Black Women in the United States
Course Number: WGS 21:988:389
Cross-listed: African American and African Studies 21:014:305
Jarrettia Adams, Instructor
Fall 2021

“We specialize in the wholly impossible.”
(Motto of Nannie Helen Burroughs school)

Course meets in Conklin Hall, Room 319
Tuesday & Thursday, 2:30-3:50

Instructor’s contact information:
Email: jarrettia.adams@rutgers.edu
Office Hours: On Tuesday & Thursday - by appointment and via Zoom

COURSE DESCRIPTION
This course is a broad, chronological survey of the history of Black women in the United States from slavery to the present. It explores common themes such as everyday forms of resistance, feminism, sexuality and reproductive rights, political activism, and identity. The course begins with enslaved women, continues to black women’s social roles and activism during reconstruction and after, the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, and finishes with an examination of the roles of Black women in contemporary culture. This course incorporates both fiction and nonfiction works to illuminate the major themes in black women's history.
LEARNING OUTCOMES

The course requirements are based upon our learning goals:

- To use primary sources to critically examine the complex history of black woman in the United States
- To understand how “womanhood” and “blackness” have been defined and redefined throughout American history
- To understand various strategies of resistance employed by black women
- To develop analytical reading and writing skills through the critical examination of primary sources and written response papers
- To develop a broad understanding of the various issues facing black women throughout U.S. history, including the roles of black women in family life, the workplace, politics, literary and artistic achievement, education, and the struggle for women's rights

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Attendance: As this syllabus is being revised, the plan is to offer this course in-person on the Newark campus. Attendance will be taken in class.

Discussion Board: Discussion Board is a space available for your written contributions and comments on the course and to rehearse ideas for midterm and final papers. Generally, I will provide a prompt to provoke discussion. You will be expected to post one original comment of your own and to respond to at least 2 other class members.

Midterm Paper: 5-7 page (not including bibliography) research paper

Final Paper: 7-12 page research paper. Students are also required to produce a one-page proposal and a one-page bibliography ahead of and in addition to the final paper. I will provide you with more detailed information, as well as a checklist or rubric for each required part of the final paper.

WEIGHTED GRADING:

Attendance: 20%
Discussion Board: 20%
Midterm Paper: 30%
Final Paper: 30%
Grading Scale:

- 90 - 100          A
- 87 - 89           B+
- 80 - 86           B
- 77 - 79           C+
- 70 - 76           C
- 60 - 69           D
- 59 or less        F

POLICIES

Accommodation and Support Statement
Rutgers University Newark (RU-N) is committed to the creation of an inclusive and safe learning environment for all students and the University as a whole. RU-N has identified the following resources to further the mission of access and support:

For Individuals with Disabilities: The Office of Disability Services (ODS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter barriers due to disability. Once a student has completed the ODS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and reasonable accommodations are determined to be necessary and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be provided. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at ods.rutgers.edu. Contact ODS at (973)353-5375 or via email at ods@newark.rutgers.edu.

For Individuals who are Pregnant: The Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance is available to assist with any concerns or potential accommodations related to pregnancy. Students may contact the Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance at (973) 353-1906 or via email at TitleIX@newark.rutgers.edu.

For Absence Verification: The Office of the Dean of Students can provide assistance for absences related to religious observance, emergency or unavoidable conflict (e.g., illness, personal or family emergency, etc.). Students should refer to University Policy 10.2.7 for information about expectations and responsibilities. The Office of the Dean of Students can be contacted by calling (973) 353-5063 or emailing deanofstudents@newark.rutgers.edu.

For Individuals with temporary conditions/injuries: The Office of the Dean of Students can assist students who are experiencing a temporary condition or injury (e.g., broken or sprained limbs, concussions, or recovery from surgery). Students experiencing a temporary
For English as a Second Language (ESL): The Program in American Language Studies (PALS) can support students experiencing difficulty in courses due to English as a Second Language (ESL) and can be reached by emailing PALS@newark.rutgers.edu to discuss potential supports.

For Gender or Sex-Based Discrimination or Harassment: The Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance can assist students who are experiencing any form of gender or sex-based discrimination or harassment, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, relationship violence, or stalking. Students can report an incident to the Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance by calling (973) 353-1906 or emailing TitleIX@newark.rutgers.edu. Incidents may also be reported by using the following link: tinyurl.com/RUNReportingForm. For more information, students should refer to the University’s Student Policy Prohibiting Sexual Harassment, Sexual Violence, Relationship Violence, Stalking and Related Misconduct located at http://compliance.rutgers.edu/title-ix/about-title-ix/title-ix-policies/.

For support related to interpersonal violence: The Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance can provide any student with confidential support. The office is a confidential resource and does not have an obligation to report information to the University’s Title IX Coordinator. Students can contact the office by calling (973) 353-1918 or emailing run.vpva@rutgers.edu. There is also a confidential text-based line available to students; students can text (973) 339-0734 for support.

For Crisis and Concerns: The Campus Awareness Response and Education (CARE) Team works with students in crisis to develop a support plan to address personal situations that might impact their academic performance. Students, faculty and staff may contact the CARE Team by using the following link: tinyurl.com/RUNCARE or emailing careteam@rutgers.edu.

For Stress, Worry, or Concerns about Well-being: The Counseling Center has confidential therapists available to support students. Students should reach out to the Counseling Center to schedule an appointment: counseling@newark.rutgers.edu or (973) 353-5805. If you are not quite ready to make an appointment with a therapist but are interested in self-help, check out TAO at Rutgers-Newark for an easy, web-based approach to self-care and support: https://tinyurl.com/RUN-TAO.

For emergencies, call 911 or contact Rutgers University Police Department (RUPD) by calling (973) 353-5111.

Attendance

a. as noted above attendance will be taken at the start of each class.
b. “recognized grounds for absence are 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” (From: http://catalogs.rutgers.edu/generated/nwk-ug_0608/pg23613.html). You must provide some form of written evidence for absences to be excused.

c. the History Department policy is as follows: “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.”

Communication: Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions related to the class. I strongly urge everyone to make plans to meet with me at least once during the semester. Email me (jarrettia.adams@rutgers.edu) for an office hours appointment and give me several meeting time options. I will do my best to respond to all emails within 24 hours. Please plan ahead if you have a question related to a paper or other matter with a required deadline.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

The Writing Center
The Writing Center (http://www.ncas.rutgers.edu/writingcenter), located in Room 126 of Conklin Hall, offers writing tutoring and writing workshops to all undergraduate students currently enrolled in classes on the Rutgers-Newark campus. Their tutors work to help students become more independent readers and writers capable of responding well to the demands of writing within the university. The Writing Center is available to you free of charge. I encourage you to take advantage of their services to strengthen your reading, writing, and research skills.

This class requires a knowledge of the Canvas learning platform. I also assume you have created a Zoom account through Rutgers, which I may use for office hours.

If you require technical assistance, these are sites for help:

- Link to RU-N “Technology LaunchPad”: https://runit.rutgers.edu/technology-launch-pad/
- Contact information for OIT-Newark Help Desk: https://runit.rutgers.edu/hd/
If you would like to do some additional reading for context about the history of Black women in the United States, the following texts (not required) may be of interest. Both of them will be helpful as sources for topics for your final papers/projects:

*A Black Women’s History of the United States* (with a Revised Afterword), Boston: Beacon Press, 2020 – Daina Ramey Berry and Kali Nicole Gross


For help (beyond the Writing Center) with writing and formatting your papers throughout your academic career: look for used copies of Strunk & White’s *The Elements of Style* – the edition doesn’t really matter. I own a fourth edition (updated 2000), but there are probably later editions now. It’s a classic and a fun read if you like that sort of thing. A small book with a big return. Every student should own and read a copy. That being said, the best writing is often about knowing when to break the rules rather than being a slave to them.

Diane Hacker regularly updates *A Pocket Style Manual* (spiral bound). There are lots of online style manuals, some better than others. I find having Hacker handy when I’m working down to the wire (as usual) is worth the price. Good investment if you expect to have a great many papers in your future. Again, none of the books listed above are required.

One of my favorite online sources of writing assistance (sorry, Rutgers!) is Purdue University’s Online Writing Lab at [https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/purdue_owl.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/purdue_owl.html). Check it out.

**ASSIGNMENTS**

The books for this course are listed below.


These books are available as print copies or as ebooks, and can be purchased at the campus bookstore or online. I have included links to online versions where they exist. Cheaper, used copies of most of these books are available from a variety of sources. Of course, all of these books can be requested free of charge through Dana Library, but allow time for the library to secure the text for you. I will see about putting books on reserve for you as well.

1) Thursday, September 2:

Getting Started!

1. **READ THE SYLLABUS BEFORE COMING TO CLASS!** SPEND NO MORE THAN 10-15 MINUTES OR SO ON THIS. LOOK IT OVER QUICKLY TO ORIENT YOURSELF. THEN GO BACK AND READ THROUGH IT MORE CAREFULLY. TAKE NOTES AS YOU READ AND MARK OR UNDERLINE 5 IMPORTANT ITEMS. BE SURE TO WRITE DOWN ANY QUESTIONS YOU HAVE AS THEY COME UP.

2. Introductions

3. Keywords: Primary and Secondary Sources, Race, Gender, Intersectionality

2) Tuesday, September 7

Required Reading:


*2. WATCH: the first 10-15 minutes of Ava DuVernay’s “13th” (2016). Feel free to watch the entire documentary if you have the time. It is available on Netflix. I will provide a video excerpt or link to the documentary.
Discussion Board: Due Friday, Sept 10 – Big Idea: Adding Black women to the mix requires us to tell U.S. history in a different way; it’s NOT just about “add women and stir.” After reading the Douglass excerpt and watching the clip from 13th, how do you imagine a consideration of the experience of black women would change these two narratives. Post one original response and respond to at least two other posts from your colleagues by Friday. Do not spend more than 10-15 minutes on your post or your responses. This is informal. You will not be graded on your spelling, formatting, or the amount of added research you have done. I am looking for the effort you put into thinking about this and in responding to other students. I don’t expect a piece of polished writing for what is essentially a blog post. This will remain true for all discussion board assignments.

3) Thursday, September 9

Required Reading:
1. Sojourner Truth: “Ain’t I a Woman,”
http://www.blackpast.org/1851-sojourner-truth-arent-i-woman


3. Harriet Jacobs, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl (start reading)
https://www.docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/jacobs/jacobs.html
4) Tuesday, September 14

Required Reading:
   https://www.docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/jacobs/jacobs.html

5) Thursday, September 16

Required Reading:
   https://www.docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/jacobs/jacobs.html

6) Tuesday, September 21

Big Idea: “The Loophole of Retreat” – “She dreams of possibility from within impossible strictures of enclosure and confinement.” – Tina Campt

Required Reading:
   https://www.docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/jacobs/jacobs.html

7) Thursday, September 23

Required Reading:
   https://www.docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/jacobs/jacobs.html
8) Tuesday, September 28

Required Reading:
   [https://www.docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/jacobs/jacobs.html](https://www.docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/jacobs/jacobs.html)

9) Thursday, September 30

Required Reading:
   [https://www.docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/jacobs/jacobs.html](https://www.docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/jacobs/jacobs.html)

10) Tuesday, October 5

Required Reading:
   [http://www.blackpast.org/?q=primary/reconstruction-amendment](http://www.blackpast.org/?q=primary/reconstruction-amendment)

2. Cooper, Anna Julia, “Womanhood a vital element in the regeneration and progress of a race, “ (excerpt) in *A Voice from the South* (1892)

11) Thursday, October 7

Required Reading:
   [http://www.gutenberg.org/files/14977/14977-h/14977-h.htm](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/14977/14977-h/14977-h.htm)

12) Tuesday, October 12

Required Reading:
   [http://www.gutenberg.org/files/14977/14977-h/14977-h.htm](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/14977/14977-h/14977-h.htm)

13) Thursday, October 14 – Big Idea: The Politics of Respectability

Required Reading:


3. Elise Johnson McDougald, “The Task of Negro Womanhood” (1925)

14) Tuesday, October 19

**Required Reading:**

15) Thursday, October 21

**Required Reading:**
1. Larsen, *Quicksand*

16) Tuesday, October 26

**Required Reading:**
1. Larsen, *Quicksand*

17) Thursday, October 28 - *Blues Women*

You’ve had your chance and proved unfaithful
So now I’m gonna be real mean and hateful
I used to be your sweet mama, sweet papa
But now I’m just as sour as can be.
(–“Used to be Your Sweet Mama”)

**Required Reading:**
1. Handouts: Misc. Blues lyrics

***MIDTERM PAPER DUE FRIDAY, OCTOBER 29***
18) Tuesday, November 2

Required Reading:

*2. Ella Baker: “We Need Group-Centered Leadership”

3. Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi* – don’t be intimidated by the page length of this book. It is a quick and interesting (IMHO) read.

Film: *Imitation of Life* (1934),
https://digitalcampus.swankmp.net/rutgers313400/watch/4B6E00A078230FD3?referrer=direct

19) Thursday, November 4

Required Reading:
1. Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi*

20) Tuesday, November 9

Required Reading:
1. Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi*

21) Thursday, November 11

Required Reading:
1. Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi*
(The text of Hamer's speech is at: http://www.infoplease.com/t/hist/hamer-dnc1964/).
Watch: A 10 minute documentary providing more historical context is at https://youtu.be/RfBob3tKXi0

22) Tuesday, November 16 – Big Idea: Black Feminisms/Black Radicalism

“We realize that the liberation of all oppressed peoples necessitates the destruction of the political-economic systems of capitalism and imperialism as well as patriarchy. We are socialists because we believe that work must be organized for the collective benefit of those who do the work and create the products, and not for the profit of the bosses. Material resources must be equally distributed among those who create these resources. We are not convinced, however, that a socialist revolution that is not also a feminist and anti-racist revolution will guarantee our liberation.” (-Combahee River Collective)

Required Reading:

2. The Combahee River Collective Statement (1977)


23) Thursday, November 18

Required Reading:


24) Tuesday, November 23
Required Reading:


Thanksgiving Recess, November 24-28, 2021

25) Tuesday, November 30


26) Thursday, December 2


27) Tuesday, December 7

To be determined.

28) Thursday, December 9

To be determined.

December 13 - Fall classes end
December 14 & 15 - Reading days
December 16 to December 23 – Fall exams

***RESEARCH PAPER – DUE DATE: FRIDAY, DECEMBER 17***