

# BLACK WOMEN IN THE UNITED STATES

Fall 2018

Course Number: 21:014:305:01

Monday & Wednesday 4:00-5:20 PM

Express Newark (Hahne & Co.), Room 411



Mickalene Thomas, *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe: Le Trois Femme Noires* (2010)

## CONTACT INFORMATION:

Instructor: Lauren O'Brien

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Office: Conklin 246

Office Hours: Wednesday 2:00-3:30pm or by appointment

## COURSE DESCRIPTION:

How have ideas of Black womanhood evolved over time? This course will explore this question and the multifaceted ways that Black women in the United States have defined themselves and their place in society from slavery to the present. A key thread throughout this class will be the concept of intersectionality and examining the ways that race, gender, sexuality, class, and ability shaped the lived experiences of Black women. While our readings will be arranged in a

historically linear fashion, definitions of Black womanhood are varied, complex, and most importantly personal; and therefore cannot easily be encompassed within a single semester class. Nevertheless, our goal still is to interpret the selected cultural texts and put into dialogue past and contemporary notions of Black womanhood so that we may leave with a more critical vocabulary and conceptualization of “womanhood” and “blackness.”

### COURSE OBJECTIVES:

The learning goals for our course are:

- Develop a rhetoric for discussing race, gender, and sexuality that values respect, sensitivity, and care
- Analyze different articulations of black womanhood within a diverse set of cultural texts, such as novels, film, music and visual art
- Enhance close reading, critical thinking, and writing skills
- Cultivate a more critical vocabulary and theoretical framework to discuss the concept of intersectionality
- Recognize how “womanhood” and “blackness” have been defined and redefined throughout American history.

**Note:** This syllabus may be subject to change. The instructor will make students aware of changes via email.

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### REQUIRED TEXTS:

The books for this course are listed below. Additional materials such as articles and visual sources will be made available on Blackboard. These texts can be found at the RU-N Bookstore, Amazon, and both the Rutgers and Public Library.

Jacobs, Harriet. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*

Morrison, Toni. *The Bluest Eye*

McGuire, Danielle. *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*

Lorde, Audre. *Zami, A New Spelling of My Name- A Biomythography*

**\*\*\*\*\*We will be doing a close reading of these texts, so you must bring physical copies of text to each class meeting.**

### COURSE REQUIREMENTS

*Weekly Reading Response:* (Due every Wednesday by 12pm) each week a set of discussion questions based on the week’s readings and class discussion will be posted on Blackboard. Responses must be 250-350 words in length and include specific references to the required texts. Please be attentive to your spelling, grammar, and usage. Late responses will not receive full points.

*Hashtag Project/Presentations:* Inspired by Dr. Laura Helton’s “Hashtag Update Assignment,” this assignment asks each student to adopt and track over the course of the semester a hashtag,

blog, organization, or issue linked to contemporary issues concerning Black Womanhood. Students will submit a brief proposal, progress updates, and present findings in a presentation at the end of the semester. More instructions will be provided as the semester progresses.

## **GRADING:**

Attendance/ Participation: 15%  
Weekly Reading Response: 20%  
Midterm Exam: 25%  
Hashtag Project/Presentation: 15%  
Final Exam: 25%

## **POLICIES:**

### *Communication*

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions related to the class. I strongly urge everyone to take advantage of my office hours—or to make an appointment if your schedule conflicts. Please give at least 48 hours for an email response.

### *Attendance*

Students are expected to make every effort to attend class, on time regularly. For an absence to count as “excused,” students must submit acceptable written documentation of the reason for their absence. Excused absences are defined by the course catalog as: “illness requiring medical attention, curricular or extracurricular activities approved by the faculty, personal obligations claimed by the student and recognized as valid, recognized religious holidays, and severe inclement weather causing dangerous traveling conditions.”

Each unexcused absence beyond three will reduce your FINAL GRADE in the course by 5%. Any student who misses eight or more sessions through any combination of excused and unexcused absences will not earn credit in this class. Such students should withdraw to avoid getting an F.

### *Academic Integrity*

All assignments submitted for this class must be your own original work. Information derived from other sources—whether or not you quote it directly—must be cited appropriately. All instances of plagiarism and cheating will be investigated fully, in accordance with the Rutgers Policy of Academic Integrity (<http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu>).

### *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](mailto:odsnewark@rutgers.edu).

*Electronics:*

Except in cases of emergency, cell phones must be turned completely off during class. While Laptops are **NOT**, reading tablets are permitted in class for the purposes of accessing the readings and taking notes only. Using social media/email/etc. during class time will result in loss of electronic privileges for the duration of the semester.

**Course Schedule**

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**Wednesday, September 5: Introduction**

1. Review Class Syllabus

**Monday, September 10: What is Black Women Studies?**

1. Gloria T. Hull & Barbara Smith, "Introduction: The Politics of Black Women Studies"
2. Noliwe M. Rooks, "Like Canaries in the Mines: Black Women's Studies at the Millennium"

**Wednesday, September 12: Black Women & Slavery I**

1. Sojourner Truth "Ain't I a Woman?"
2. Wilma King, "Mad" Enough to Kill: Enslaved Women, Murder, and Southern Courts"

**Monday, September 17: Black Women & Slavery II**

1. Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (pp. note-65)

**\*\*Hashtag Project Proposal Due on Blackboard by 11:59pm**

**Wednesday, September 19: Black Women & Slavery III**

1. Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (pp. 65-113)

**Monday, September 24: Black Women & Slavery IV**

1. Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (pp. 113- end)

**Wednesday, September 26: Post- Emancipation Black Feminism**

1. Watch in Class: Ida B. Wells Clip from *Iron Jawed Angels*
2. Crystal N. Feimster, "Ida B. Wells and the Lynching of Black Women"
3. Mary Church Terrell, "Progress of Colored Woman"

**\*\*Hashtag Project Update Due on Blackboard by 11:59pm**

**Monday, October 1: Black Women & Civil Rights I**

1. Danielle McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street* (pp. Prologue-71)

**Wednesday, October 3: Black Women & Civil Rights II**

1. Danielle McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street* (pp. 71- 142)

**Monday, October 8: Black Women & Civil Rights III**

1. Danielle McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street* (pp. 142- 213)

**Wednesday, October 10: Black Women & Civil Rights IV**

1. Danielle McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street* (pp. 213- 287)

**Monday, October 15: Black Feminism & Womanism**

1. Watch in Class Kimberle Crenshaw: What is Intersectionality?
2. Audre Lorde, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master’s House”
3. Combahee River Collective, “The Combahee River Collective Statement”

**Wednesday, October 17: Black Queer Studies I**

1. Audre Lorde, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name-* (pp. 7- 68)

**Monday, October 22: Black Queer Studies II**

1. Audre Lorde, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name-* (pp. 69- 130)

**Wednesday, October 24: Black Queer Studies III**

1. Audre Lorde, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (pp.131-191)

**Monday, October 29: Black Women Queer Studies IV**

1. Audre Lorde, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (pp.192- end)

**\*\*Hashtag Project Update Due on Blackboard by 11:59pm**

**Wednesday, November 1: Midterm Review**

**Monday, November 5: Midterm Exam**

**Wednesday, November 7: Colorism, Blackness, & Politics of Beauty I**

1. Watch in class *Imitation of Life*

**Monday, November 12: Colorism, Blackness, & Politics of Beauty II**

1. Finish *Imitation of Life* in class

**Wednesday, November 14: Colorism, Blackness, & Politics of Beauty III**

1. Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (pp.1-58)

**Monday, November 19: Colorism, Blackness, & Politics of Beauty IV**

1. Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (pp. 59-93)

**Wednesday November 21: NO CLASS**

**Monday, November 26: Colorism, Blackness, & Politics of Beauty V**

1. Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (pp. 94- end)

**\*\*Hashtag Project Update Due on Blackboard by 11:59pm**

**Wednesday, November 29: Black Women Visual Art Culture**

1. Heidi R. Lewis and Roland Mitchell exhibition statement “Beyond Mammy, Jezebel, & Sapphire: Reclaiming Images of Black Women ”

**Monday, December 3: Public History & Hidden Figures**

1. Alice Walker, “In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens”
2. Fath Davis Ruffins, “Lifting as We Climb’: Black Women and the Preservation of African American History and Culture.

**Wednesday, December 5: Black Digital Feminism**

1. Alicia Garza, “A Herstory of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement
2. Sandra E. Garcia, “The Women Who Created # MeToo Long Before Hashtags
3. Sarah J. Jackson, et al., “#GirlsLikeUS: TransAdvocacy and Community Building Online.”

**Monday, December 10: Hashtag Presentations**

**Wednesday, December 12: Hashtag Presentations, Final Review, & Wrap Up**

**Wednesday December 19- Take Home Final Due**