

Women's Studies 520

Women of Color and Social Activism

Spring 2008

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274 University Hall

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Office Hours: Wed. 2-4:00,
and by appointment

This course focuses on black feminist thought and on citizenship, leadership, democracy, and political activism. We will consider historical and theoretical perspectives on issues such as how to understand the relationship between political thought and political practice and what constitutes social/political leadership and activism for African American women. The course includes a research, writing, and presentation component.

Required Texts

Kimberly Springer, editor, *Still Lifting, Still Climbing: Contemporary African American Women's Activism* (Duke University Press)

Geneva Smitherman, editor, *African American Women Speak Out on Anita Hill—Clarence Thomas* (Wayne State University Press)

Angela Dillard, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner Now? Multicultural Conservatism in America* (New York University Press)

Course Requirements

You must complete all readings by the dates indicated on the schedule below. I expect you to attend all class meetings, and I will keep track of attendance through the distribution of a role sheet at the beginning of every class period. It is your responsibility to sign the role sheet if you come to class late. You may miss 2 classes for any reason without penalty; for every absence after the 2nd, I will subtract 3 points from the highest possible grade on the Paper Project. Students with problems that require more than 2 absences from class during the quarter must speak to me. Late arrival at class should only occur in the event of an emergency. If you consistently arrive late or leave class early you should discuss your issue with me. In the absence of special circumstances you should be prepared to begin class on time with the necessary materials (including whatever books are assigned for that class session).

I will conduct class in a mixed lecture/discussion format, using lectures to deliver background and explanatory information. I expect all students to come prepared to participate in class discussions in a candid, thoughtful, and respectful manner. Please feel free to ask questions at any time. You should plan to take notes during lectures and discussions in order to enhance your understanding and retention of information.

The Office for Disability Services (ODS) offers a variety of services and auxiliary aids for students with documented disabilities. To access services, students must provide ODS with documentation of the disability. ODS is located in 150 Pomerene Hall; you can contact them at 292-3307.

The OSU Writing Center, which offers free tutoring to students, is located at 475 Mendenhall Lab. You can obtain more information about the Center at http://cstw.ohio-state.edu/writing_center/index.htm, and you may contact them at 688-4291.

Plagiarism Policy

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 work that is not his or her own and plagiarism search engines make it possible to document offenses. Always cite your sources. Always ask questions before you turn in an assignment if you are uncertain about what constitutes plagiarism.

Mid-Term and Final Examinations

The mid-term and final exams will be essay exams. Approximately two weeks before each exam, I will distribute a study sheet with questions for which you should prepare responses. These responses will help you prepare for the exam. You may not use notes or texts in the exam. If you miss the mid-term exam for any reason you will make up that exam during the second hour of the final examination period. Please consult the schedule below for exam dates.

Group Project/Paper

Each student in this course will participate in a research project that has both individual and group components. Please read the following instructions carefully and refer back to them in completing your project. Each one of you will be assigned to work on one of the books listed below. Class members will be divided into 5 groups of approximately 5 members each. Each group will then be assigned a particular presentation date (see schedule). Groups will be responsible for conducting class on the presentation date through a panel discussion on an assigned book.

Group Component of Research Project

Group members are responsible for insuring that individual papers and presentations explore different topics and do not merely replicate one another. Group members should trade papers so that there is some acquaintance on the part of all group members with the work that others are performing. All group members should read and critique each other's papers so that everyone has the benefit of cross-proofreading.

On the day of each group's research presentation, group members will take turns presenting work. Presentations may be placed in whatever order group members decide, but this order should be announced to the class. The group should select a "chair" for the panel; the responsibilities of the chair will be to introduce panelists and keep time during each presentation.

Individual Components of Research Project

Books and individual questions for papers/presentations are:

Patricia A. Schechter, *Ida B. Wells-Barnett & American Reform, 1880-1930*

- How did Wells' Christian faith influence her social and political activism?
- How did Wells' "body" (including her sex and her racial genealogy) and others' readings of that body affect her activist work?
- Explain how and why Wells' work was received ambivalently by her own racial community during the years of her activism.
- What discoveries did Wells make and publicize about the nature and practice of lynching that differentiated her work from that of other anti-lynching activists?
- What was the significance of Wells' own personality and gender performance (e.g., her "Joan of Arc" persona) for her activism and the reception of her activism by others?
- Besides her work as a crusading journalist and writer, what roles did Wells play in building social and political organizations?

Melba Patillo Beals, *Warriors Don't Cry: A Searing Memoir of the Battle to Integrate Little Rock's Central High*

- Explain the social and political context in which the public school integration "crisis" took place in the South.
- What forms did white opposition to integration take?
- What forms did black resistance to this opposition take?

- In what ways do narratives of school integration in the South both confirm and complicate ideological and political divisions between black and white Americans?
- Why did many African Americans in the South disapprove of the fight to achieve school integration? What forms did this disapproval take?
- What role did family and personal relationships play in Beals's and the other "Little Rock 9" student's struggles, successes, and challenges?

Elaine Brown, *A Taste of Power: A Black Women's Story*

- In the Black Panther Party, what was meant by "revolution"/"revolutionary," and what goals were associated with these ideas?
- In what ways was discipline of Party members enforced within the Party? How did discipline differ by the gender of Party members?
- In what ways did the politics of the Black Panther Party intersect with more "mainstream" civil rights politics, and in what ways did these politics differ?
- How was authority gendered in the Black Panther Party? What obstacles and opportunities did women negotiate in exercising authority?
- What tasks, functions, and powers did leaders in the Black Panther Party exercise? What internal challenges to their leadership did leaders face?
- What threats did the Black Panthers face from US government institutions and authorities?

Anita Hill, *Speaking Truth to Power*

- What kinds of political motivations were ascribed to Hill by those who were either involved in or observed the events of autumn, 1991?
- How did Judge Clarence Thomas's supporters challenge Hill's credibility in an effort to undermine her testimony against Thomas?
- What is Hill's critique of the proceedings of the Senate Judiciary committee?
- What is the role of race in Hill's decisions and in the responses of others to her actions?
- What kinds of understandings and misunderstandings of sexual harassment does Hill address?
- What role do the actions of the press and mass media representations of her and her acts play in Hill's narrative?

Star Parker, *Uncle Sam's Plantation: How Big Government Enslaves America's Poor and What We Can Do About It*

- What is Parker's understanding of the causes and varieties of poverty?
- For Parker, what is the role of Christian faith and teachings in preventing and solving social problems?
- How and why does Parker argue that federal government interventions to solve social problems fail to solve those problems or make them worse?
- In what ways does Parker use her own background and experiences to support her interpretations of and solutions for social problems?
- In what ways does Parker criticize and exhort the African American community?
- In what ways does Parker criticize practices related to American education, and what are her alternatives?

Joan Steinau Lester (with Eleanor Holmes Norton), *Fire in my Soul* (Chapters 3-13)

- How did Eleanor Holmes Norton's relationship with prominent civil rights organizations demonstrate and influence her political commitments?
- What was/is Norton's relationship to the feminist political movement and to feminist political goals/ideals?
- What was/is Norton's relationship to the Democratic Party and to a "liberal" political agenda?
- How did Norton's legal career from law student to chair of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and beyond demonstrate and influence her political commitments?
- What groups were Norton's allies throughout her career and what groups were her adversaries? Explain how and why these groups were allies and adversaries.
- What role did family and personal relationships play in Norton's struggles, successes, and challenges as a leader?
- What have been the major challenges, setbacks, and disappointments of Norton's career as a leader and in public service? How did she deal with these difficulties?

Guidelines:

1. Each paper should be no briefer than 6 full pages of text in 12-point font. Papers may be no longer than 8 pages of text.
2. Papers must be clearly written with attention to content, organization, style, and mechanics.
3. Each paper should consist of two parts. The first section will consist of your own overview of the book as a whole, while the second section should consist of your attention to your specific question. These sections should *not* be clearly delineated in the paper; rather these sections should be integrated together in the style of a book review.
4. Each oral presentation should be no longer than 8 minutes. Please rehearse before the presentation date to make sure you can cover your material in the time allotted. Chairs will keep time and make sure that presenters adhere to their limit.
5. Each presenter is responsible for creating and copying a presentation/study guide for members of the class (including the professor). This study guide should be clear and informational (ie, the goal is not to stuff as much information as you can into 1 page), and it may be no longer than 1 manuscript page of text in 12-point font.
6. All students are responsible for keeping study guides and using them (in addition to class notes) to prepare for the final exam. In addition, students should take notes during all presentations. You will be tested on this material.
7. Each group is responsible for working together to prepare its presentation.
8. Be aware of the University's plagiarism policy. Papers must include a brief honors statement on the cover page that pledges all contents to be the work of the author.
9. All group members should read every paper in the group and offer feedback to each author.
10. Finally, you should keep notes on whatever meetings or conversations you have with your group so that you can write a 1 page statement about the group's process to hand in with your final paper. Be specific in this statement; include information about meetings, who (if anyone) assumed a leadership role in the group, and who (if anyone) neglected responsibilities associated with the project.

Checklist:

1. Copies of a **1 page** study sheet for all class members and professor.
2. Final draft of a **6-8 page** paper with a cover sheet that includes your name, course number, date, and a signed honors statement.
3. A **1 page** statement of your group's process that includes your analysis of how effective you believe the group was at delegating topics and preparing for the class presentation. Please attach this statement to the back of your paper.

Grading

Midterm exam	1/3
Final exam	1/3
Group Project/Paper	<u>1/3</u>
	100%

Schedule of Readings and Examinations:

This schedule is subject to change. Changes announced in class will be considered to have become a part of the course syllabus.

Introduction

Tue Mar 25	Introduction to the course. <i>Complete "Pretest"</i>
Thu Mar 27	Springer: Kimberly Springer, Introduction (1-13); "Four Mission Statements" (37-46)

Political Ideologies

Tue Apr 1	Springer: Anderson-Bricker, "'Triple Jeopardy': Black Women and the Growth of Feminist Consciousness in SNCC, 1964-1975 (49-69); Roth, "The Making of the Vanguard Center: Black Feminist Emergence in the 1960s and 1970s" (70-90)
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Thu Apr 3	Dillard: Introduction and Chapter 1, “Malcolm X’s Words in Clarence Thomas’s Mouth” (1-55). At some point in your reading of selections from Dillard, you might want to read the review of her book that appeared in the New York Times in 2001. Written by Scott L. Malcomson, it can be found on the web at http://www.nytimes.com/books/01/03/04/reviews/010304.04malco mt.html
Tue Apr 8	Dillard: Chapter 2, “Toward a Politics of Assimilation” (56-98); Smitherman: Smitherman, “Introduction (7-16); “Statements (Hill/Thomas)” (19-30)

Strategies and Practices	
Thu Apr 10	Springer: Myers, “Racial Unity in the Grass Roots? A Case Study of a Women’s Social Service Organization” (107-130); Smooth and Tucker, “Behind But Not Forgotten: Women and the Behind-the-Scenes Organizing of the Million Man March” (241-258)
Tue Apr 15	Springer: Gateward, “Documenting the Struggle: African American Women as Media Artists, Media Activists” (275-296); <i>Mid-Term Study Guide Distributed</i>
Thu Apr 17	Springer: White, “Talking Black, Talking Feminist: Gendered Micromobilization Processes in a Collective Protest Against Rape” (189-218)
Tue Apr 22	Springer: Smith, “ONAMOVE: African American Women Confronting the Prison Crisis” (219-240); Vanessa Tait, “‘Workers Just Like Anyone Else’: Organizing Workfare Unions in New York City” (297-324)
Thu Apr 24	Springer: Grayson, “‘Necessity Was the Midwife of Our Politics’” (131-148); Ross, “Epilogue: African American Women’s Activism in the Global Arena” (325-339)
Tue Apr 29	<i>Mid-Term Examination</i>
Thu May 1	Smitherman: Ransby, “A Righteous Rage and a Grassroots Mobilization” (45-52); Etter-Lewis, “High-Tech Lynching on Capitol Hill: Oral Narratives from African American Women (80-99)

Actors

Tue May 6	Dillard: Chapter 3, “I Write Myself, Therefore I Am” (99-136)
Thu May 8	Springer: Eckert and Benson-Smith, “Crossing Lines: Mandy Carter, Grassroots Activism, and Mobilization ‘96” (259-274)
Tue May 13	Smitherman: Alexander, “Whose ‘Boy’ is This?” (75-79); Brown, “Imaging Lynching: African American Women, Communities of Struggle, and Collective Memory” (100-124)
Thu May 15	Smitherman: Hine, “For Pleasure, Profit, and Power: The Sexual Exploitation of Black Women” (168-177); Coleman-Burns, “Social and Political Thought from the Feminist and Black Communities: The Scapegoat and the Sacrificial Lamb” (53-73)

Presentations

Tue May 20	Group 1
Thu May 22	Group 2
Tue May 27	Group 3
Thu May 29	Group 4
Wed Nov 30	Group 5

Tue June 3 *Final Exam: 11:30-1:18. Be on time!*