

***Feminism and Black Political Thought:
Black Feminist Politics WS 775.03
SPRING 2005***

Professor Rebecca Wanzo
286 University Hall
Office Hours: Tuesdays 2-4 and By Appointment
292-2271
wanzo.1@osu.edu

Course Description

In her famous essay, "But What Do We Think We're Doing Anyway: The State of Black Feminist Criticism(s) or My Version of a Little Bit of History," Barbara Christian examines the state of black feminist literary criticism. However, the critiques that emerge in this essay go beyond the parameters of literary studies, and a few of the questions she poses at the end of the essay are ones that all academics engaged in black feminist work should consider:

"Does our emphasis on definitions and theories mean that we will close ourselves to those, the many, who know or care little about the intense debates that take so much of our time in universities?"

"To whom are we accountable? And what social relations are inscribing us?"

"By 2000, will our voices sound like women's voices, black women's voices to anyone?"

"What do we want to do anyway and for whom do we think we're doing it?"

These questions interrogate the political importance of work built on "Theory" (particularly evolving from poststructuralism) and encourage a clear delineation of the audiences for black feminist work. She wrote the essay at the dawn of the final decade of the twentieth century; her evocation of the year 2000 addresses her concern about the absence of a clear black feminist project. What is the work of black feminist scholarship in the twenty-first century?

We'll seek to answer that question by looking at the most influential work in U.S. black feminist scholarship over the last two decades. By examining the scholarly trajectories of major black feminist thinkers, we will look at the evolution of foci their work and address issues such as audience, the political value of theory and the academy, and "black feminism" as, perhaps, a problematic unified concept. As we look at what these scholars think they're doing we'll also keep asking ourselves what *we're* doing—reading this text, in our classroom, in this institution, and in the context of our disciplines.

A word about the title of this course: for all of the scholars we're reading, feminism and black politics are integrated. The course title is thus a bit of misnomer, albeit an instructive one. One of the major issues in this course will be a discussion of this division—the idea that feminism has often been antithetical or unimportant to black politics.

Required Texts:

All of the following texts are required. I understand that book buying can be expensive, but these texts are nonetheless required for the course. Davis and Wallace are new books and not even owned by OSU yet, but there are many copies of *The Color Purple*, *Yearning*, and *The Alchemy of Race and Rights* in the Ohio Link system and very cheap copies available though Amazon.com.

The Angela Davis Reader

Delores Williams *Sisters in the Wilderness*

Patricia Williams *The Alchemy of Race and Rights*

Alice Walker *The Color Purple*

Michelle Wallace *Dark Designs and Visual Culture*

Zip Publishing Course Pack

Course Requirements

Journals, Response Papers and Participation:	25%
Presentations	20%
First paper (7-10)	25%
Expansion of first paper (20 pages)	30%

Response Papers and Participation:

As this is a seminar, participation by each student is a requirement. A seminar is only as lively as its members. I'd like to see you bring your interests and energy to this course. However, I recognize that everyone is not comfortable speaking. To compensate for this, I will pose a question at the end of every class session as a prompt for the following class. Some journal assignment questions are in the syllabus. Students will respond in writing to the prompt, and may be called upon to read their responses or talk about them in class. The responses may range from 3 sentences to 1 double-spaced page—this assignment is neither prescriptive nor punitive. I will collect the Response Papers (*for the week*) at the end of every Wednesday class.

There will be three other journal assignments for the course which will be related to the final paper assignment: a paper abstract, a brief annotated bibliography, and a journal search. The paper abstract is a conference paper abstract and will precede your first paper. The annotated bibliography will be a 2 page bibliography of your sources with a description of the text and its usefulness for your argument, and the journal assignment is to choose an academic journal for which the final paper you write for this course might be appropriate. I am not requiring that you submit the article for publication, only that you write the article in the format of the journal you've chosen.

Presentations:

In pairs, students will sign up for a presentation and lead class discussion at the beginning of a class period. A presentation model will be handed out on 3/30. Students will be required to lead a class discussion at the beginning of the next class. Prepare a list of **5 substantive questions** about the readings. I expect presentation pairs to be responsible for facilitating classroom discussion for a substantial portion of the class. (It is possible that a person may present alone, if desired.) The presentation grade will be evaluated by the pair's understanding of the material, ability to link the readings to previous readings and class discussions, and original and creative application of texts to other issues and concepts. Please give me **TWO** hardcopies of the questions and an outline of your presentation (one for each presenter).

Paper Assignments:

The papers for this class will address some issue central to black feminist scholarship. I AM NOT LOOKING FOR A LITERATURE REVIEW OF TEXTS READ IN THE CLASS, OR A RESPONSE TO ONE TEXT. The paper assignment is quite open. The first paper will be 7-10 pages (the length of a 15 minute conference paper). For final papers, the students will revise and expand that paper into a 20 page paper. Students are encouraged to begin thinking about what they would like to write about in the first two weeks of class.

Procedures and Policies:**Attendance and Participation:**

I expect you to attend every class. After two **unexcused** absences (a doctor's note, death in the family, or other emergency constitutes an excuse), your grade will be dropped one-half of a letter grade. I also expect you to be on time. If you are tardy three times I will count that as an absence. If you have some problem getting to class from your previous class or work, please discuss this with me.

Attendance constitutes part of your participation grade. Being present is not enough to earn full credit for participation. Contributing to class discussion is a must as a course is only as good as its members and the community built in the classroom.

On Writing:

Learning how to write is a continuous exercise. As you work on your writing for this course, I encourage you to come to me for help. You are also fortunate to have a Writing Center at OSU that aids students of all skill levels. Please take advantage of the free tutoring if you feel the need. The OSU Writing Center is located in 475 Mendenhall Laboratory, on the south end of the oval. Their phone number is 688-4291, and their website is cstw.ohio-state.edu/writing_center/index.htm.

Plagiarism:

The following is my department's expanded statement of The Ohio State University's policy on plagiarism:

As defined by University Rule 3335-31-02, plagiarism is "the representation of another's works or ideas as one's own; it includes the unacknowledged word for word use and/or paraphrasing of another person's work, and/or the inappropriate unacknowledged use of another person's ideas." Plagiarism is one of the most serious offenses that can be committed in an academic community; as such, it is the obligation of this department and its instructors to report all cases of suspected plagiarism to the Committee on Academic Misconduct. After the report is filed, a hearing takes place and if the student is found guilty, the possible punishment ranges from failing the class to suspension or expulsion from the university. Although the existence of the Internet makes it relatively easy to plagiarize, it also makes it even easier for instructors to find evidence of plagiarism. It is obvious to most teachers when a student turns in works that is not his or her own and plagiarism search engines make documenting the offense very simple. You should always cite your sources (I can help you with this if you are unfamiliar with proper styles of documentation). Always ask questions before you turn in an assignment if you are uncertain about what constitutes plagiarism. Always see your TA or professor if you are having difficulty with an assignment. To preserve the integrity of OSU as an institution of higher learning, to maintain your own integrity, and to avoid jeopardizing your future, **DO NOT PLAGIARIZE!**

Academic Misconduct:

It is the responsibility of the Committee on Academic Misconduct to investigate or establish procedures for the investigation of all reported cases of student academic misconduct. The term "academic misconduct" includes all forms of student academic misconduct wherever committed; illustrated by, but not limited to, cases of plagiarism and dishonest practices in connection with examinations. Instructors shall report all instances of alleged academic misconduct to the committee (Faculty Rule 33356-5-487). For additional information, see the Code of Student Conduct http://studentaffairs.osu.edu/resource_csc.asp.

I also direct students to this particular clause in the Code of Student Conduct, which is sometimes not recognized as an aspect of academic dishonesty: One should not submit "substantially the same work to satisfy requirements for one course that has been submitted in satisfaction of requirements for another course, without permission of the instructor of the course for which the work is being submitted."

Disability Services:

Students with disabilities that have been certified by the Office of Disability Services will be appropriately accommodated, and should inform the instructor as soon as possible of their needs. The Office for Disability Services is located in 150 Pomerene Hall, 1760 Neil Avenue; telephone 292-3307, TDD 292-0901; <http://www.ods.ohio-state.edu/>.

Course Schedule

Week One

3/28

Introductions

Background Lecture

What is Black Feminist Thought Exercise

3/30

The Angela Davis Reader

Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 6

<http://www.incite-national.org/about/>

Recommended: Barbara Christian "But What Do We Think We're Doing Anyway"

Week Two

4/4

The Angela Davis Reader

Part II

4/6

The Angela Davis Reader

Part III and Chapter 22

Students must have e-mailed me to discuss possible paper topics by the end of this week.

Week Three

4/11

bell hooks

Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics 1-13

Adolph Reed handout

Journal Assignment: Scan the hooks books on reserve and read an early chapter from either *Ain't I a Woman* or *Talking Back*. How would you describe the difference between her iterations of her feminist project?

4/13

bell hooks

Yearning 15, 16, 19-23

From *Salvation*

"Introduction—love is our hope"

"heterosexual love—union and reunion"

"embracing gayness—unbroken circles"

Friday 4/15 Abstracts due in my mailbox by 4:00

Week Four

4/18

Patricia Hill Collins Excerpt from *Black Feminist Thought*

“The Politics of Black Feminist Thought”

“Defining Black Feminist Thought”

“Toward an Afrocentric Feminist Epistemology”

4/20

Excerpt from *Black Sexual Politics*

“Why Black Sexual Politics”

“Prisons for our Bodies, Closets for our Minds”

“Very Necessary”

Week Five

4/25

Alice Walker

Alice Walker “womanism” definition

The Color Purple

4/27

Film: *The Color Purple*

Friday 4/29 First Papers Due in my mailbox by 4:00

Week Six

5/2

From *The Same River Twice*

191-200; 202-205; 214-215; 219-237; 281-287

Stanley Crouch “Aunt Medea”

5/4

Excerpt from *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* on e-reserve

Michelle Wallace *Dark Designs and Visual Culture*

Introduction, Chapters 1, 4, and 6

Week Seven

5/9

Michelle Wallace *Dark Designs and Visual Culture*

Chapters 9, 10, 14, 16, 18, 21, 29, 32, 39, 42, 43, 53 and ALL of Part IV

5/11

Hortense Spillers "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe"

Week Eight

5/16

Hortense Spillers "Interstices: A Small Drama of Words"

5/18

Delores Williams

Sisters in the Wilderness

Chapters 1-3

Recommended: Chapter 4

Week Nine

5/23

Delores Williams

Sisters in the Wilderness

Chapters 5-8

5/25

Patricia Williams

The Alchemy of Race and Rights

Part I (Chapters 1-3)

Week 10

5/30

No class

6/1

Patricia Williams

The Alchemy of Race and Rights

Chapters 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12

Final Papers Due Wed. June 8th by 1:30