

AML 3284
African American Women and the Culture Critique
Fall 2022

Professor: Dr. Debra Walker King

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Class Time: R 6th – 8th (12:50 – 3:50)

Place: TUR 2303

Office hours: TR (by appointment only due to COVID)

COVID-19 Policy

In response to COVID-19, the following recommendations are in place to maintain your learning environment, to enhance the safety of our in-classroom interactions, and to further the health and safety of ourselves, our neighbors, and our loved ones.

- If you are not vaccinated, get vaccinated. Vaccines are readily available and have been demonstrated to be safe and effective against the COVID-19 virus. Visit ONE.UF for screening / testing and vaccination opportunities.
- If you are sick, stay home. Please call your primary care provider if you are ill and need immediate care or the UF Student Health Care Center at 352-392-1161 to be evaluated.
- As with any excused absence, you will be given a reasonable amount of time to make up missed work.

Course Description: This course engages the work of world-renowned literary and cultural theorist Hortense Spillers and, in fact, carries the name of a course she taught while at Emory University. It investigates whether Spillers’ theories concerning Black women’s literary production articulate the theoretical concepts of Afro Pessimism and/or Womanist Thought. By focusing foremost on representations of the captive female body within the social and political context of the United States, it examines the subject positions of African American women and the power of transformative rage. As an inquiry generated by Spillers’ work as well as current issues in literary scholarship, it addresses some of the assumptions of womanist and feminist investigation by exploring the following questions—the first asked by Hortense Spillers. “If feminist praxis and epistemology are grounded in notions of ‘freedom,’ ‘individuality,’ and the freedom of the body to ‘labor,’ deeply implicated in the rise of modern capitalism, then what gaps must be brought to light in order for this discourse to achieve a broader articulation?” If womanism is both a social change perspective and a way of being in the world, how do texts written by African American women engage that perspective and mode of being? Do the surveyed texts engage either? In other words, what do African American women writers offer as survival strategies for those living in environments that appear content with promoting the “social death” of Black women? Finally, the course considers the points of conversion, foreclosure, and difference among the theories of Africana Womanism, Womanism, and White Feminism.

Format: The readings and teaching methods of this course are eclectic in pursuit of a variety of twentieth century texts and contemporary experiences. The class sessions include lectures, discussions, group breakout sessions and student reports. We will focus on the critical work of Hortense Spillers, three Twentieth Century novels, Black sermons, and short stories. As investigators and scholars, our inquiries will play in the spaces between practice and theory in order to address the commonalties, disruptions, gaps, absences, and silences that exist among the primary texts.

Required Texts and Materials:

1. *Sula*, Toni Morrison,
2. *Jubilee*, Margaret Walker,
3. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Zora Neale Hurston
4. *Black, White and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture*, Hortense Spillers
5. *3X5 index cards*
6. *In Love and Trouble*, Alice Walker (Optional Text)

Course Schedule

Course readings not in our texts are available in Canvas under “Files.”

Week 1—Aug. 25 Purpose and Goals

Course Introduction

Week 2— Sept. 1

Required Readings:

Cixous, Helene. “Laugh of the Medusa”

Henderson, May G., “Speaking in Tongues”

In-class graded assignment: Impromptu discussion (1st)

Week 3—Sept. 8

Required Readings:

Weier, Sebastian. “Consider Afro-Pessimism”

bell hooks, "Killing Rage: Militant Resistance"

Spillers, Hortense. “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe.”

In-class graded assignment: Impromptu discussion (2nd)

Week 4—Sept. 15

Required Readings:

Walker, Margaret. Part 1: “Sis Hetta’s Child—The Ante-Bellum Years,” Chapters 1-18, *Jubilee*, 3-175.

In-class graded assignment: Impromptu discussion (3rd)

Week 5— Sept. 22

Required Readings: Walker, Margaret. Part 2: “Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory—
The Civil War Years,” Chapters 19-40, *Jubilee*, 179-314

In-class graded assignment: Impromptu discussion (4th)

Exam #1 opens today and is due Oct. 6th at 11:50 am (See under "Assignments")

Week 6— Sept. 29

Required Reading: Walker, Margaret. Part 3: “Forty Years in the Wilderness—
Reconstruction and Reaction,” Chapters 41-58, *Jubilee*, 317-502

In-class graded assignment: Impromptu discussion (5th)

Week 7—Oct 6

Required Readings:

Alice Walker. “The Child Who Favored Daughter,” *In Love and Trouble*, 35-16

Ralph Ellison, “Chapter Two,” *Invisible Man*, 27-55

Spillers, Hortense. “The Permanent Obliquity of an In(pha)llibly Straight: In the Time of the
Daughters and the Fathers,” *Black, White and in Color*

In-class graded assignment: Impromptu discussion (6th)

Exam #1 Due in Canvas today at 11:59 pm

Week 8—Oct 13

Required Reading:

Spillers, Hortense. “Moving on Down the Line: Variations
on the African-American Sermon,” *Black, White and in Color*

Hurston, Zora Neale. Excerpt from Chpt. 24 of *Jonah’s Gourd Vine* (See “Files”)

We will discuss and review clips from the following required videos.

Please take a look at each before class:

“Watch Them Dogs,” (length 44 minutes) <https://youtu.be/edRP3HoWR3U>

“Who Let the Dogs Out” (length 39 minutes) <https://youtu.be/Lu1WpB5tsZ0>

In-class graded assignment: Impromptu discussion (7th)

Week 9—Oct 20 **Oral Quiz – Group work with graded share-out discussion**

Groups are assigned and available for student review under “People” / “Oral Quiz” in Canvas. Although you may discuss any of the sermons or sermon clips, we discussed previously in class (linked in this syllabus above), I expect you to engage a text we have not discussed: the famous and well-known sermon given (and recorded as audio only) by the Rev. C.L. Franklin during the mid-twentieth century (“The Eagle Stirreth Her Nest”).

“The Eagle Stirreth Her Nest” (length 30 min.) <https://youtu.be/epIZSWCsnw8>

Prepare for this quiz by listening to the sermon. Point values for this graded assignment and further instructions are listed under “Oral Quiz” in Canvas under “Assignments.” You will find the required video version of the sermon on YouTube using the above link.

Week 10—Oct. 27 **No Face-to-face Class—Group presentation preparation Session this week:**

This week’s class sessions are for the benefit of group panel preparations. Please be prepared to work with your group. Attendance is mandatory. You may meet face-to-face or via ZOOM. If you use Zoom, you must set it up. My zoom address will not be available. Presentations begin in next week.

Please note: The Extra Credit Paper Assignment is open. All projects are due by December 1st (no exceptions).

Week 11—Nov. 3

Please note the Discussion Board assignment opens today and is due Nov. 17th. You may access the assignment under “Discussions / Pinned Discussions” or under the Canvas “Assignment” tab labeled “Discussion Board Assignments.”

Group I Presentation: Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Chapters 1-9

Group II Presentation: Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Chapters 10-15

Group III Presentation: Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Chapters 16-20

Week 12—Nov. 10

Group IV Presentation: Toni Morrison, *Sula*, “Part One” through “1921”

Group V Presentation: Toni Morrison, *Sula*, “1922” through “1937”

Group VI Presentation: Toni Morrison, *Sula*, “1939” through ending

Week 13—Nov. 17 **Please Note: there is a required Discussion Board assignment due today.**

Required Readings:

- Spillers, Hortense. “A Hateful Passion, A Lost Love: Three Women’s Fiction,” in *Black, White and in Color*.
- Full Text Discussion of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Sula*

Week 14—Nov. 24 THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY No Class

Week 15—Dec. 1 Last Day of class (all classes end next week on Wednesday Dec. 7th)
Final papers due in Canvas by 11:59 pm Wednesday Dec. 7th

Assignments and Grade Distribution

100 points: Final Paper (6-10-page limit not including bibliography)

You are required to submit a six-ten (6-10) page term paper. You may consider and discuss any text read this semester or topic discussed, but the paper must address the focus of the course. This is a research paper, requiring at least two “outside” scholarly readings. By this, I mean scholarly texts not assigned by me in this course. This final paper is due by 11:59 pm Wednesday Dec. 7th.

100 points: Group Report Sessions.

These forty-minute sessions probe previously discussed questions and explore new ones. Be creative in your presentations. Do not line up and give reports. I repeat: DO NOT. Have fun with this project! Present your analysis and interpretations through narration while acting out a scene or revising a scene; stage a debate or a trial; juxtapose the novel with artwork, music, or poems. Be sure to involve the class. Only your imagination limits the possibilities! Two class sessions are dedicated to panel planning so there should be no excuse for any member’s lack of participation. **Each panel** must write and submit **ONE** (collaborative) summary of the group’s work, including commentary on individual effort and the panel’s contribution to the class objectives. These two- or three-page summaries (one per group) are due the day of the panel presentation--post in Canvas. Presentation and paper assessments are combined for one group score. See the assignment rubric in Canvas for more information.

50 points Impromptu Discussion

I will select participants for impromptu panel discussions randomly. These discussions are based on the readings for that day or week (see syllabus). Students are asked to present their entrance pass as prepared for that day and enter into a discussion offered by another student seated on the panel. I require impromptu participants to **submit a 1–3-page paper** one week following their impromptu. If you do not use research in your entrance pass and impromptu discussion, be sure to do so in the paper. See the Impromptu Assignment under "Assignments" in Canvas for additional information such as panel structure and expectations. Be prepared at all times.

Other Expectations and Assignments –250 pts

Point breakdown is available in Canvas under “Assignments”

Exams, Quizzes, Discussion Boards and Other assignments:

There may be pop quizzes—no makeup pop quizzes. Your performance during class, progress evaluations (as well as tests and quizzes) and in-class discussions will determine whether a final exam (during exam week) is necessary. I will inform you of my decision.

Please note, **there will be one in-class oral quiz** using a group discussion and in-class share-out format. If you are not present that day, you are required to submit a written paper, 5-6 pages in length, which addresses the quiz foci and questions as stated in the “Oral Quiz” assignment instructions. Those instructions are located in Canvas under “Assignments.”

A discussion board assignment is due on November 17th. This assignment requires you to respond to the readings listed below and is due November 17th. Consider this a good time to test ideas for your final paper!

Discussion Board Required Readings:

- **Spillers, Hortense. “A Hateful Passion, A Lost Love: Three Women’s Fiction,” in *Black, White and in Color*.**
- **Hurston, Zora. *Their Eyes Were Watching God***
- **Morrison, Toni. *Sula***

Attendance: I take attendance very seriously and expect you to come to class every session on time. I use your entrance passes (with reading response commentary) to document your attendance. You are allowed **up to three** unexcused absences, your grade will automatically drop a half letter grade after the third unexcused absence. **If you reach six (totaling three weeks of class) absences, you will automatically fail the course and should withdraw from the class or you will receive an “E” for the semester.** No *Incomplete grades* are given for this course.

Caveat: Excused absences are permitted if you provide a typewritten letter documenting an illness, a family crisis, or participation in a university sponsored event. All students should consult with me to make up material missed during an excused absence. For additional information, please see our University guidelines cited in the “Course Policies” section of this syllabus.

Preparation: All readings and at-home assignments must be prepared and ready for each class session. Everyone should use their 3x5 index card, *entrance passes* to present a discussion topic and question for in-class discussion each session. You may be asked to offer your discussion topic and questions during any class session, so be prepared. When asked to contribute your insights, be brief, intelligent, thoughtful and scholarly. Identify why the material is valuable to our class discussion (or objectives). On the index card, put your name in the upper right corner, ask an engaging discussion question prefaced by brief contextualizing commentary. Consider including research to enhance your card and prepare for an impromptu discussion if assigned.

Participation: Students should complete all readings prior to the class meeting and participate fully in class discussion. Assessment is made in the areas of attendance, interlocutory engagement, leadership, teamwork, and originality.

Strong participation includes:

1. only excused absences with no recorded tardiness
2. adherence to course policies and guidelines
3. evidence that readings are completed and ready for class discussions
4. outside research done and shared with class on multiple occasions
5. clear and respectful exchanges with other students and the professor
6. volunteering to enter or begin discussions (brief presentations included)
7. leadership within small group activities noted by reporting out for the group or taking a guiding role
8. an understanding of teamwork and one's responsibility to advancing positive class or group dynamics
9. originality in thought, discussion and researched information and sharing
10. encouraging others' ability to enter or sustain participation in discussions
11. engaging questions from the professor or other students without hesitation or persuasion

Rubric

- "A" level participation is strong in all key areas.
- "B" level participation, albeit promising, is notably weak in *two* key areas.
- "C" level participation is notably weak in *three* key areas.
- "D" level participation is significantly weak in *Three* or more of the key areas.

Extra Credit (5 bonus points):

Readings for Extra Credit essays:

- Spillers, Hortense. "'All the Things You Could Be by Now, If Sigmund Freud's Wife Was Your Mother': Psychoanalysis and Race," *Black, White and in Color*, 376-427.
- Walker, Alice. *In Love & Trouble*. 1967, San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanivch, 1973.
- This reading is optional. See the extra credit assignment in Canvas for instructions. Bonus points are added to your final course score. This paper is due before December 1st at 11:59 pm.
- The role of course timekeeper is a second opportunity for extra credit. There are only two slots available. See me for details.

Grade Distribution and Grading Method

All papers and short essay quizzes are evaluated on content, originality, creativity, connections to course objectives, and form (grammar, spelling, bibliography, etc.). Grades will be calculated in terms of possible score percentages with no curve. You are guaranteed an A or A- if you earn 465 points or more out of 500 possible points (90 %⁺).

435 to 464 (87% ⁺) B⁺ 385 to 399 (77 % ⁺) C⁺ 335 to 363 (67 %⁺) D⁺

415 to 434 (83% ⁺)	B	365 to 384 (73 % ⁺)	C	315 to 334 (63 % ⁺)	D
400 to 414 (80 % ⁺)	B ⁻	350 to 364 (70 % ⁺)	C ⁻	300 to 314 (60 % ⁺)	D ⁻

Grading Criteria

Assignments will be graded on how proficiently they meet expectations in the key areas of content, organization, and grammar/mechanics.

Strong content includes:

- a clearly delineated and/ or interpreted topic
- a strong, clear, and logically developed thesis that is supported by fully developed ideas in the form of relevant textual evidence and research
- ideas that show evidence of independent thinking
- commentary that explains how the concrete details support the thesis. Commentary may include interpretation, analysis, argument, insight, and/or reflection.
- research supporting materials (note: Google and Wikipedia searches are fine for starters, but please use academic journals and books for strong research effort)

Strong organization includes:

- the effective arrangement of points that reveals itself in very good incorporation of evidence (use of summary, paraphrase) and the sparing and judicious use of quotations
- rounded and well-connected paragraphs
- the use of appropriate transitions

Strong grammar, mechanics, and prose style is characterized by:

- mature sentence structure, syntax, and diction
- strong audience awareness as evidenced in the use of appropriate style, register, tone, and vocabulary
- little to no errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation
- the formatting of document in keeping with prescribed guidelines—including length of journal entries

Rubric

The “A or A-” submission has strong content, strong organization, AND strong grammar/mechanics. To receive an “A or A-,” work needs to offer support in the form of textual evidence and secondary research materials (using direct quotes and paraphrase), present original insight in argumentation, and be organized clearly and logically with sources documented using MLA style guidelines.

A “B” submission is notably weak in ONE of the above key areas.

A “C” submission, albeit promising, is notably weak in TWO or more of the above key areas.

A “D” submission is significantly weak in TWO or more of the above key areas.

Additional information concerning UF grading policies may be found on the undergraduate catalog web page <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx> (Links to an external site.)

Course Policies

- *“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 (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 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) and reference problems,
 10. Poor Paragraphing or lack of paragraphing,
 11. Lack of conformity with assignment format or instructions.

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 other progress grading.

- Cell phones and computers: Cell phones must be muted 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 (see policy below).
- Papers / Journals: All papers must be typed and double spaced using the 8 1/2 x 11 page layout with one inch margins all around. Use Courier or 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.
- 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 oversight, I will not consider grade changes. **Please do not ask; I consider it harassment.** You may consult the English Department Associate Chair, for grade appeals, however. Please note: appeals may result in a higher, unchanged, or lower final grade.

- Midterm assessment Report: Individual grades are available in Canvas indicating your current status in the class. These reports offer information on all graded aspects of the course, including attendance. You should consider these performance tracking reports carefully and govern yourself accordingly.
- 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.
- Journal Submission guidelines (if applicable): This assignment **must be submitted electronically**. Microsoft Word compatible documents only please. Unreadable documents will be returned ungraded. Submit your project via Canvas upload by 1:30 p.m. on the due date. Late submissions will suffer a half letter grade reduction.
- *“Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found in the online catalog at: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx> (Links to an external site.).”*

University Policies

In-Class Recording

• Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor.

A “class lecture” is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or lecturer during a class session.

Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To “publish” means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student.

Campus Resources

Health and Wellness

- *U Matter, We Care:* If you or a friend is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu or 352 392-1575 so that a team member can reach out to the student.

- *Counseling and Wellness Center*: <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc>, and 392-1575; and the University Police Department: 392-1111 or 9-1-1 for emergencies.
- *Sexual Assault Recovery Services (SARS)*
Student Health Care Center, 392-1161.
- *University Police Department* at 392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies), or <http://www.police.ufl.edu/> ([Links to an external site.](#)).
- *UF Health Shands Emergency Room / Trauma Center*: For immediate medical care call 352-733-0111 or go to the emergency room at 1515 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, FL 32608; Visit the UF Health Emergency Room and Trauma Center website. GatorWell Health Promotion Services: For prevention services focused on optimal wellbeing, including Wellness Coaching for Academic Success, visit the GatorWell website or call 352-273-4450.

Academic Resources

- E-learning technical support, 352-392-4357 (select option 2) or e-mail to Learning-support@ufl.edu.
<https://lss.at.ufl.edu/help.shtml>.
- Career Resource Center, Reitz Union, 392-1601. Career assistance and counseling.
<https://www.crc.ufl.edu/>.
- Library Support, <http://cms.uflib.ufl.edu/ask>. Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.
- Teaching Center, Broward Hall, 392-2010 or 392-6420. General study skills and tutoring.
<https://teachingcenter.ufl.edu/>.
- Writing Studio, 302 Tigert Hall, 846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.
<https://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/>.
- Student Complaints Campus: https://www.dso.ufl.edu/documents/UF_Complaints_policy.pdf.
- On-Line Students Complaints: <http://www.distance.ufl.edu/student-complaint-process>.