Black Feminist Statement: Combahee River Collective,” in Cherie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings By Radical Women of Color* (1983)

• Johnnie Tillmon, “Welfare as a Woman’s Issue” (1972)

• Premilla Nadasen, “‘We Do Whatever Becomes Necessary’: Johnnie Tillmon, Welfare Rights, and Black Power,” in Dayo Gore et.al. eds., *Want to Start a Revolution?*, pp. 317-338.

Discussion Questions: How did black women writers and activists from the late 1960s into the 1980s seek to change the terms on which white feminists and other white people viewed them? How did black women writers and activists in the late 1960s and 70s seek to change the terms on which black male activists and other African Americans viewed them? What is Premilla Nadasen’s thesis about welfare activism?

December 6: Black Women and Hip Hop

• Morgan, *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost*, excerpts

• TBA

Assignment: Bring in an example of today’s hip hop and provide a brief analysis of how black women are portrayed. For example, what do the lyrics say, what kinds of visual images are produced, and who are the artists producing them?

December 13: Exam 3.**Looking Back, Looking Ahead Black Women, Popular Culture and History**

• Exam 3.

• Beyonce, “Formation” (2016): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WfMIFxrMb18>

• Michelle Obama, speech at DNC (2016): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ZNNWYqDU948>

Assignment: Consider (no writing required!) these sources in historical context. To do so, ask yourselves the following questions:

1. How does thinking about this source as relevant to more than our own moment in time, but instead as part of African American women’s history, change our understanding of it?

2. How is this source **part of a longer tradition**—a longer tradition of black women’s activism, of discussions about and representations of black women, of black women’s resistance, of political battles waged in the past, etc.?

3. How is this source **a departure from a longer tradition**—a longer tradition of black women’s activism, of discussions about and representations of black women, of black women’s resistance, of political battles waged in the past, etc.? (Of course, the same source could extend and depart from earlier traditions and patterns.)

4. How does this source *use and draw on* history?

Final Revised Essay Due: December 22 (at the latest)

