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GWS 301-001 (Spring 2015)  
Class meets TR 11:00-12:15 pm  
Chemistry-Physics Building, Room 201

## **GWS 301 CROSSROADS: BLACK WOMEN IN THE UNITED STATES**

### *Syllabus*

As historian Deborah Gray White has noted, “The uniqueness of the African American female’s situation is that she stands at the crossroads of two of the most well-developed ideologies in America, that regarding women and that regarding the Negro.” In that regard, black women’s history offers a lens into racism and sexism in America, but also resistance to such oppression. Covering a broad regional and chronological scope, this course is designed to introduce students to the major themes, debates, and developments in African-American women’s history, especially as seen through the lives of individual women—some you’ve probably heard of, others you may not have. Much of the course readings and films will consist then of biography and autobiography.

Particular attention will be paid to the roles class, race, culture, and sexuality play in shaping black women’s experiences and their relationships with other women as well as black men. In recent years, scholars have come to understand gender not as static, objective, or natural reality, but as a social construction. Consequently, during the course, we will continually interrogate the term “woman,” and the changing meanings and expectations associated with the category across various cultural and historical contexts. Throughout American history, one’s educational, political, and economic opportunities have largely been prescribed or circumscribed on the basis of race and gender, but such limitations have been continually challenged through both individual and collective action. This course then will focus on the representations, experiences, work, and activism of African-American women, from the colonial era to the present, and will explore several themes, including:

- The intersections of gender, race, and sexuality in American history;
- Laws and cultural norms regarding sex, marriage, and reproduction;
- Individual and organized resistance;
- Changing constructions of femininity and representations of black women in popular culture;
- Black women’s work, both paid and unpaid labor;
- Formation of identity and identity politics;
- Tensions and alliances between women across lines of class, sexuality, and race; and
- The development of black feminist ideology and rhetoric.

In addition to lectures, this course will also entail a good deal of discussion, small group exercises, and engaged class participation. It is essential that every student does all the assigned readings, and come to class prepared for discussion. Regular written assignments will be given to ensure that you have read and understood the material and students are encouraged to email me, speak to me after class, or make an appointment with me if they are having trouble with any aspect of the coursework.

*This course meets a USP and/or UK Core requirement (US Citizenship).*

### Learning Outcomes and Objectives:

Through assigned readings, class discussions, and written work, students will:

- Develop an understanding of major themes in African American women's history, and the intersecting roles race and gender (as well as class, sexuality, etc) played and continue to play in their lives
- Discuss what institutions and traditions shape black women's experiences
- Analyze primary sources and formulate critical questions about their historical context and implications
- Build skills in developing and defending a scholarly argument, in both oral and written communication
- Learn the conventions of scholarly writing employing primary and secondary evidence

### **Required Texts:**

- Deborah Gray White, Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South (W.W. Norton, 1999)
- Melton McLaurin, Celia, A Slave (Avon, 1999)
- Mia Bay, To Tell the Truth Freely: The Life of Ida B. Wells (Hill and Wang, 2010)
- Assata Shakur, Assata: An Autobiography (Lawrence Hill Books, 2001)
- Audre Lorde, Zami: A New Spelling of My Name - A Biomythography (The Crossing Press, 1982)

*Note:* In addition to the required books above, there will also be articles and other readings for the course. Unless otherwise noted, these readings are available through Blackboard, as designated by a "BB" on the schedule below.

### **Readings:**

Students are expected to do all the reading, and to be prepared to discuss readings in class (please bring your readings to class).

### **Communication with Professor:**

My preferred method of contact is email ([melissa.stein@uky.edu](mailto:melissa.stein@uky.edu)). I make every effort to reply in a timely manner, and during the week, I will respond to your message within 24 hours at the most (though usually less). I am not generally on email during the weekend, and will respond to any messages I receive then on Monday. So do plan accordingly and avoid waiting until the last minute before an assignment is due to email me urgent questions, since you may not receive an immediate response.

### **Announcements:**

I will occasionally communicate important information about upcoming projects or class concerns through the Announcements feature in Blackboard. Such announcements will show up when you log in to Blackboard and be sent directly to your email; please make sure you have your preferred email address set up with Blackboard and check it regularly. *Please note, this syllabus, along with course assignments and due dates, is subject to change.* It is the student's responsibility to check Blackboard for corrections or updates to the syllabus. Any changes will be clearly noted in course announcements and email.

### **Attendance Policy:**

In order for a college-level course to work, everyone's presence and active participation is essential. Attendance is **mandatory**. Roll will be taken at the beginning of each class. More than two unexcused absences will lower your final grade a full grade. Three latenesses (more than five minutes late) will count as an unexcused absence. You must let me know at the beginning of class if you need to leave early. Leaving early without permission will count as a double absence. Please see me if you have a legitimate reason for absence or lateness so that I may record it as excused.

**Excused Absences:**

Students need to notify the professor of absences prior to class when possible. S.R. 5.2.4.2 defines the following as acceptable reasons for excused absences: (a) serious illness, (b) illness or death of family member, (c) University-related trips, (d) major religious holidays, and (e) other circumstances found to fit “reasonable cause for nonattendance” by the professor.

Students anticipating an absence for a major religious holiday are responsible for notifying the instructor in writing of anticipated absences due to their observance of such holidays no later than the last day in the semester to add a class. Information regarding dates of major religious holidays may be obtained through the religious liaison, Mr. Jake Karnes (859-257-2754).

Students are expected to withdraw from the class if more than 20% of the classes scheduled for the semester are missed (excused or unexcused) per university policy.

**Verification of Absences:**

Students may be asked to verify their absences in order for them to be considered excused. Senate Rule 5.2.4.2 states that faculty have the right to request “appropriate verification” when students claim an excused absence because of illness or death in the family. Appropriate notification of absences due to university-related trips is required prior to the absence.

**Classroom Behavior, Decorum and Civility:**

In course of this nature, students will not always agree on the issues discussed in class. Such debate is encouraged; it makes discussion more engaging when a range of perspectives are represented. However, while class members may not share the same opinions, students are expected to be respectful of each other and of the professor in class. That includes not interrupting classmates, or otherwise exhibiting disrespect or a lack of attention while classmates are speaking. In addition, use of headphones, cell phones, text messaging, or reading materials not assigned for the course will not be tolerated during class, and all phones should be set to “silent” prior to the start of class. Engaging in any of the disruptive or disrespectful behaviors described above will severely impact your class participation grade.

**Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty:**

Per university policy, students shall not plagiarize, cheat, or falsify or misuse academic records. Students are expected to adhere to University policy on cheating and plagiarism in all courses. The minimum penalty for a first offense is a zero on the assignment on which the offense occurred. If the offense is considered severe or the student has other academic offenses on their record, more serious penalties, up to suspension from the university may be imposed.

Plagiarism and cheating are serious breaches of academic conduct. Each student is advised to become familiar with the various forms of academic dishonesty as explained in the Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities. Complete information can be found at the following website:

<http://www.uky.edu/Ombud>. A plea of ignorance is not acceptable as a defense against the charge of academic dishonesty. It is important that you review this information as all ideas borrowed from others need to be properly credited.

Part II of Student Rights and Responsibilities (available online

<http://www.uky.edu/StudentAffairs/Code/part2.html>) states that all academic work, written or otherwise, submitted by students to their instructors or other academic supervisors, is expected to be the result of their own thought, research, or self-expression. In cases where students feel unsure about the question of plagiarism involving their own work, they are obliged to consult their instructors on the matter before submission.

When students submit work purporting to be their own, but which in any way borrows ideas, organization, wording or anything else from another source without appropriate acknowledgement of the fact, the students are guilty of plagiarism. Plagiarism includes reproducing someone else's work, whether it be a published article, chapter of a book, a paper from a friend or some file, or something similar to this. Plagiarism also includes the practice of employing or allowing another person to alter or revise the work which a student submits as his/her own, whoever that other person may be.

Students may discuss assignments among themselves or with an instructor or tutor, but when the actual work is done, it must be done by the student, and the student alone. When a student's assignment involves research in outside sources of information, the student must carefully acknowledge exactly what, where and how he/she employed them. If the words of someone else are used, the student must put quotation marks around the passage in question and add an appropriate indication of its origin. Making simple changes while leaving the organization, content and phraseology intact is plagiaristic. However, nothing in these Rules shall apply to those ideas which are so generally and freely circulated as to be a part of the public domain (Section 6.3.1).

*Please note:* Any assignment you turn in may be submitted to an electronic database to check for plagiarism.

#### **Disability Accommodations:**

If you have a documented disability that requires academic accommodations in this course, please make your request to the University Disability Resource Center. The Center will require current disability documentation. When accommodations are approved, the Center will provide me with a Letter of Accommodation, which details the recommended accommodations. Contact the Disability Resource Center, Jake Karnes, Director, at 859-257-2754 or [jkarnes@email.uky.edu](mailto:jkarnes@email.uky.edu).

#### **Submission of Assignments:**

Any assignment turned in after the deadline without prior permission from me will be graded down a full grade, and I will not accept any such assignment more than a week late. The two longer papers should be submitted to me in *both* paper and electronic formats; that is, students must turn in a hard copy at the start of class on the date the paper is due *and* send me an email with the paper attached as a .doc or .pdf file. The homework assignments will be turned in through Blackboard, but they too must be turned in by the start of class on the day they are due, and will not be accepted late without prior permission (on account of an excused absence, for example).

#### **Midterm grades:**

Mid-term grades will be posted in myUK by the deadline established in the Academic Calendar (<http://www.uky.edu/Registrar/AcademicCalendar.htm>), and will be based on performance in the course up to that point (including class participation, homework assignments, attendance, and the first paper).

#### **Grading system:**

Grades are calculated mathematically according to a 4.0 scale (4=A; 3=B; 2=C; 1=D; 0=E).

Letter grades are awarded according to the following standards:

- A outstanding work that far exceeds basic requirements
- B work that significantly exceeds basic requirements
- C work that satisfies course requirements in all respects
- D substandard work
- E performance that fails to meet course requirements

Please note that consistent improvement over the course of the semester can have a noticeable impact on your grade. For example, your second paper is weighted significantly higher than the first in order to mathematically reward improvement for those students who incorporate the feedback they received on their first papers toward the writing, organization, and argumentation of their later work.

**Assignments/Grading** (All assignments must be completed to pass the course):

Class Participation:	15%
Pop Quizzes	15%
Homework Assignments	20%
Paper 1	15%
Paper 2	20%
Current Events Research/Presentation:	15%

*Class Participation:* Your undivided attention during lectures and films, preparedness for class (i.e. bringing assigned readings, keeping up with the reading assignments, etc), and active participation in class discussions will determine your class participation grade.

*Pop Quizzes:* On five occasions over the course of the semester, I will administer a pop (unannounced) quiz based on the readings assigned for that day's class. Each quiz will include 4-6 identification questions. Responses to these ID questions should both identify the person, event, concept, etc. AND explain its significance to African-American women's history.

*Homework Assignments:* Throughout the semester, I will post brief homework assignments on Blackboard in advance of class for you to complete in response to the assigned readings. Each assignment, generally a question or open-ended prompt related to the assigned readings, should be answered in 1-2 paragraphs and turned in directly through Blackboard prior to the start of class (see the "Assignments" section on the course Blackboard page). The ten days for which I will post and collect a homework assignment are marked by "HOMEWORK" on the course schedule below. Informal writing assignments, your responses should above all demonstrate that you have done the assigned readings as you address the specific prompt. I will collect homework assignments 10 times during the semester; however, you only need to turn in **seven** (i.e. you can skip turning in homework assignments on three designated "HOMEWORK" days of your choosing). **Please read the syllabus carefully at the beginning of the course and keep track of how many homework assignments you have completed as the semester progresses. It is your responsibility to make sure you keep up with the homework, and you will receive an "E" for the "Homework" portion of your grade (which constitutes 20% of your final grade!) if you turn in less than the required seven responses.** Late comments will not be accepted (except in the case of excused absences) and you may not turn in additional assignments (more than seven) for "extra credit." Please note that the homework assignments are designed to ensure you are keeping up with and understanding the readings (and to help me identify areas where you may need some additional help), and they are a relatively simple way to pull up your course grade if needed.

*Papers:* In addition to the informal response papers, students must complete two longer papers, each of 5-6 pages in length, based on the course readings and films. Though it is not required, you may consult outside readings in preparing the papers if you wish to do so, provided they are cited in full. Papers submitted late, without consulting the professor in the case of potentially excused lateness, will be marked down one letter grade; no assignment will be accepted more than one week past the due date without prior permission from the professor. The first paper is due in class on **Thursday, March 5<sup>th</sup>**, the second during finals week on **Monday, May 4<sup>th</sup> by 11:59 pm.**

*Current Events Research and Informal Presentation:* Throughout the semester, students will peruse news media for current stories relating to black women's lives today (including issues of health, culture, representation, and politics). News magazines, popular periodicals, newspapers, and online news sources (NYT online, CNN.com, etc.) are all acceptable sources. Each student will turn in to the professor a copy of the story they found (a photocopy, newspaper clipping, printout, or in the case of a video story, indicate the URL where it may be viewed), followed by a short commentary (one typed page) that summarizes the story, how it relates to the themes of the course, and your analysis of why it is important or noteworthy. Students will informally present and discuss their stories on the last two days of class. This "presentation" will not require any additional preparation beyond the material you turned in to the professor the previous week; you will simply discuss with the other members of the class the key points in your write-up.

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### WEEK ONE

#### **Thursday, January 15--Introduction**

### WEEK TWO

#### **Tuesday, January 20--Issues in Black Women's History: Class, Race, & Difference**

*Readings:* Elsa Barkley Brown, "What Has Happened Here: The Politics of Difference in Women's History and Feminist Politics" in *Feminist Studies* 18:2 (Summer 1992) BB **HOMEWORK**

#### **Thursday, January 22--Colonial Contact and the Consolidation of Slavery**

*Readings:* Jennifer Morgan, "Some Could Suckle Over Their Shoulder: Male Travelers, Female Bodies, and the Gendering of Racial Ideology, 1500-1770," *The William and Mary Quarterly* (January 1997) BB

### WEEK THREE

#### **Tuesday, January 27--Black Women and Slavery: Stereotypes and Lived Experience**

*Readings:* Deborah Gray White, Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South, 1-118 **HOMEWORK**

#### **Thursday, January 29--Black Women and Slavery: Coping and Resistance**

*Readings:* White, Ar'n't I a Woman, 119-160

### WEEK FOUR

#### **Tuesday, February 3--Worse for Women?**

*Readings:* begin Melton McLaurin, Celia, A Slave

\*In-Class Film: Slavery & the Making of America, Part III (60 mins)

#### **Thursday, February 5--Worse for Women?**

*Readings:* finish McLaurin, Celia, A Slave **HOMEWORK**

WEEK FIVE

**Tuesday, February 10--Fighting for Freedom: Black Women and Abolition**

*Readings:* Anne Boylan, "Benevolence and Anti-Slavery Activity Among African American Women in New York and Boston, 1820-1840" in The Abolitionist Sisterhood: Women's Political Culture in Antebellum America BB; Sojourner Truth, "Ain't I a Woman?," <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/sojtruth-woman.asp>

**Thursday, February 12--Slavery's Scars**

*Readings:* Nell Irvin Painter, "Soul Murder and Slavery: Toward a Fully Loaded Cost Accounting" in U.S. History as Women's History (1995) BB **HOMEWORK**

WEEK SIX

**Tuesday, February 17--From Slavery to Freedom**

*Readings:* White, Ar'n't I a Woman, 161-190; Mia Bay, To Tell the Truth Freely, 3-39

**Thursday, February 19--From Slave Labor to Wage Labor**

*Readings:* Tera Hunter, "Domination and Resistance: The Politics of Wage Household Labor in New South Atlanta," in We Specialize in the Wholly Impossible (1995) BB **HOMEWORK**

WEEK SEVEN

**Tuesday, February 24--Reconstruction and Black Women's Politics**

*Readings:* Bay, To Tell the Truth Freely, 40-108

**Thursday, February 26--Racial and Sexual Violence in the Nadir**

*Readings:* Bay, To Tell the Truth Freely, 109-150; Darlene Clark Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West: Thoughts on the Culture of Dissemblance," Signs (Summer 1989) BB **HOMEWORK**

WEEK EIGHT

**Tuesday, March 3--Resistance and the Politics of Race and Gender**

*Readings:* Bay, To Tell the Truth Freely, 151-231

**Thursday, March 5--Discrimination Within**

*Readings:* None.

\*In-Class Film: Dark Girls (71 mins)

\*\*\*FIRST PAPER DUE\*\*\*

WEEK NINE

**Tuesday, March 10--Respectability and Reform**

*Readings:* Bay, To Tell the Truth Freely, 232-328

**Thursday, March 12--Suffrage and Segregation**

*Readings:* Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, "Discontented Black Feminists: Prelude and Postscript to the Passage of the Nineteenth Amendment" in Decades of Discontent: The Women's Movement, 1920-1940 (1983) BB

[Note: Midterm grades will be posted by March 13]

WEEK TEN

**Tuesday, March 17--SPRING BREAK (no class)**

**Thursday, March 19--SPRING BREAK (no class)**

WEEK ELEVEN

**Tuesday, March 24--Activism in a New Era**

*Readings:* Ula Taylor, "Negro Women Are Great Thinkers as Well as Doers": Amy Jacques-Garvey and Community Feminism, 1924-1927," Journal of Women's History 12:2 (Summer 2000) BB

**Thursday, March 26--Black Women in the Harlem Renaissance, Part I: The Blues**

*Readings:* Hazel V. Carby, "It Jus Be's Dat Way Sometime: The Sexual Politics of Women's Blues" in Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader (1990) BB **HOMEWORK**

\*In-Class Film: Wild Women Don't Have the Blues (58 mins)

WEEK TWELVE

**Tuesday, March 31--Black Women in the Harlem Renaissance, Part II: The Politics of Memory**

*Readings:* begin readings assigned to discuss on Thursday

\*In-Class Film: Zora Neale Hurston: Jump at the Sun (84 minutes)

**Thursday, April 2--Revisiting the Civil Rights Era: Mobilization**

*Readings:* Danielle McGuire, "It Was Like We Were All Raped: Sexualized Violence, Community Mobilization and the African American Freedom Struggle," Journal of American History 91:3 (December 2004) BB; Ruth Feldstein, "I Wanted the Whole World to See": Race, Gender, and Constructions of Motherhood in the Death of Emmett Till," in Not June Cleaver BB **HOMEWORK**

\*In-Class Film: finish Zora Neale Hurston: Jump at the Sun (84 minutes)



WEEK THIRTEEN

**Tuesday, April 7--Revisiting the Civil Rights Era: Women's Activism**

*Readings:* Cynthia Griggs Fleming, "More than a Lady': Ruby Doris Smith Robinson and Black Women's Leadership in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee," in Unequal Sisters: An Inclusive Reader in U.S. Women's History (2007) BB

**Thursday, April 9--The Politics of Love**

*Readings:* Begin Assata Shakur, Assata: An Autobiography

\*In-Class Film: The Loving Story (77 mins)

WEEK FOURTEEN

**Tuesday, April 14--Gender, Race, and the Criminal Justice System**

*Readings:* Finish Shakur, Assata: An Autobiography **HOMEWORK**

**Thursday, April 16--Revolutionary Times, Revolutionary Women**

*Readings:* Begin Audre Lorde, Zami: A New Spelling of My Name

\*In-Class Film: Free Angela and All Political Prisoners (101 mins)

WEEK FIFTEEN

**Tuesday, April 21--Black Power and the Origins of Black Feminism**

*Readings:* Frances Beal, "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female" (1969), <http://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/scriptorium/wlm/blkmanif/#double> (stop when you come to the start of the next article, "The Black Movement and Women's Liberation"); Combahee River Collective, "A Black Feminist Statement" (1977), <http://circuitous.org/scraps/combahee.html>; continue reading Lorde, Zami: A New Spelling of My Name

\*In-Class Film: finish watching Free Angela and All Political Prisoners (101 mins)

**Thursday, April 23--Class, Sexuality, and Identity**

*Readings:* Finish Lorde, Zami: A New Spelling of My Name **HOMEWORK**

WEEK SIXTEEN

**Tuesday, April 28--Black Women and Community in the New Millennium**

*Readings:* Elsa Barkley Brown, Deborah King and Barbara Ransby, "African American Women in Defense of Ourselves" in The New York Times (1991) BB; Kimberle Williams Crenshaw, "Black Women Still in Defense of Ourselves," in The Nation (2011), <http://www.thenation.com/article/163814/black-women-still-defense-ourselves>

**Thursday, April 30--Black Women in the Age of #BlackLivesMatter**

*Readings:* Kali Gross, "Missing Black Women Are Usually Ignored Until They're Proved Worthy" ([http://www.theroot.com/articles/culture/2014/11/who\\_is\\_looking\\_for\\_all\\_the\\_missing\\_and\\_abducted](http://www.theroot.com/articles/culture/2014/11/who_is_looking_for_all_the_missing_and_abducted))

[\\_black\\_women.html](#)), “Black Women Are Already Dead in America” ([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kali-nicole-gross/black-women-are-already-d\\_b\\_5825914.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kali-nicole-gross/black-women-are-already-d_b_5825914.html)), “How Do Mothers of Slain, Unarmed Black Daughters Grieve?” ([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kali-nicole-gross/how-do-mothers-of-slain-unarmed-black-daughters-grieve\\_b\\_6383048.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kali-nicole-gross/how-do-mothers-of-slain-unarmed-black-daughters-grieve_b_6383048.html)), “Demands for Justice Are Failing Black Women and Girls” ([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kali-nicole-gross/demands-for-justice-are-failing-black-women-and-girls\\_b\\_6295744.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kali-nicole-gross/demands-for-justice-are-failing-black-women-and-girls_b_6295744.html))

\*\*\*SECOND PAPER DUE BY EMAIL ON **MONDAY, May 4<sup>th</sup>**\*\*\*

*Have a great break!!*