Black Feminist Epistemologies  
Gender Studies 205  
Winter 2017  
Prof. Aisha Finch

Course Time: Wednesdays 1:00-3:50pm  
Course Location: Rolfe Hall 3120  
Office Hours: By appointment  
Office: 2210 Rolfe Hall  
Telephone: (310) 206-1669  
Email: akfinch@ucla.edu

Course Description

This course will examine the knowledge structures and modes of being that constitute black feminist theory and praxis. How does black feminism offer new ways of thinking about embodiment, political struggle, intellectual production? What does it mean to be engaged in a black feminist project intellectually, materially, and spiritually? Our goal in this class will be to think about black feminism as a field of knowledge, yes, but even more to the point as a crucial analytic, i.e. a way of seeing, thinking, and knowing the world. In so doing, we will explore some of the main themes, texts, and theories that black feminists have produced, and that have in turn helped to shape black feminist epistemology and practice. Specifically, we will explore the intersections between black feminist scholarship and black social life, erotics, representational politics, agency, political sovereignty, and other nodes of black cultural studies and history. We will also investigate the tensions and the synergies between black feminism and other liberation movements such as black nationalism and anticolonialism. Ultimately our goal will be to complicate, rethink, and collectively examine what we even mean when we say “black feminism.” The course will traverse a wide terrain of work that examines these and other questions.

Class Requirements

Participation and Attendance:

This class is designed to be a collective act of investigation. Therefore, an active engagement with the readings and the conversations around them will be crucial for this class. You will be expected to bring at least two discussion questions or points of engagement to discuss during class. Your goal is to synthesize and succinctly frame the most intriguing, productive, and useful aspects of the readings in question, and to pose questions (or raise points) that will help to
contribute to a collective conversation. The idea is to present ideas that will stimulate the thinking of your fellow students, and offer points that can be discussed collectively in class. You can use these questions to comment on what you found provocative, intriguing or problematic in the readings, and consider how the readings deepen or challenge what we have read thus far. In other words, this is not about speaking up just for the sake of saying something. Since everyone will have put rigorous thought into the week’s arguments, everyone will be expected to share their insights and analyses.

You are also responsible for **attending each and every class**. If you anticipate for any reason that you will be absent, it is your responsibility to let me know and obtain permission well in advance. Because the course only meets once a week, two or more unexcused absences will constitute an automatic lowering of the student’s grade.

**Written Assignments:**

Students will be responsible for writing two book reviews over the course of the quarter. All reviews should be 5-6 pages, double-spaced. These papers will be due **in class** each week, and should synthesize and interrogate the central themes of the readings. These response papers are designed to reflect on the critical conversations taking place within and amongst the assigned readings, and to analyze their respective claims and implications. Students will also be required to produce a final paper of 12-14 pages that analyzes the core themes of the class.

**Guidelines for Book Reviews**

You will be responsible for writing two book reviews over the course of the quarter. The purpose of these assignments is to engage more closely with the work that black feminist thought has produced, and place this work in conversation with the readings from the class. For each review, you will select one week from the syllabus and choose a book (or a group of articles) from the recommended reading list. Your goal is to provide a close, in-depth analyses of the recommended reading(s) **alongside** the required readings for the week. As such, your review will not be written as an “evaluation” of the texts, but rather as an engagement with the major theoretical, conceptual, and methodological issues that each of these authors is raising.

**Things to include in the review:**

- At the outset, you will need to address the major intellectual issues that each of these authors are responding to. What central questions are they all grappling with?
➢ You must clearly and substantively identify the primary arguments for each of the texts in your paper. (This should be approximately 1-3 paragraphs for each reading).

➢ After addressing these first two points, you can move on to one or more of the following questions. You do not need to take up all of these questions in your review, these are designed to help you structure your thought process as you respond. Where relevant, you are welcome to bring in a discussion of previous readings.

1. What aspects of the reading did you find particularly valuable, useful, or convincing, or compelling? In each instance, carefully explain why.
2. How would you offer a productive critique of this person’s work? After first explaining what is useful about the text or what it accomplishes, what inconsistencies, silences or gaps did you notice?
3. How would you situate these texts within the larger field of black feminism? Since each week’s readings represent a larger intellectual debate or discussion, how do each of these authors contribute to, critique, or intervene in this discussion?
4. What are the convergences, divergences, and productive tensions between their arguments? If relevant, how do they inform the readings from the previous weeks?
5. In what ways do these authors shift or expand our approach to black feminism as a field and a knowledge structure? What do they ask us to rethink or add to the discussion?
6. What are the larger intellectual stakes or interventions of this group of readings, or this broader theme?

Plagiarism and Cheating

Students enrolled in this course are obligated to maintain standards of academic integrity. Violations of academic obligations include unethical practices and acts of academic dishonesty such as cheating, plagiarism, or the facilitation of such acts. Cheating includes giving or receiving any unauthorized aid or giving or receiving any unfair advantage on any form of academic work. Plagiarism is the use of another's ideas or words, or both, as if they were one’s own. The use of ideas or direct quotations from others is acceptable, with appropriate citation of the source, but direct quotations should be used sparingly. Please familiarize yourself with the UCLA websites that explain plagiarism and proper citation procedures, including:

http://www.library.ucla.edu/bruinsuccess
2) http://www.deanofstudents.ucla.edu/paper.pdf, and
http://www.deanofstudents.ucla.edu/StudentGuide.pdf
Course Grading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Book Review</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Book Review</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final paper</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Books available for purchase at the UCLA Bookstore:


All other readings for the class will be available on the course website under their respective weeks: [https://moodle2.sscnet.ucla.edu/course/view/17W-GENDER205-1](https://moodle2.sscnet.ucla.edu/course/view/17W-GENDER205-1). You will be asked to respect our classroom community and not use the internet at any point during class, unless requested by the instructor. Please refrain as well from using phones, i-pods, or any other superfluous electronic items during class.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

**Week 1: Course Introduction**

Jan 11:

Course Introduction
Week 2: Black Feminist Knowledge Production

Jan 18:


Recommended:

- Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*
- The Combahee River Collective Statement
- Kia Caldwell, “Black Women’s Studies in the United States and Brazil: The Transnational Politics of Knowledge Production,” in *Race and the Politics of Knowledge Production*
- Filomina Chioma Steady, *The Black Woman Cross-Culturally*
Rosalyn Terborg-Penn and Andrea Benton Rushing, eds., *Women in Africa and the African Diaspora: A Reader*

**Week 3: Histories of Black Women’s Organizing and Community Formation**

**Jan 25:**

- Tera Hunter, *To ‘Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War*

**Recommended:**

- W.E.B. Dubois, *Black Reconstruction*
- Pamela Scully and Diana Paton, eds., *Gender and Slave Emancipation in the Atlantic World*
- Sarah Haley, *No Mercy Here: Gender, Punishment, and the Making of Jim Crow Modernity*
- LaShawn Harris, *Sex Workers, Psychics, and Numbers Runners: Black Women in New York City’s Underground Economy*
- Rhonda Williams, *The Politics of Public Housing: Black Women's Struggles Against Urban Inequality*
- Aimee Marie Cox, *Shapeshifters: Black Girls and the Choreography of Citizenship*

**Week 4: Black Women’s Agency? Archives, the Black Body, and the Discourse of Social Death**

**Feb 1:**


**Recommended Background Reading:**
- Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, chapters 2 and 3
- “Afro-Pessimism: An Interview with Frank Wildeson” (http://incognegro.org/index.html)

**Recommended Reading:**
- Sharon Holland, *Raising the Dead: Readings of Death and (Black) Subjectivity*
- Matt Richardson, *The Queer Limit of Black Memory: Black Lesbian Literature and Irresolution*
- Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: Blackness and Being*
- Stephanie Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora*
- Michelle Wright, *Physics of Blackness: Beyond the Middle Passage Epistemology*

**Week 5: Gender, Blackness and the Politics of Visuality**

**Feb 8:**
- Simone Browne, *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness*

**Recommended**
- Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*

Nicholas Mirzoeff, The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality


Week 6: Black Social Life, Feminism, and the Politics of Representation

Feb 15:

Terrion Williamson, Scandalize My Name: Black Feminist Practice and the Making of Black Social Life

Recommended

- Kimberly Juanita Brown, The Repeating Body: Slavery’s Visual Resonance in the Contemporary
- Rizvana Bradley, “Living in the Absence of a Body: The (Sus)Stain of Black Female (W)holeness” Rhizomes no. 29 (2016)
- Candice Jenkins, Private Lives, Proper Relations: Regulating Black Intimacy
- Tamara Beauboeuf-Lafontant, Behind the Mask of the Strong Black Woman: Voice and the Embodiment of a Costly Performance
- Janell Hobson, Venus in the Dark: Blackness and Beauty in Popular Culture

Week 7: Desire, the Sacred, and Black Caribbean Ethnography

Feb 22:

- Gloria Wekker, The Politics of Passion: Women’s Sexual Culture in the Afro-Surinamese Diaspora
- Audre Lorde, “Uses of the Erotic”
Recommended:

- Omise’eke Natasha Tinsley, *Thieving Sugar: Eroticism between Women in Caribbean Literature*
- Jefari Allen, *iVenceremos?: The Erotics of Black Self-making in Cuba*
- Jamica Kincaid, *A Small Place*
- LaMonda Horton Stallings, *Funk the Erotic: Transaesthetics and Black Sexual Culture*

**Week 8: Entanglements: Black Feminism, Black Power, and Anticolonial Struggle**

**Mar 8:**

- Malcolm X, “The Ballet or the Bullet”
- Angela Davis, “Meditations on the Legacy of Malcolm X,” in *Malcolm X in Our Own Image*
- bell hooks, “Sitting at the Feet of the Messenger: Remembering Malcolm X,” in *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*
- Frantz Fanon, “On Violence” in *The Wretched of the Earth*
- T. Denean Sharpely-Whiting, “U.S. Black Radical Feminists and Fanon,” in *Frantz Fanon: Conflicts and Feminisms*

Recommended

- Terry Goldie, “Saint Fanon and ‘Homosexual Territory,’” in *Franz Fanon: Critical Perspectives*
- Cheryl Higashida, *Black Internationalist Feminism: Women Writers of the Black Left, 1945-1995*
- T. Denean Sharpey-Whiting, “Fanon and Capecia” in *Franz Fanon: Critical Perspectives*
- Thomas Sankara, *Women’s Liberation and the African Freedom Struggle*
- Ula Taylor, *The Veiled Garvey: The Life and Times of Amy Jacques Garvey*

**Week 9: Black Nationalism, Queer Identities, and the Politics of Gender**

Mar 15:

- Wahneema Lubiano, “Standing in for the State: Black Nationalism and ‘Writing’ the Black Subject.” In Eddie Gluade, ed., *Is It Nation Time?*
- Huey Newton, “A letter from Huey to the Revolutionary Brothers and Sisters about the Women's Liberation and Gay liberation movements,” in *Black Men on Race, Gender, and Sexuality: A Critical Reader*
- Simmons and Riggs, “Sexuality, Television and Death: A Black Gay Dialogue on Malcom X,” in *Malcom X in Our Own Image*

**Recommended**

- Robin Kelley, “This Battlefield Called Life: Black Feminist Dreams” in *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*
- Sherie Randolph, Florynce “Flo” Kennedy: *The Life of a Black Feminist Radical*

**Week 10: Black Masculinity, Longing, and the In/visible Closet**

**Mar 1:**

C. Riley Snorton, *Nobody Is Supposed to Know: Black Sexuality on the Down Low*

**Recommended:**

- Jeffrey McCune, *Sexual Discretion: Black Masculinity and the Politics of Passing*
- Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman, *Against the Closet: Black Political Longing and the Erotics of Race*
- Marlon Bailey, *Butch Queens Up in Pumps: Gender, Performance, and Ballroom Culture in Detroit*
- Roderick Ferguson, *Aberrations In Black: Toward A Queer Of Color Critique*
- LaMonda Horton Stallings, *Mutha is Half a Word!: Intersections of Folklore, Vernacular, Myth, and Queerness in Black Female Culture*

***************Final Paper Due Date TBD***************