

Black Women in the United States

Spring 2019

Course Number: 21:014:305:01

Monday 2:30-3:50 PM & Wednesday 1-2:20 PM

Conklin Hall Room 402



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 11:00-12:30pm 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 have 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.

Required Texts:

The books for this course are listed below. These texts can be found at the RU-N Bookstore, Amazon, and both the Rutgers and Public Library. **Texts with an asterisk will have a PDF version made available on Blackboard.** Additional materials such as articles and visual sources will also be made available on Blackboard.

*Jacobs, Harriet. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (A PDF version will be made available on Blackboard)

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*

Mock, Janet. *Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love, & So Much More*

*Thurman, Wallace. *The Blacker the Berry*

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Attendance/Participation: Class participation is an essential component of this course therefore students are expected to attend all class sessions and to participate in class discussions and activities related to the readings. **We will be doing a close readings of our texts, so you must bring physical copies to each class meeting.**

Weekly Reading Response: **(Due every Tuesday by 11:59pm)** each week a set of discussion questions based on the week’s readings and class discussions will be posted on Blackboard. Responses must be 250-500 words in length and include specific references and citations from

the required texts. Please be attentive to your spelling, grammar, and usage. Late responses will not receive full credit.

Quizzes: There will be five quizzes given throughout the semester making up 25% of your final grade. Quizzes will vary in format. Some will consist of several key terms or short answer questions and others may be in the form of a single short essay. Quiz questions will be inspired by the weekly reading prompts and will test both your attention to reading and engagement with class lectures/discussions. Note that you **cannot** make up a quiz that you missed.

Performative Reflection: This assignment asks you to creatively reflect on how their understanding of black womanhood has evolved over the semester and to present those reflections to the class. The format is open (You can create spoken word poetry, videos, visual art project, etc.) except that no traditional essays or written responses are allowed. Additional details will be provided at a later date.

Current Event Analytical Final Paper: This final assignment asks you to take a current event in the news and/or popular culture related to Black womanhood and analyze it in relation to our major course themes and readings. The paper must address a contemporary topic in the United States that has occurred during the span of the semester, be 4-5 double-spaced pages long, and specifically reference a minimum of 2 course texts. More instructions and examples will be provided later in the semester.

Grading:

Attendance & Participation- 15%

Weekly Reading Response- 20%

Quizzes- 25%

Performative Reflection: 15%

Current Event Analytical Final Paper: 25%

The Grading Scale is as follows:

90-100 (A)

87-89 (B+)

80-86 (B)

77-79 (C+)

70-76 (C)

60-69 (D)

59 or below (F)

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 prior to class or within a 12 hour period after the class was missed. Failure to communicate regarding the circumstances of the absence will result in an unexcused absence. Excused absences are defined by the course catalog as: “illness requiring medical attention, curricular or extracurricular activities approved by the faculty, 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.

Safe Learning Environments/Sex-Based Discrimination:

Rutgers faculty are committed to helping create a safe learning environment for all students and for the university as a whole. If you have experienced any form of gender or sex-based discrimination or harassment, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, relationship violence, or stalking, know that help and support are available. Rutgers has staff members trained to support survivors in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, and more. The University strongly encourages all students to report any such incidents to the University. Please be aware that all Rutgers employees (other than those designated as confidential resources such as advocates, counselors, clergy and healthcare providers as listed in Appendix A to [Policy 10.3.12](#)) are required to report information about such discrimination and harassment to the University. This means that if you tell a faculty member about a situation of sexual harassment or sexual violence, or other related misconduct, the faculty member must share that information with the University's Title IX

Coordinator. If you wish to speak with a staff member who is confidential and does **not** have this reporting responsibility, you may contact the Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance at (973)-353-1918, or at run.vpva@rutgers.edu. Learn more about the office here: <http://counseling.newark.rutgers.edu/vpva>

Electronics:

Except in cases of emergency, cell phones must be turned completely off during class. Laptops and 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.

Course Schedule

Wednesday, January 23: Introduction

1. Review Class Syllabus

Monday, January 28: Black Women Studies & Intersectionality

1. Gloria T. Hull, “The Bridge Between Black Studies and Women Studies”
2. Kimberle Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics”

Wednesday, January 30: Black Women in Public Memory

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

Monday, February 4: Black Women & Slavery

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

Wednesday, February 6: Black Women & Slavery II

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

Monday, February 11: Black Women & Slavery III

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

Wednesday, February 13: Enslaved Women & Everyday Resistance

1. *******Quiz # 1*******
2. Claire Voon, “An Afrofuturist Graphic Novel Revives the Lost Histories of Women-Led Slave Revolts”
3. Stephanie Camp, “The Pleasures of Resistance: Enslaved Women and Body Politics in the Plantation South, 1830-1861”

*****Saturday, February 16: Extra Credit Opportunity:**

- Attend the 39th Annual Marion Thompson Wright Lecture Series: “The Erotic as Power: Sexuality and the Black Experience,” @ RU-N PRCC 9:30am- 3:30pm

Monday, February 18: Early Black Feminism

1. In class: Watch Ida B. Wells Clip from *Iron Jawed Angels*
2. Sojourner Truth “Ain’t I a Woman?”
3. Crystal N. Feimster, “Ida B. Wells and the Lynching of Black Women”
4. Mary Church Terrell, “Progress of Colored Woman”

Wednesday, February 20: Black Women & Civil Rights I

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

Monday, February 25: Black Women & Civil Rights II

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

Wednesday, February 27: Black Women & Civil Rights III

1. Danielle McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street* (pp. 142- 213)
2. *****Quiz #2*****

*****Wednesday February 27: Extra Credit Opportunity:**

- Attend “Black Women Writing Black Histories” Roundtable 6-8pm, in Essex Room PRCC

******Monday, March 4 & Wednesday, March 6: No Class Meetings**

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

Monday, March 11 An Eloquent Rage

1. In class: Watch scenes from Pratibha Parmar’s *A Place of Rage*
2. bell hooks, “Killing Rage: Militant Resistance”
3. Audre Lorde, “Uses of Anger”
4. Brittney Cooper, “Introduction,” of *Eloquent Rage*

Wednesday, March 13: Black Feminism & Womanism

1. Audre Lorde, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master’s House”
2. Alice Walker, “Womanist Definition”
3. Combahee River Collective, “The Combahee River Collective Statement”
4. *****Quiz # 3*****

******Monday, March 18- 20 Spring Break: No Class Meeting**

Monday, March 25: Gender, Sexuality, & Black Womanhood

1. In class: Watch Dee Rees' *Pariah*
2. Janet Mock, *Redefining Realness* (intro- pg. 73)

Wednesday, March 27, October 22: Gender, Sexuality, & Black Womanhood II

1. In class: Finish *Pariah*
2. Janet Mock, *Redefining Realness* (pg.73- 145)

Monday April 1: Gender, Sexuality, & Black Womanhood III

1. Janet Mock, *Redefining Realness* (pg. 146- 217)

Wednesday, April 3: Gender, Sexuality, & Black Womanhood IV

1. Janet Mock, *Redefining Realness* (pg. 218- end)
2. ****Quiz # 4****

Monday, April 8: Colorism, Blackness, & Politics of Beauty I

1. In class: Watch *Imitation of Life*
2. Wallace Thurman, *The Blacker the Berry* (Part I)

Wednesday, April 10: Colorism, Blackness, & Politics of Beauty II

1. In class: Finish *Imitation of Life*
2. Wallace Thurman, *The Blacker the Berry* (Part II)

Monday, April 15: Colorism, Blackness, & Politics of Beauty III

1. Wallace Thurman, *The Blacker the Berry* (Part III & IV)

Wednesday, April 17: Colorism, Blackness, & Politics of Beauty IV

1. Wallace Thurman, *The Blacker the Berry* (Part V)

Monday, April 22: Black Women & The Diaspora

1. Selected readings from *The Afro-Latin@ Reader: History and Culture in the US*
2. ****Quiz # 5 ****

Wednesday, April 24: Contemporary Visions of Black Feminism

1. Watch Beyonce's *Formation* & Cardi B's *Money* Music Video
2. bell hooks, "Moving Beyond Pain"
3. Treva B. Lindsey & Jessica Marie Johnson, "Searching for Climax: Black Erotic Lives in Slavery and Freedom"

Monday April 29: Performative Reflection Presentations

Wednesday, May 1: Performative Reflection Presentation

*****Monday, May 13: Current Event Analytical Final Paper 11:59pm**