

LIT 6358 SECTION 1D36
Womanist Intellectual Thought

“When you really look at the stereotypes of Black women, the worst you can say about them, that is once you disregard the vocabulary and the dirty words and deal with the substance of what is being said, is quite complementary. Think about it. What is being said is that Black women are wonderful mothers and nurturers (mammies), that we are sexually at home in our own bodies (oversexed), and that we are self-sufficient and tough (henpecking and overbearing). And isn't that exactly what every woman wants to be: loving and nurturing, sexually at home in her body, competent and strong?”

-Toni Morrison in an interview with *Ebony Magazine*, July 1988

Dr. Debra Walker King
Spring 2015 – M 9-11th periods (4-7 pm)
E-mail: dwking@ufl.edu

Office Hrs: M 6-8th periods
and by appointment
Office: 4352 Turlington

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 intellectual traditions and challenging imposed boundaries that define intellectualism. Students will examine the intersection of the public intellectual, academic, and political theorist while discussing the influences of black female intellectuals in the development of literary and cultural criticism, education, law, and American (as well as global) social and political issues.

Since Alice Walker introduced the term "womanism" in 1983, critics have both embraced and rejected it. Black theologians and sociologists were the quickest to accept the label as one offering opportunities for a specific type of critical engagement: namely, womanist ethics and liberation theology. They have also been the most influential in defining (and redefining) the boundaries of its use. The value of womanist intellectual thought to theoretical and activist discourses--especially when we consider black/white feminist relationships--has been criticized as offering nothing more to feminism than an analysis of the white woman as other. In this light womanism has been misunderstood and redefined. With these thoughts in mind the primary objective of this course is to answer the question “what is womanism?” Is it as Audre Lorde once charged an “attempt to disclaim being feminist”? Is it an umbrella term for a distinctly humanist approach to equality and social tolerance? Or is it something more...something revolutionary, liberating and necessary?

A second objective of the course is to introduce a few uses and abuses of womanism as a theoretical discourse and as a platform of women’s activism. Our discussions will address questions such as who can be a womanist and what exactly does this identity mean in terms of bridging the still obtrusive gap separating black and white feminists? What are the problems and issues that sustain this gap and how can they be challenged or addressed? How does the black feminist differ from the womanist? Is there a need for such distinctions? What is the relationship of community, family, religion, and spirituality to womanism? We will also consider the definitions of an intellectual. What is an intellectual and how is this identity constructed? How

does the public intellectual differ from the academic? What is low and high culture (or low and high theory) and how does womanism address these distinctions? How are the activist and public intellectual viewed by advocates of womanism? And, finally, we will examine womanism as a potential mobilizing force for a global humanist movement of empowerment.

Format: Class sessions include lectures, student presentations and class discussions.

Required Texts

1. Beverly Guy-Sheftall, ed. 1995. *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*.
2. Layli Phillips, ed. 2006. *The Womanist Reader*.
3. ---, 2012. *The Womanist Idea*.
4. Peggy Antrobus. 2004. *The Global Women's Movement: Origins, Issues, & Strategies*.
5. Katie Geneva Cannon, et.al. 2011. *Womanist Theological Ethics: A Reader*.
6. Alice Walker, 2010. *Hard Times Require Furious Dancing*.
7. ---, 2006. *We Are the Ones We Have Been Waiting For*.
8. ---, 1988. *Living by the Word: Selected Writings 1973-1987*.
9. ---, 1989. *Temple of My Familiar* (please note: this text was not on the online list)
10. Rudolph P. Byrd, ed. 2010. *The World Has Changed*.

COURSE CALENDAR

Week 1 -- 1/12

Course Introduction: Purpose and Goals

Week 2 – 1/19

MLK Holiday –No Class

Unit One: Interpretive, Theoretical, and Methodological tools of Womanism

Week 3 – 1/26

Readings:

“Preface” through “Civil Rights and Women’s Liberation...” (in *Words of Fire*, Beverly Guy-Sheftall, ed. pp. 1- 228)

Week 4 – 2/2 Subject Text “Beyond the Margins...” through End of Text (*Words*, pp. 229-551)

1st Papers (Panelists 1 and 2) 15 min. each with respondents (#5) Q&A to follow

Week 5 – 2/9 Subject Text: *The Womanist Reader*, Layli Phillips, ed

1st Papers (Panelists 4 and 5) 15 min. each with respondent (#6) Q&A to follow

Week 6 – 2/16 Subject Text *The Womanist Idea*. Layli Phillips

1st Papers (Panelists 7 and 8) 15 min. each with respondent (#1) Q&A to follow

Week 7 – 2/23 Subject Text *Womanist Theological Ethics*, Katie Geneva Cannon, et. al., eds.
1st Papers (Panelists 3, 6 and 9) 15 min. each with respondent (#4) Q&A to follow

Week 8 – 3/2 (No Class--Spring Break—2/28-3/7) ☺

Unit Two: The Mother of Womanism: Alice Walker Speaks

Week 9 – 3/9

Subject text: *The World Has Changed: Conversations with Alice Walker*
2nd Papers (Panelist 6) 15 min. with respondent (#9) Q&A to follow

Week 10 -- 3/16

Subject text: Alice Walker's *Living By the Word*, "Preface"—"A Name is Sometimes an Ancestor"
2nd Papers (Panelists 7 and 8) 15 min. each with respondent (#3) Q&A to follow

Session Break

Subject text: Alice Walker's *Living By the Word*, "A Thousand Words" –End
2nd Papers (Panelists 4 and 5) 15 min. each with respondent (#2) Q&A to follow

Week 11— 3/23

Subject text: Alice Walker's *We Are The Ones We Have Been Waiting For*
2nd Papers (Panelists 3, 6 and 9) 15 min. each with respondent (#8) Q&A to follow

Week 12 – 3/30

Alice Walker's *Hard Times Require Furious Dancing*
2nd Papers (Panelists 1 and 2) 15 min. each with respondent (#7) Q&A to follow

Week 13 – 4/6

Reading: Alice Walker's *Temple of My Familiar*

Unit Three: The Globalization of Womanism

Week 14 – 4/13

3rd papers (All Seminiar Participants) Peggy Antrobus. *The Global Women's Movement: Origins, Issues, & Strategies*. (see assignment description below)

Week 15 – 4/20 – Writing Day

Seminar Papers (due in my email box by 4:00 pm on April 22nd)

GRADE DISTRIBUTION

PANEL PAPERS AND RESPONDENT ASSIGNMENT

250 POINTS

• **125 points:** Each student is asked to write two (2) **Panel Papers** and present them to the class. Panels 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 fifteen minute panel presentations—offer a critical reflection, focusing on the conceptual and empirical substance of the assigned texts. Panels will use a conference format with two panelists and a panel respondent.

• **125 points: Second,** each student is responsible for responding to two panel papers, or one panel of presenters, orally. By this, I mean respondents do not have to submit a written paper to me. Think of this as your panel. I want you to lead discussion of the panel papers; 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 both the papers and their relationship to each other, course objectives, and 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 panel insightfulness as well as personal points of agreement and disagreement, additions or enhancements. Prepare questions for each presenter as well as a general discussion question for the class. Time limit—twenty minutes, including discussion.

General panel guidelines: Because there are respondents, each panel member must complete assigned papers (présis 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 via email to the assigned respondents **by 4:05 the Monday preceding the primary discussion of your assigned text** (see schedule above). Late paper or draft submissions will be penalized by immediate **letter grade reduction** (no exceptions). If you cannot meet the deadline on the due day, make arrangements for the submission with your panel leader (respondent). **Send your final panel papers to me by 4:05 on the due date via email.**

THEMATIC PAPER ASSIGNMENT

125 POINTS

• **125 points:** Your **third written assignment**, scheduled for submission and discussion on April 13th, addresses our course objective to examine womanism as a mobilizing vehicle for a global humanist movement. Read *The Global Women's Movement: Origins, Issues, & Strategies* (2004) by Peggy Antrobus. Prepare to discuss it in class. Consider this text and all we have discussed this semester as you address the following question in a four page essay: In what ways might womanism, as a discourse of liberation and personal empowerment, speak to and address the concerns of a global audience—male and female.

FINAL PAPER ASSIGNMENT
125 POINTS

Seminar Paper: The content of this six-ten page, paper should emphasize some aspect of the course focus and objectives, using any of the required texts. Students may develop their panel paper(s).

OTHER

Preparation:

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 1/26) and an exit paper (3-5 pages--due 4/20—discussing what you learned in this seminar). These requirements must be fulfilled in order to earn a “satisfactory” audit grade.

Course Policies

1) “FATAL ERRORS” POLICY: 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* refers to formal writing errors of form. Specifically, they include the following and will be identified in evaluated written assignments by error number:

- ✚ 1. Each different word misspelled,
- ✚ 2. Each sentence fragment,
- ✚ 3. Each run-on sentence or comma splice,
- ✚ 4. Each mistake in capitalization,
- ✚ 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 verb tense or subject/verb agreement,
- ✚ 7. Each instance of ending a sentence with a preposition,
- ✚ 8. Each improper citation, or lack of citation, where one is needed
- ✚ 9. Each misuse of words (*who* for *that* or unwarranted use of clichés, for instance),
- ✚ 10. Poor Paragraphing or lack of paragraphing,
- ✚ 11. Lack of conformity with assignment format.

Papers with more than **three (3) fatal errors on any one page** or more than **seven (7) for the entire document** will be returned to the student and 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 relative importance of the assignment to

the determination of the final course grade. This policy applies to all assignments, excluding entrance cards and portfolio progress grading.

- 2) **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**.
- 3) **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.
- 4) **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.
- 5) **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 Professor Stephanie Smith, Associate Chair, for grade appeals, however. Please note: appeals may result in a higher, unchanged, or lower final grade.
- 6) **MISSED CLASS SESSIONS:** Make up work for approved absences must be addressed within one week of your return. See me for submission deadlines for missed work within this time frame.
- 7) **FINAL PAPER SUBMISSION GUIDELINES:** This assignment **must be submitted electronically**. Microsoft Word compatible documents only please. Unreadable documents will be returned ungraded. Submit your final project via email (dwking@ufl.edu) by 4:05 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. All students must abide by the student honor code. For more information about academic honesty, including definitions of plagiarism and unauthorized collaboration, see:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/advising/info/student---honor---code.aspx>

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.hr.ufl.edu/eo/sexharassment.htm>

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>.”

Selected Readings (not alphabetized)

Heidi Mirza, ed., *Black British Feminism* (1997)

bell hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* (2000)

M Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Cartographies of Knowledge and Power: Transnational Feminism as Radical Praxis" (from *Critical Transnational Feminist Praxis*, Amanda Lock Swarr & Richa Nagar, eds. Pp.23-45, 2010)

V. Eudine Barriteau, "The relevance of black feminist scholarship: a Caribbean perspective" (*Feminist Africa*, Issue 7:9-31, Dec. 2006) (available online)

Rhoda Reddock, "Conceptualizing Difference in Caribbean Feminist Theory" (in *New Caribbean Thought*, 2002)

Rhoda Reddock, "Women's organizations and movements in the Commonwealth Caribbean" (*Feminist Review*, 59:57-73, 1998)

Beverly Bryan et al., "Chain reactions: Black women organizing" (in *The Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain*, pp. 123-181)

Marie-José N'Zengou-Tayo. "Fanm Se Poto Mitan: Haitian woman, the pillar of society" (in *Feminist Review*, 59:118-142, 1998)

Valerie Smith, "Preface," *Not just Race, Not Just Gender* (1998)

Marie Griffith and Barbara Dianne Savage, eds., *Women and Religion in the African Diaspora* (2006)

Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider*

Angelyn Mitchell, ed. *Within the Circle*

Gloria Wade-Gayles, *No Crystal Stair*

Michele Wallace, *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*

Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

... , *Black Skin, White Masks*

Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*