

SYLLABUS

AFS 499:

WMS 399:

Black Female Epistemologies at the Intersection of Race and Gender

Instructor: Dr. Dana Murray Patterson African & African American Studies & Women's Studies (Section 1)

Office: 140 Millett Hall

Phone: (937) 775-5645 Tuesdays & Thursdays 10:25-12:05

Office Hrs: by appointment. Spring 2009

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DESCRIPTION: This class is designed to explore the intellectual experiences of Black females from raced and gendered perspectives. Examining writings and film by and in regards to Black females, students will gain an appreciation for conditions in which Black women's ways of "knowing" have emerged and survived in a world where both their race and gender are marginalized. The course will challenge the assumptions of Black female epistemology and ontology based traditionally on "whiteness" and "maleness" while providing a framework for understanding that embraces an Africana Womanist ideology.

Learning Objectives:

- Students will gain an understanding of how traditional paradigms of Black females have worked to disempower and objectify them.
- Students will gain a critical perspective in regards to media perceptions of Black females and their presence in academe, the world of professional work and beyond.
- Students will gain an understanding of models of Black female epistemology "ways of knowing" that embrace the intersection of race and gender and the implications for those models.
- Students will practice reading, writing and living in a world that honors multiple ways of knowing.

TEXT:

1. **Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism** by bell hooks

2. **Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment** (2nd Edition) by Patricia Hill Collins

These texts are available at the Wright State University Bookstore. There may also be articles and supplemental readings assigned throughout the course and/or on reserve at the library.

Diversity Statement

Wright State University celebrates diversity. Our daily life is made rich by the diversity of individuals, groups, and cultures. The interplay of the diverse stimulates creativity and achievement in all facets of our existence.

Respect, tolerance, and goodwill are the keystones to enjoying the diversity of our world. We are all linked to each other in a world created for all of us to share and enjoy. Each member of humanity has a potential contribution to make to the whole. It is our duty to encourage and promote that contribution.

Wright State University is committed to achieving an intellectual, cultural, and social environment on campus in which all are free to make their contribution. We will achieve an environment in which every student may think, and learn, and grow without prejudice, without intimidation, and without discrimination. We will achieve an environment in which personal dignity and respect for the individual are recognized by all.

Wright State University promotes the acceptance and appreciation of every individual regardless of race, gender, age, ethnicity, ability or disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, religious affiliation, or national origin. We encourage appropriate activities and events that foster learning about the diversity of our world.

Wright State University will be a model for our geographic region, exemplifying that a human community can exist that celebrates diversity, enjoys the richness that diversity brings to our lives, and grows stronger with every new member.

Adopted by the Wright State University Board of Trustees March 28, 1991

Please advise the professor if you require any reasonable accommodations to help facilitate your learning in this class.

Course Expectations:

1. Active Learning: This involves active reading and participation, described below:

A) *Active Reading*: Active reading means doing the following for each reading: considering points you think are important, questions you have, inconsistencies you find, areas of interest, and connections with other readings both in this course and others. Active learning means that you not only read the assignments, but that you develop points of view about what the authors say and do some critical analysis of the ideas in the readings. The nature of the course necessitates completing the assigned reading prior to class sessions.

Our discussions will hinge on the readings and the quality of the discussion will depend on class members' understanding of the readings.

B) *Active Participation*: Active participation means that you bring your insights and contribute them to the class discussion. It also means engaging actively with the thoughts of your colleagues – listening carefully, responding openly to, and making connections among others' contributions. Attendance is essential; although I know that circumstances sometimes prevent attendance, it is your responsibility to minimize absences. Missing three sessions will result in a decrease of a full letter grade in the course; missing four will result in being dropped from the course. Class participation will be evaluated as part of your course grade.

2. **Assignments**: Required assignments and deadlines are described on attached pages. Assignments are expected to be turned in at class time on the due date. All assignments for this course must be submitted in hard copy or as instructed. If you must hand in work late for a legitimate reason (e.g., personal illness, family illness) you must contact me to discuss the situation prior to the date the assignment is due. I will not accept late assignments without prior permission, except under unusual circumstances. Extensions on assignments due at the end of the term are granted only under unusual circumstances. Incompletes are also negotiated only under unusual circumstances and well in advance of the end of the term.
3. **Timeliness**: Class starts promptly at 10:25. You are to be in your seat and ready to begin class at this time. Arriving late to class is disruptive and disrespectful to all of us. If a prior commitment will affect your ability to arrive on time, please notify me prior to class.

Assignments:

- **Reading Response**: Each class session will end with a reading assignment. In order to facilitate the classroom discussion, students will email a short (1-2 pages) response to the professor by 9:00 pm on the day before class. Your response should demonstrate an **emerging relationship with the readings and any thoughts or feelings that developed as a result**. Please use **specific examples from the text to illustrate your point**. Your response should not summarize the reading but serve as a clear indication that you did indeed read and made an attempt to digest the material. The response should include **at least one question** that the reading generated for you. **Responses should be emailed as an attachment (MS Word or text-only file such as Notepad) and not included in the body of your email.**
- **In-class activities**: There will be at least two in-class activities that may require you to move beyond your traditional frame of reference and your normal comfort zone. The subject matter we are encountering in this class produces strong emotions and therefore your willingness to explore and expose your own vulnerabilities is appreciated. If for some reason, you feel unsafe or extremely uncomfortable engaging in an in class activity or assignment, please visit me

during office hours to insure an appropriate and expedient response to your dilemma.

- Final Paper: Each student will participate in a project that further examines the epistemology of a Black female. Further instructions will be provided. Students will present the findings of their inquiry in an innovative, enlightening manner that engages the class. Students will submit a summary of their work in the form of a written paper at the end of the class to accompany the presentation. Papers should include references from the assigned readings and specific examples where appropriate. Final papers should be no less than 8 pages and no more than 12 pages long.
- Final Exam: This exam will be a comprehensive evaluation of students' ability to apply the information they have learned throughout the course.
- Extra Credit: There will be at least one opportunity for extra credit given during the quarter.
- **Grading: A grading rubric will be distributed to students early in the course that considers all assignments and course expectations.**

COURSE OUTLINE

- **Tuesday March 31:**
 - In class: Introductions/ Expectations/ Read Excerpt from Black Feminist Thought (included in syllabus)
 - Assignment (for next class session): Read "Becoming Visible" and Chapter 2 in BFT
- **Thursday April 2:**
 - In class: Discussion on "Becoming Visible" and BFT
 - Assignment: "Coming of Rage" and Chapter 1 in *Ain't I a Woman*
- **Tuesday April 7:**
 - In class: Watch "The Way Home" Discussion of Anger and Black Women
 - Assignment: "Making Waves", "Towards an Afrocentric Research Model" and BFT Chapter 5.
- **Thursday April 9:**
 - In class: Finish "The Way Home" and Discussion of "Afrocentric Research Model and Black Feminism.
 - Assignment: *Ain't I a Woman* Chapters 2, and questions for Dr. Butler
- **Tuesday April 14:**
 - In class: Dr. Shakti Butler and discussion of "The Way Home"
 - Assignment: "Black Womanhood, Essence and its Treatment of Stereotypical Images of Black Women" and BFT Chapters 4.
- **Thursday April 16:**
 - In class: Discussion on power of images on Racism and Sexism and Essence Activity
 - Assignment: *Ain't I a Woman* Chapter 3 and "Womanism: A Methodological Framework"

- **Tuesday April 21:**
 - In class: Discussion on womanism
 - Assignment: BFT Chapters 7 and 8
- **Thursday April 23:**
 - In class: Discussion on Black women in Medicine and Healing and the “ethic of caring”
 - Assignment: “Africana Womanism: A Flip Side of a Coin”, “Revisiting What’s in a Name”, and BFT Chapter 10.
- **Tuesday April 28:**
 - In class: Discussion on “Africana Womanism” and listening to tape of Clenora Hudson-Weems
 - Assignment: “Our known everydayness” and “Can a white woman be a Black feminist?”
- **Thursday April 30:**
 - In class: Discussion on empowerment and healing through the telling of stories
 - Assignment: “Un-masking Identity Healing Our Wounded Souls” and BFT Chapter 11
- **Tuesday May 5:**
 - In class: Viewing of movie “Their Eyes Were Watching God”
 - Assignment: *Ain’t I a Woman* chapter 4
- **Thursday May 7:**
 - In class: Discussion of the Enlightened Black Womanist Model and the need for new frameworks
 - Assignment: “Come to the River” and excerpt from “Divorcing the Doctor”
- **Tuesday May 12:**
 - In class: Discuss the current status of Black female epistemology
 - Assignment: BFT Chapter 12
- **Thursday May 14:**
 - In class: Music Exercise
 - Assignment: *Ain’t I a Woman* Chapter 5
- **Tuesday May 19:** Presentations Groups 1, 2 and 3
- **Thursday May 21:** Presentations Groups 4, 5 and 6
- **Tuesday May 26:** Guest Lecture by Sierra Leon on Black Women in Prison
- **Thursday May 28:** no class (extra credit option)
- **Tuesday June 2:** Presentations Groups 6, 7 and 8
- **Thursday June 4:** (extra credit project due) Review for final exam

The course outline is subject to change at the instructor's discretion with due notice given to the student.

Some Readings may be available on the World Wide Web

From Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990, pp. 221-238.

Patricia Hill Collins

Black Feminist Thought in the Matrix of Domination

Black feminist thought demonstrates Black women's emerging power as agents of knowledge. By portraying African-American women as self-defined, self-reliant individuals confronting race, gender, and class oppression, Afrocentric feminist thought speaks to the importance that knowledge plays in empowering oppressed people. One distinguishing feature of Black feminist thought is its insistence that both the changed consciousness of individuals and the social transformation of political and economic institutions constitute essential ingredients for social change. New knowledge is important for both dimensions of change.

Knowledge is a vitally important part of the social relations of domination and resistance. By objectifying African-American women and recasting our experiences to serve the interests of elite white men, much of the Eurocentric masculinist worldview fosters Black women's subordination. But placing Black women's experiences at the center of analysis offers fresh insights on the prevailing concepts, paradigms, and epistemologies of this worldview and on its feminist and Afrocentric critiques. Viewing the world through a both/and conceptual lens of the simultaneity of race, class, and gender oppression and of the need for a humanist vision of community creates new possibilities for an empowering Afrocentric feminist knowledge. Many Black feminist intellectuals have long thought about the world in this way because this is the way we experience the world.

Afrocentric feminist thought offers two significant contributions toward furthering our understanding of the important connections among knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment. First, Black feminist thought fosters a fundamental paradigmatic shift in how we think about oppression. By embracing a paradigm of race, class, and gender as interlocking systems of oppression, Black feminist thought reconceptualizes the social relations of domination and resistance. Second, Black feminist thought addresses ongoing epistemological debates in feminist theory and in the sociology of knowledge concerning ways of assessing "truth." Offering subordinate groups new knowledge about their own experiences can be empowering. But revealing new ways of knowing that allow subordinate groups to define their own reality has far greater implications.
