ENG 352:416: Seminar in Modern American Fiction

Womanifesto: Black Women Writers in Literature

Tuesdays and Thursdays: 10:00 AM-11:20 AM
Room: Conklin Hall 348

Professor: Dr. Melanie R. Hill
Office Hours: Tuesdays from 1:00 PM-2:00 PM and by appointment
Location: Hill Hall 512
Phone: (973) 353-5182
Email: mhr197@english.rutgers.edu

Course Overview:

Exploring the distinguished literary canon of twentieth and twenty-first century African-American women writers from Zora Neale Hurston and Toni Morrison to Maya Angelou and Ntozake Shange, this course will examine black women's writing through fiction, poetry, and drama. Using Jazz, Gospel, Neo-Soul, and Hip-Hop music genres, this course will explore the performance of the black woman's voice in twentieth and twenty-first century African American literature. From writers Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker, Natalie Baszile, and Audre Lorde to
musicians, Jill Scott, Ms. Lauryn Hill, Erykah Badu, India Arie, Abbey Lincoln, and Nina Simone, we will analyze how these writers/artists used their pens and musical voices to assert social and political freedom. As both text and performance, prose and poetry, literature and music, the novels and songs of these writers and artists offer excellent resources for our investigation of the literary and musical performance of the black woman writer.

In this course, we will explore particular pieces of literature from Audre Lorde, Alice Walker, Sonia Sanchez, Ntozake Shange, Zora Neale Hurston, and Natalie Baszile that effectively mark the presence of black writers and poets from the twentieth century to present times. Juxtaposing spirituals, blues, and jazz with these works, we will also examine the intersections of literature and music in Shange’s and Angelou’s works as sound and text provide a critical framework through which we examine the breadth of the African American literary canon. As both text and performance, prose and poetry, and literature and music, the works of these authors offer an excellent resource for our investigation of black literary studies.

This course is designed to involve students in the kinds of research that the discipline of literary studies currently demands, including: working with primary sources and archival materials; reviewing the critical literature; using online databases of historical newspapers, periodicals, and other cultural materials; exploring relevant contexts in literary, linguistic, and cultural history; studying the etymological history and changing meanings of words; experimenting with new methods of computational analysis of texts; and other methodologies. This course typically involves several main texts that are studied intensively from a variety of approaches. Research exercises throughout the semester will enable and culminate in a final paper project: a scholarly essay of 10-11 pages. The final project must emerge out of each student’s intensive, independent research agenda.

In-class assignments and reading response exercises (“Think Pieces”) throughout the semester will enable and culminate in a final paper project: a scholarly essay of 10-11 pages that will be turned in online via Canvas during final exam week at the end of the semester. At the end of the semester, students will also present their final paper project idea in a creative form (i.e. Power Point presentation, et al.). Make this presentation creative!

Course Goals:

- Comprehend how canonical works in African American Literature since the twentieth century reflect the current cultures of which African American authors write.
- Class discussions, reading responses (think pieces), formal essays, and in-class assignments will help carry students to a higher level of literary analyses of assigned texts.
- Students will trace, through assigned literary and historical texts, the development of African American consciousness, attitudes, and ideals.
- Recognize in literary and historical texts themes that continue to challenge America (i.e. class, gender and race consciousness, violence, religious values).
- Develop and express, formally and informally, perspectives on said African American themes to increase critical thinking.
Use research to augment understanding and to develop analytical papers that demonstrate students' deep investment in assigned texts and writing responses over the course of the semester.

You will be able to purchase the following required texts at the Rutgers University—Newark Barnes and Nobles Bookstore located at the Hahne's Building 42 Halsey Street; Newark, NJ 07102. Bookstore Phone Number: (973) 353-2200

**Required Texts:**

Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937)

Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969)


Alice Walker, *In Love and Trouble* (1973)


Alice Walker, *Her Blue Body Everything We Know* (1991)

Sonia Sanchez, *Shake Loose My Skin* (1999)

Issa Rae, *Misadventures of Awkward Black Girl* (2011)

Natalie Baszile, *Queen Sugar* (2014)


(*any short stories that are assigned will be distributed in .pdf files via email to all students*)
(*some texts are recommended reading that will help you throughout the semester; recommended texts are not required texts*)

Some of our Featured Music:
Jill Scott, Woman (2015)
Jill Scott, The Light of the Sun (2011)
Beyoncé, Lemonade (2016)
Soulé Knowles, A Seat at the Table (2016)
Ms. Lauryn Hill, MTV Unplugged (2001)
Ms. Lauryn Hill, The Mis-education of Lauryn Hill (1998)
India Arie, Acoustic Soul (2001)
India Arie, Songversation (2013)
India Arie, Testimony Vol. 1, Life and Relationship (2006)
India Arie, Testimony Vol. 2, Love and Politics (2009)

Some of our Featured Films and Documentaries:
Beyoncé, Lemonade
The Women of Brewster Place
Maya Angelou, And Still I Rise
Their Eyes Were Watching God
Queen Sugar (OWN)
Issa Rae, Insecure (HBO)

Recommended Texts:
Zora N. Hurston, The Sanctified Church: The Folklore Writings of Zora Neale Hurston
Dolan Hubbard, The Sermon and the African-American Literary Imagination
Richard J. Douglass-Chin, Preacher Woman Sings the Blues
Kelly Brown Dougaliss, Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God
Alice Walker, In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens
Angela Davis, Blues Legacies and Black Feminisms: Gertrude “Ma” Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday
Toni Cade Bambara, The Black Woman: An Anthology
Imani Perry, May We Forever Stand: A History of the Black National Anthem
Houston A. Baker, Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature
Beverly Guy-Sheftall, Editor—Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought
Toni Cade Bambara, The Black Woman
Hayes and Williams, Black Women and Music
Ntozake Shange, Lost in Language and Sound
Trudier Harris—Saints, Sinners, Saviors: Strong Black Women in African-American Literature
Rutgers University—Newark, Faculty of Arts & Sciences, Spring 2020

**Academic Honesty:** Any student who violates basic codes of academic conduct—through plagiarism, cheating on exams or assignments, double submission of papers, or any other means, can expect to fail the course and face disciplinary action from Rutgers University.

**Academic Integrity:** As an academic community dedicated to the creation, dissemination, and application of knowledge, Rutgers University is committed to fostering an intellectual and ethical environment based on the principles of academic integrity. Academic integrity is essential to the success of the University's educational and research missions, and violations of academic integrity constitute serious offenses against the entire academic community.

**Academic Integrity Policy:**
- http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy/

**Email:** Please check your email regularly. Feel free to discuss any questions you have regarding the material we flesh out during class with me after class or office hours.

**Assignments:** You are expected to read all of the texts and attend class prepared. Class attendance and participation are essential to each student’s full development in this course. Please come to class on time! I expect each student to attend class ready to delve into each text and discuss the materials in an engaging manner. Attendance is mandatory. Any unexcused absences will result in a lowering of your final grade by ⅓ of a grade for each unexcused absence (e.g. from A- to B+). If you cannot attend class due to an illness or extreme emergency, it is important that you email me in advance.

**Class Percentages:**
- **Reading Response Paper/Think Piece 1 (3 pages):** 15%
- **Reading Response Paper/Think Piece 2 (5 pages):** 25%
- **Class Participation:** 15%
- **In-Class Assignments:** 10%
- **Final Paper/Project Presentation:** 35%
In-class assignments will involve two students per week submitting 4-5 discussion questions and several sentences about what was most engaging about the readings for that week. This work will be submitted online via Canvas. The length of this discussion question assignment is 1-2 pages. All in-class assignments must be submitted to Canvas the day BEFORE our scheduled class (Monday) by 4:00 PM. A sign-up sheet will be provided in class and on Canvas. All Reading Response/Think Piece Papers must be submitted to Canvas no later than the designated day and time noted on the course calendar.

**In-Class Work:** You should come to class prepared to participate in small and large group discussions. Please be respectful of everyone’s opinions, presence, and person in this course. A primary purpose of our discussions is to give you the opportunity to practice developing interpretations of the texts. While you are encouraged to offer differing interpretations, you should do so in a respectful and thoughtful manner.

**Final Paper Project Proposals will be due on Canvas on Wednesday, March 25th by 2:00 PM.**

Several weeks before the end of the semester, you will turn in a final project proposal (1.5-2 double-spaced pages that tell what topic and themes your final paper will encompass) that you can later incorporate into your final project. There are three forms this will take:

1. At the end of the semester, each student will give a presentation about your final paper topic (you can present this in Power Point, Prezi, et al; you can be creative with this presentation!). You must turn in a formal proposal stating the project, its goals, and the research that will underlie it by March 25th. Your proposal should be as clear and specific as possible, as this will form part of the basis on which I evaluate your final project/paper. In the proposal, you must pay equal attention to the paper project and to the research that scaffolds it.

For the critical essay, here are a couple of ideas to use as you're planning your final paper topic:

2. A literature review analyzing and synthesizing the current scholarly conversation about your topic. Your literature review should not simply be a summary of others’ arguments. Rather, you must make clear the intervention that your essay will make in the field and the thesis of your own argument.

3. A close reading of three non-consecutive passages from the major text you will be analyzing in the final project. These passages should be central to the argument you want to make about that text; that is, rather than selecting random quotations, make sure to choose passages that can help you develop a strong argument about the text. As with option two, your final paper should make the thesis and structure of your essay clear.
Rutgers University–Newark Policies

Rutgers University–Newark, Faculty of Arts & Sciences, Spring 2020

• **Academic Integrity**: As an academic community dedicated to the creation, dissemination, and application of knowledge, Rutgers University is committed to fostering an intellectual and ethical environment based on the principles of academic integrity. Academic integrity is essential to the success of the University's educational and research missions, and violations of academic integrity constitute serious offenses against the entire academic community.

• **Academic Integrity Policy**: http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy/

• **Disability Services**: Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, you must complete and submit the Registration Form, schedule and complete an intake meeting, and submit appropriate documentation. If your request for reasonable accommodations is approved, you will receive a Letter of Accommodations (LOA), which you should present privately to the instructor as early in the semester as possible. Accommodations are not retroactive and are effective only upon submission of the LOA to the instructor. Please begin the process by completing and submitting the Registration Form, Applying for Services, available at the website below.
  • Applying for Services: https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/applying-for-services

• **Documentation Guidelines**: https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines

• **Letter of Accommodations** (LOA): https://ods.rutgers.edu/my-accommodations/letter-of-accommodations

• Office of Disability Services (ODS)
  Suite 219, Paul Robeson Campus Center
  (973) 353-5315
  odsnewark@rutgers.edu

• Religious Holiday Policy: Students are advised to provide timely notification to instructors about necessary absences for religious observances and are responsible for making up the work or exams according to an agreed-upon schedule.

Learning Resources:
• Rutgers Learning Center (tutoring services)
Room 140, Bradley Hall
(973) 353-5608
http://www.ncas.rutgers.edu/rlc
• Writing Center (tutoring and writing workshops)
Room 126, Conklin Hall
(973) 353-5847
nwc@rutgers.edu

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https://www.ncas.rutgers.edu/writingcenter
Course Calendar (*the professor reserves the right to change the course calendar at her discretion*):

Week One
Tues. January 21st
First Day of Class
- Introductions
- Overview of Syllabus
- Ntozake Shange, *I Live in Music*
- Jill Scott, *Womanifesto*
- Notification of Thursday’s Reading Assignment

Thurs. January 23rd:
Short Story Assignment: Mae G. Henderson, “Black Women Writers’ Right to Write”
Short Essay Assignment: *In Her Own Write*
Brittany Cooper: *The Crunk Feminist Collection*
Music Selection: Ms. Lauryn Hill
“‘To Zion”
“I Find it Hard to Say (Rebel)”
Music Selection: Jill Scott in Performance at the White House

Week Two:
January 28th:
Comedic Narratives
Read half of Issa Rae, *Misadventures of Awkward Black Girl*
Visual Selection: *Insecure* series HBO

January 30th:
Submit one-paged single-spaced reading response on Issa Rae via Canvas
Finish Issa Rae, *Misadventures* and prepare to discuss full text on Tuesday, Feb. 4th

Week Three:
Sonic Language Series Part I
February 4th: Issa Rae discussion and start reading Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Thursday, February 6th:
The Promise Song
Sonic Language Series Part II
Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*
See Film: *Their Eyes Were Watching God*
Supplemental Article: *Looking for Zora* by Alice Walker
Supplemental Text: *Deep River: Music and Memory in Harlem Renaissance Thought*

**Week Four:**
**February 11/13**
Imani Perry, *Breathe: A Letter to My Sons*

**Week Five:**
**February 18/20**
*Jazz, Spoken Word, and the Dynamics of the Black Woman’s Singing Voice*
Ntozake Shange, *Sassafras, Cypress & Indigo*

**Week Six:**
**February 25/27**
Gloria Naylor, *The Women of Brewster Place*
Music and Visual Selection: *Lemonade*
Solange Knowles: *A Seat at the Table*
*(Think Piece Paper 1 Due Wednesday, February 26th by 4:00 PM)*

**Week Seven:**
**March 3/5**
Alice Walker, *In Love and Trouble*
Alice Walker, *Her Blue Body Everything We Know* (poems)

**Week Eight:**
**March 10/12**
Tayari Jones, *An American Marriage*

*Spring Break: March 14-22, 2020 (Class will not meet)*

**Week Nine:**
**March 24/26**
Sonia Sanchez, *Shake Loose My Skin*
*Final Project Proposals Due Wednesday, March 25th by 2:00 PM*

**Week Ten:**
**March 31/April 2**
*Natalie Baszile, Queen Sugar*
*Visual Selection: Queen Sugar series on OWN*
*Think Piece Paper 2 Due Tuesday, March 31st by 4:00 PM*
Week Eleven:
April 7/9
*Sonic Language Series Part III*
Audre Lorde, *Zami, A New Spelling of My Name*

Week Twelve:
April 14/16
*Sonic Language Series Part IV*
Jacqueline Woodson, *Brown Girl Dreaming*

Week Thirteen:
April 21/23
Chimamanda N. Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus*

Week Fourteen:
April 28/30
*Last Days of Class*
**Final Projects/Presentations:** WOMANIFESTO SUMMIT 2020

Last Day of Classes: Monday, May 4th
Readings Days: May 5th & 6th
Spring Exams Begin: May 7th

**FINAL EXAM: FINAL PAPERS ARE DUE ON OR BEFORE FRIDAY, MAY 8, 2020 by 12 PM SHARP via CANVAS**
WOMANIFESTO: BLACK WOMEN WRITERS IN LITERATURE

Exploring the distinguished literary canon of twentieth-century African-American women writers from Zora Neale Hurston and Toni Morrison to Maya Angelou and Ntozake Shange, this course will examine black women’s writing through fiction, poetry, and drama. In addition, we will also survey black women’s writing in music. Using Jazz, Gospel, and Hip-Hop music pieces from artists Jill Scott, Lauryn Hill, and Beyoncé, we will consider how these writers and musicians use their pens and musical voices to assert political and social freedom.

ENGL 352:416
SPRING 2020
JANUARY 21-MAY 4, 2020
TUESDAY/THURSDAY 10:00 AM-11:20 AM
RUTGERS UNIVERSITY, NEWARK

DR. MELANIE R. HILL