

BLACK FEMINIST THOUGHTS

Spring 2008, Skidmore College

Professor: Winston Grady-Willis
Times: T/Th 9:40-11:00am
Location: Tisch 308

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Hours: TBA
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Course Description and Objectives

This multidisciplinary seminar will chart and examine the historical development and expression of Black feminist thoughts throughout the global African world, but with a focus on the United States. The course will focus on the intraracial significance of gender, class, sexuality, nationality, skin color and generation, as well as the interplay among these variables. Emphasis will also be placed on illuminating Black feminist activism in several distinct, and yet overlapping, contexts, including the Black club women's movement and the reemergence of Black feminisms and womanism from the late 1960s onward. The course stresses that a bedrock theme of Black feminisms is that they simultaneously challenge racism and white skin privilege within the women's movement and sexism and patriarchy within the Black freedom movement. Through interrogating groundbreaking texts (including films), writing brief response papers, taking part in seminar discussions, and crafting an analytical essay, students will better be able to: (1) understand the various manifestations of Black feminist thoughts; (2) provide an intersectional analysis of Black women's experiences; (3) grapple with the often contested relationship(s) between feminisms and assertions of Black female, male and national identities.

Required Texts

Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*
Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice from the South: By a Black Woman of the South*
Angela Y. Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday*
Beverly Guy-Sheftall, ed., *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African American Feminist Thought*
Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*
Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*
Vivian May, *Anna Julia Cooper, Visionary Black Feminist: A Critical Introduction*
Filomina Chioma Steady, ed., *The Black Woman Cross-Culturally*

Each book should be available for purchase at the Skidmore Shop by 30 January. Nevertheless, costs for these texts can be prohibitive. Every effort will be made to have the texts available on reserve in the Lucy Scribner Library.

Evaluation

A presentation on one of the required texts, biweekly response papers, an end-of-semester discussion of the extended analytical essay, and class preparation and discussion throughout the semester constitute **45** percent of each student's grade. The 20-25 page analytical essay constitutes **40** percent of each student's grade. The final examination constitutes **15** percent of each student's grade.

Class Meetings and Attendance

Weekly meetings will follow a seminar format in which the class focuses on a given text. For that reason, it is very important that students prepare themselves by reading the necessary material. Although attendance is extremely important in a seminar such as this, each student may take one unexcused absence during the semester. However, a student with more than one unexcused absence will be required to hand in a seven-page synopsis of the given text for any subsequent missed sessions, due on the following week.

Response Papers

Students are responsible for biweekly response papers that address **one theme** that resonates for them from the given readings. These brief, two-page papers are **not** reports or summaries; rather, they are an opportunity to provide a succinct analysis or critique of a particular author's work.

Analytical Essay

The first phase of the essay project will call for students to select a constellation of four books (or three books and three approved essays) that speak to particular issues or themes raised in the course. One of the books used in preparing the essay may be from the course. Students will complete the first phase of the project by submitting an initial draft of a comparative essay (minimum 15 pages) which addresses the development of Black feminist thoughts. Although the initial draft will not be graded, students will receive extensive comments regarding analysis and writing. The final phase of the project, the result of revision and reflection, will be a polished analytical essay (minimum 20 pages) that demonstrates that the voices of the various authors have entered into a conversation with one another, and the student. Students may consult any number of style books, including Hodges and Whitten's *Harbrace College Handbook*, Turabian's *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, or *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

Academic Integrity

Students should uphold the Skidmore Honor System and the policies outlined in the *Student Handbook* and *Student Academic Handbook* regarding academic integrity. As noted in the 2007-02008 Course Catalog: "Skidmore not only promotes intellectual honesty vigorously but responds severely to such offenses as plagiarism and cheating on exams. Any Honor Code violation may affect the student's graduate school or transfer recommendations and the student's eligibility for academic prizes and awards, for Dean's List or graduation honors, and for membership in Skidmore or national honor societies."

COURSE SCHEDULE (Subject to Revision!)

GROUNDINGS

January 22 - **Introducing the Course**

- January 29 - **Global African Understandings I**
Steady, Introduction, Part One and Part Three
- January 31 - **Global African Understandings II**
Steady, Part Four and Part Two
- February 5 - **In the Context of Chattel Slavery**
Guy-Sheftall, Introduction and Chapter 1

ANNA JULIA COOPER

- February 7 - **Voice from the South**
Cooper, Part One
Response Paper Due
- February 12 - **Voice from the South**
Cooper, Part Two
- February 14 - **Beyond *Voice from the South***
May, entire book

INTERWAR MIGRATIONS

- February 19 - **Blues Women**
Davis, entire book
- February 21 - **Assessing Davis**
Response Paper Due
- February 26 - **Core Black Southern Culture**
Hurstun, Chapters 1-10
- February 28 - **Core Black Southern Culture**
Hurstun, Chapters 11-onward
Guy-Sheftall, Chapter 2
- March 4 - **From the Crucible of One Struggle . . .**
Guy-Sheftall, Chapter 3
- March 6 - **Contradictions of Black Power**
Guy-Sheftall, Chapter 7
Response Paper Due

CONTEMPORARY BLACK FEMINISMS

- March 18 - **Confronting Patriarchy and Racism**

- Collins, Parts One and Two
- March 25 - **Confronting Patriarchy and Racism**
Guy-Sheftall, Chapter Four
- March 27 - **Intersectionality**
Collins, Part Three
Response Paper Due

ENDING SILENCES

- April 1 - **Sexuality**
Lorde, entire book
- April 3 - **Assessing Lorde**
- April 8 - **Discussion of Analytical Essay First Drafts**
- April 10 - **Many Battlefronts**
Guy-Sheftall, Chapter Five
Response Paper Due
- April 15 - **Confronting Misogyny**
NO! A film by Aaishah Simmons
- April 17 - *NO!* A Film by Aaishah Simmons
- April 22 - **Presentations**
- April 24 - **Presentations**
- April 29 - **Assessing the Course**
Final Drafts of Analytical Essays Due!
- May 7 - **Final Examination**
6-9pm