

## LIT 6358: Womanist Intellectual Thought



“Sisters in Conference I & II” artwork by Kolongi Barthwaite



*Womanism is a social change perspective rooted in Black women’s and other women of color’s everyday experiences and everyday methods of problem solving in everyday spaces, extended to the problem of ending all forms of oppression for all people, restoring the balance between people and the environment/nature, and reconciling human life with the spiritual dimension.*

Layli Philips [Maparyan], *The Womanist Reader*, 2006, xx

Dr. Debra Walker King  
Spring 2020 – R 6-8<sup>th</sup> periods (12:50-3:50)  
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R 4-5th and 9th periods  
also by appointment  
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**Description:** The obscure position of African American women in the record of American intellectualism has resulted in a consensus among the uninformed that the phrase “Black womanist intellectual” is an oxymoron. This seminar disputes that assumption by focusing on Black women’s traditions and challenging imposed boundaries that define both intellectualism and genius. Students will examine the intersection of the public intellectual, academic, and grass roots activist while discussing the influences of Black female intellectuals in the development of literary and cultural criticism, education, law, theology, and American (as well as global) sociopolitical issues.

**Objectives:** Since Alice Walker introduced the term "womanism" in 1983, critics both embrace and reject it. Black, women theologians were the quickest to accept the label as one offering opportunities for a specific type of critical engagement: namely, womanist ethics and liberation theology. For this reason, they were the most influential in defining (and redefining) the boundaries of the term’s use. Some consider the contribution of womanist intellectual thought to theoretical and activist discourses--especially when we consider Black/White feminist relationships-- nothing more than an analysis of the White woman as other. This understanding of womanism is a misinterpretation and a block to communal wholeness.

With these thoughts in mind the primary objective of this course is to answer the question “what is womanism?” Is it an umbrella term for a distinctly humanist approach to equality and social tolerance? Is it, as Audre Lorde once charged, an “attempt to disclaim being feminist”? Or, is it as womanist scholar Layli Maparyan claims, “a significant intervention upon the challenges of our times...a gift from Black women to all humanity?”

**Format:** Class sessions include lectures, film clips, student presentations and discussions.

### REQUIRED TEXTS

1. Phillips, Layli ed. 2006. *The Womanist Reader*.
2. Maparyan, Layli 2012. *The Womanist Idea*.
3. Coleman, Monica A. 2013. *Ain't I a Womanist Too*.
4. ---, 2008. *Making a Way Out of No Way*.
5. Lemons, Gary L. 2019. *Building Womanist Coalitions*
6. Harris, Melanie. 2017. *Ecowomanism*.
7. Walker, Alice. 1989. *The Temple of My Familiar*.
8. Walker, Alice. 2004. *Now is the Time to Open Your Heart*.

#### Suggested texts:

Katie Geneva Cannon, et.al. 2011. *Womanist Theological Ethics: A Reader*.  
Hudson-Weems, Clenora. *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves--Africana-Melanated Womanism*. 5th Ed. Routledge UP, 2020.  
MLA Handbook, 5<sup>th</sup> edition, 2018.

## COURSE CALENDAR

Week 1 -- 1/9

Course Introduction: Purpose and Goals

Reading Assignment: "Introduction" from *The Womanist Reader*, Layli Phillips, ed.; as well as the "Preface" and "Introduction" of *The Womanist Idea*, Layli Maparyan.

Introductory Lecture and Discussion of Video:

[2017 Albright - Layli Maparyan - Womanism and the Inclusion of Grassroots Women](#)

Week 2 – 1/16

Required reading: Part 1, "Birthplaces, Birthmothers: Womanist Origins," *Womanist Reader*, Layli Phillips, ed.

Suggested Reading: Hudson-Weems, Clenora. *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves—Africana-Melanated Womanism*. 5th Ed. Routledge UP, 2020.

Week 3 – 1/23

Subject Text: *The Womanist Idea*, Layli Phillips, ed.

Required reading: Chapters 1-6

**Response Paper** (#3) 20 min. with respondent (#5) Q&A to follow

Week 4 – 1/30

Subject Text: *The Womanist Reader*. Layli Phillips

Required Reading: Part 3 through End of Text,

**Response Paper** (#2) 20 min. with respondent (#8) Q&A to follow

Week 5 – 2/6

Subject Text: *Ain't I A Womanist Too*, Monica Coleman.

Required Reading: Chapters 1-6

**Response Paper** (#4) 20 min. with respondent (#1) Q&A to follow

Week 6 – 2/13

Subject Text: *Ain't I A Womanist Too*, Monica Coleman.

Required Reading: Chapters 7-end

**Response Paper** (#5) 20 min. with respondent (#7) Q&A to follow

Week 7 – 2/20

Subject Text: *Building Womanist Coalitions*. Gary L. Lemons, ed.

**Response Paper** (#8) 20 min. with respondent (#6) Q&A to follow

Suggested reading: Part 2, "Womanist Kinfolk: Sisters, Brothers, Daughters, and Sons on Womanism," *The Womanist Reader*. Layli Phillips

Week 8 – 2/27

Subject Text: Parts 2 & 3 of *The Womanist Idea*, Layli Maparyan

**Response Paper** (#1) 20 min. with respondent (#2) Q&A to follow

Week 9 – 3/5 (No Class--Spring Break)

Week 10 – 3/12

Subject text: *Ecowomanism: African American Women and Earth-Honoring Faiths*, Melanie L. Harris

**Response Paper** (#9) 20 min. with respondent (#10) Q&A to follow

Week 11 – 3/19 Subject Text: *Making a Way Out of No Way*, Monica Coleman.

**Response Paper** (#7) 20 min. with respondent (#3) Q&A to follow

Week 12 – 3/26

Subject Text: *The Temple of My Familiar*, Alice Walker

**Response Paper** (#10) 20 min. with respondent (#9) Q&A to follow

Week 13— 4/2

Concluding discussion of Alice Walker's *The Temple of My Familiar*

**Response Paper** (#6) 20 min. with respondent (#4) Q&A to follow

Week 14 – 4/9

Subject text: Alice Walker's *Now is the Time to Open Your Heart*

Assignment: Using a 3x5 index card, prepare a brief analytical statement or commentary concerning some aspect of the novel you find supports, defies or in some way problematizes your understanding of womanist precepts and praxis. Conclude your commentary with an open-ended question for discussion. This is not a graded, written assignment; but it will be assessed in your preparation and participation grade. Be prepared to deliver these cards to me for this assessment.

Week 15– 4/16

Concluding: Alice Walker's *Now is the Time to Open Your Heart*

Continue discussion of commentary cards if necessary.

NOTE: Seminar Papers due in Canvas by 11:59 pm on April 24<sup>th</sup>

### Grade Distribution

Panel papers and respondent Assignment

250 points

- **125 points:** First, each student must write a **Panel Paper** and present it to the class. Panel presentation numbers will be assigned during the first week of class. If you enter the seminar after the first class, see me. These papers should be no more than six (6) typed, double-

spaced pages for the twenty-minute panel presentations—offer a critical reflection, focusing on the conceptual and empirical substance of the assigned texts. Panels will conclude with comments offered by, and class discussion lead by, a respondent.

- **125 points: Second**, each student is responsible for responding to a panel paper orally. By this, I mean respondents do not have to submit a written paper to me. I want you to lead discussion of the panel paper; so, do not read a written statement. I am serious about this. You are a discussion leader as well as respondent. You may use notes during your in-class discussion of the paper and its relationship to course objectives as well as other texts or papers read thus far, but do not read a paper. Your role is to facilitate interlocutory exchange; therefore, your comments should highlight points of insightfulness as well as personal points of agreement and disagreement, additions or enhancements. Prepare a general discussion question for the class. Your time limit is twenty minutes, including discussion.

### **General panel guidelines:**

Because there are respondents, each panel member must complete assigned papers ( précis or drafts) one week in advance of the presentation date so respondents have an opportunity to prepare for the session. To ensure things move smoothly, please post respondent prep materials on Canvas (or email) addressed to the assigned respondents **by 4:05 the Monday preceding the primary discussion of your assigned text** (see schedule above). Late papers or draft submissions will be penalized by immediate **letter grade reduction** (no exceptions). If you cannot meet the deadline for your draft due day, make arrangements for the submission with your respondent. **Submit your final panel papers to me on Canvas by 11:59 pm on the presentation due date.**

## **Seminar Paper**

250 pts

Womanism is a “spiritual movement,” a “way of being in the world” and “a social and ecological change perspective.” We find its methods and concerns used in multiple fields of study (see the non-exhaustive bibliography in *The Womanist Reader*, Part V, “Womanist Resources”). With this in mind, write a 30-page white paper in which you appraise the applicability of womanist thought to concepts and problems central to your area of specialization or question(s) guiding your current graduate study. The guide must be divided into chapters as follows:

### Chapter One: Comparative Critical Review

In this chapter you examine how the five overarching characteristics defining womanism—its antioppressionist, vernacular, nonideological, communitarian, and spiritualized makeup—may (or may not) open new avenues for intellectual engagement in your area of specialization. How does the literature reviewed align with womanism? This chapter is an abbreviated, critical literature review of published work in your field or area of study juxtaposed with the above characteristics, which we find demonstrated consistently in womanist intellectual thought. Demonstrate what a consideration of womanism brings to the table for interrogation, transformation and exploration. In other words, explain, with detail, how the five characteristics of womanism might change, or enhance, the conversation—or, why it may not? This chapter should be no longer than ten (10) pages.

## Chapter Two: Humanizing Agency

Explore the synergistic "Womanist Triad of Concern" as a means of bringing depth of insight and humanizing agency to your work in new or reevaluated ways. What does "humanizing agency" mean in your work or area of specialization? Is womanism useful as a means of enhancing the conversation? How? To what benefit? This chapter should be no longer than ten (10) pages.

## Chapter Three: Application

Considering womanism's claim as a social and ecological change perspective, theorize and/or analyze an area of your work (in literature, pop culture, film, community engagement, Sankofa, etc), by exploring its relationship to one or more of the ten Womanist Social and Ecological Change Methodologies Maparyan outlines: "harmonizing and coordinating," "dialogue," "arbitration and mediation," "spiritual activities," "hospitality and the politics of invitation," mothering, "self-care and mutual aid," "physical healing," "standing in" and "fly-over." This chapter should be ten (10) pages in length.

## Bibliography

Include a bibliography, but do not count it in the 30-page minimum.

## Other

### **Preparation and Participation:**

All readings must be prepared and ready for each class session.

### **Audits and Independent Studies:**

\* Students entering this course via independent study must attend class regularly and participate. They should follow the requirements of the course as outlined above.

\* Students auditing this course must also attend class regularly and participate. For audits I require an entrance paper (3 pages--due 1/23) and an exit paper (3-5 pages--due 4/24—discussing what you learned in this seminar). These requirements must be fulfilled in order to earn a "satisfactory" audit grade.

## Course Policies

- *"Fatal Errors" Policy:* I expect mature, scholarly writing at all times. In other words, students must meet high standards in writing. To this end, all written assignments must meet minimal presentation criteria to be acceptable. These standards address spelling, punctuation, format and basic grammar. The term *Fatal Errors (FE)* refers to formal writing errors of

form. Specifically, they include the following and will be identified in evaluated written assignments (FE#\_):

- 1. Each different word misspelled;
- 2. Each sentence fragment;
- 3. Each run-on sentence or comma splice;
- 4. Each mistake in capitalization (In this class, capitalize Black and White when referring to individuals, communities, or ideas);
- 5. Each serious error in punctuation that obscures meaning, including errors in the use or failure to use italics and quotation marks;
- 6. Each error in voice, verb tense, shifts in tense, or subject/verb agreement (note: second person point of view is not used in formal writing);
- 7. Each instance of ending a sentence with a preposition;
- 8. Each improper citation, or lack of citation, where one is needed (follow the MLA Handbook, 8<sup>th</sup> edition, 2018);
- 9. Each misuse of words (*who* for *that* or unwarranted use of clichés, for instance, and reference problems (note: pronouns refer to the last person mentioned));
- 10. Poor paragraphing or lack of paragraphing (this includes the proper use of indented quotations);
- 11. Lack of conformity with assignment format, including application of the 5-1-1 rule (five words per slide with one image used one time) for all PowerPoint presentations.

Papers with more than **three (3) fatal errors on any one page** or more than **seven (7) for the entire document** may be returned to the student for revision but will suffer a half letter grade deduction. Only one resubmission is allowed. Penalties for final course papers (where there is no time for a resubmission) will be based on the magnitude of errors and the relative importance of the assignment to the determination of the final course grade. This policy applies to all formal, written assignments.

- *Cell phones and computers:* Cell phones must be muted or turned off during the class session. If an emergency occurs and you have to respond to calls or texts, please leave the classroom. Computers (iPads or other electronics) are allowed for note taking, access to eBooks and presentations only. Anyone using a computer for any other purpose will be asked to deliver the device to me for retrieval after class. You may record the class (presentations, for instance) with my permission **only**.
- *Papers:* All papers must be typed and double spaced using the 8 1/2 x 11 page layouts with one inch margins all around. Use Courier or New York Times font at 12-point size. Documentation and form should follow the MLA style manual. Number all pages after the first within the upper right margin.
- *Paper Maintenance Responsibilities:* Students are responsible for maintaining duplicate copies of all work submitted in this course and retaining all returned, graded work until the semester is over. Should the need arise for a resubmission of papers or a review of graded papers; it is the student's responsibility to have and to make available this material.

- *Grade Disputes:* Questions about assigned grades are acceptable during my office hours only. If my written responses do not address your concerns, I will explain why a grade was earned. With the exception of miscalculation or posting error, I will not consider grade changes. **Please do not ask.** You may consult the department's Graduate Coordinator, for grade appeals, however. Please note: appeals may result in a higher, unchanged, or lower final grade.
- *Missed class sessions:* Make up work for approved absences must be addressed within one week of your return. See me for submission deadlines of missed work within this time frame. You are allowed one absence. Additional absences receive approval only if accompanied by appropriate documentation of professional or university event, illness, or family emergency.
- *Final Paper Submission guidelines:* This assignment **must be submitted electronically.** Unreadable documents will be returned ungraded. Submit your final project via Canvas 11:59 pm on the due date. Late submissions will suffer a half letter grade reduction.

### **University Policies**

*Disability Services:* The Disability Resource Center in the Dean of Students Office provides students and faculty with information and support regarding accommodations for students with disabilities in the classroom. It is your responsibility to contact the school administration regarding any disability you may have, and to inform me so we can make any necessary arrangements. For more information, see: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>

*Academic Honesty:* Honor Code. "We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honesty and integrity." This oath represents UF's commitment to academic honesty and integrity. "Cheating, plagiarism, bribery, misrepresentation, conspiracy and fabrication" are violations of the Honor Code. Violators will suffer the consequences. For more information about academic honesty, including definitions of plagiarism and unauthorized collaboration, see: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcodes/honorcode.php>

*Harassment:* UF provides an educational and working environment for its students, faculty, and staff free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment. For more about UF policies regarding harassment, see: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/studentguide/studentconductcode.php#s4041>

**STUDENTS WHO ARE IN DISTRESS:** For guidance during distressing situations, please contact U Matter We Care or the Dean of Students Office. They can help students navigate resources and academic procedures for personal, medical, and academic issues. Below, are additional resources:

- a. U Matter We Care: <http://umatter.ufl.edu>, [umatter@ufl.edu](mailto:umatter@ufl.edu), 352-294-2273 (CARE)
- b. Dean of Students: <https://dso.ufl.edu/>, 202 Peabody Hall, (352) 392-1261
- c. Counseling & Wellness Center: <https://counseling.ufl.edu/>, 3190 Radio Road, (352) 392-575
- d. Field and Fork Pantry: <https://fieldandfork.ufl.edu/>, located near McCarty B, 352-294-2208
- e. Student Health Care Center: <http://shcc.ufl.edu/>, multiple locations, (352) 392-1161

COURSE EVALUATIONS: “Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course based on 10 criteria. These evaluations are conducted online at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results>.”