

AML 3284/WST 3930/AFA 3930
African American Women and the Culture Critique

Dr. DW King
Place: Tur. 2336
Class Time: MWF 5th period (11:45-12:35)

Phone: 352-294-2853
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Office hours: MWF 10:30-11:30
or by appointment

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. 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 and foreclosure between 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, and student reports. We will focus on the critical work of Hortense Spillers, three twentieth century novels and one collection of 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:

You will need a pack of 3x5 cards for this class

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

Course Schedule

Week 1—Aug. 22-24 Purpose and Goals

Wed.: Course Introduction Part 1

Fri.: Course Introduction Part 2

Friday's entrance pass assignment—consider the following questions and be prepared to discuss them in class: How would you define Black Feminism? Womanism? To what degree do the texts you have read in the past articulate that point of view? In what ways do they fall short? How would you define *the captive female body* present and past?

Week 2—Aug. 27-31 Readings available in Canvas under “Files”

Mon.: Required Reading: Cixous, Helene. “Laugh of the Medusa”

Wed.: Required Reading: Henderson, May G., “Speaking in Tongues”

Fri.: Required Reading: Weier, Sebastian. “Consider Afro-Pessimism” and bell hooks, “Killing Rage: Militant Resistance.”

***Assignment:** Begin your journal entries with this week's reading assignment. Be prepared to discuss your entry if asked in class. This is **Reading Response #1**

Week 3—Sept. 3-7

Monday—Holiday—No Class

Wed.: Required Reading: Spillers, Hortense. “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,”
Sections 1& 2 in *Black, White and in Color*.

Fri.: Required Reading: Spillers, Hortense. “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,”
Section 3 in *Black, White and in Color*.

***Assignment: Reading Response #2**

Please Note: Group assignments will be available in Canvas by 6:00pm Monday. You will find the list under “Files.” Begin reading your assigned text now.

Week 4—Sept. 10-14

Please Note: We will have group panel introductory meetings this week.

Mon.: Required Reading: Walker, Margaret. Part 1: “Sis Hetta’s Child—The Ante-Bellum Years,” Chapters 1-10. *Jubilee*, 3-118.

Wed.: Required Reading: Walker, Margaret. “Part 1: Sis Hetta’s Child—The Ante-Bellum Years,” Chapters 11-18. *Jubilee*, 119-175.

Fri.: Required Reading: Part 1 concluding discussion

Week 5—Sept. 17-21

Mon.: Required Reading: Walker, Margaret. Part 2: “Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory—The Civil War Years,” Chapters 19-29. *Jubilee*, 179-245.

Wed.: Required Reading: Walker, Margaret. Part 2: “Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory—The Civil War Years,” Chapters 30-40. *Jubilee*, 246-314.

Fri.: Required Reading: Part 2 concluding discussion

Week 6—Sept. 24-28

Mon.: Required Reading: Walker, Margaret. Part 3: “Forty Years in the Wilderness—Reconstruction and Reaction,” Chapters 41-49. *Jubilee*, 317-402.

Wed.: Required Reading: Walker, Margaret. Part 3: “Forty Years in the Wilderness—Reconstruction and Reaction,” Chapters 50-58. *Jubilee*, 403-502.

Fri.: Required Reading: Part 3 concluding discussion.

Assignment: Reading Response #3 on Margaret Walker’s *Jubilee

Week 7—Oct. 1-5

Mon.: Walker, Alice. “The Child Who Favored Daughter,” *In Love and Trouble*.

Wed.: Ralph Ellison, “Chapter Two,” *Invisible Man*, 27-55. In Canvas “Files.”

Fri.: 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*.

***Assignment: Reading Response #4**

Week 8—Oct 8-12

Mon.: Required Reading: Walker, Alice. “The Revenge of Hannah Kemhuff” and
“Strong Horse Tea,” *In Love and Trouble*.

Wed.: Required Reading: Walker, Alice. “The Welcome Table” and
“Entertaining God,” *In Love and Trouble*.

Fri.: Required Reading: Walker, Alice. “The Dairy of an African Nun” and
“The Flowers,” *In Love and Trouble*.

Week 9—Oct. 15-19

Mon.: Required Reading: Hurston, Zora Neale. Excerpt from Chpt 24 of *Jonah’s Gourd
Vine*. (Text available under “Files” in Canvas.)

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

Fri.: Required Readings: Lee, Jarena. “Jarena Lee’s Call to Preach.” (Text
available under “Files” in Canvas)

***Assignment: Reading Response #5 (Note: All responses are due next week.)**

Week 10—Oct. 22-26

Mon.: Required Reading: Spillers, Hortense. “Interstices: A Small Drama of
Words,” *Black, White and in Color*.

Wed.: Required Reading: Walker, Alice. “Roselily” and “Really Doesn’t Crime
Pay?” *In Love and Trouble*.

Fri.: Required Readings: Walker, Alice. “Her Sweet Jerome,” *In Love and Trouble*.

***Assignment: All reading response journals are due Friday (five entries)—please submit them electronically (Canvas submissions only) before 1:30 pm. No exceptions.**

Week 11—Oct. 29-Nov. 2

Required Group Preparation Sessions:

This week’s class sessions are for the benefit of group panel preparations. Please come prepared to work with your group. Attendance is mandatory. Presentations begin next week.

Week 12—Nov. 5-9

Mon.: **Group I Presentation: Introduction to Toni Morrison’s *Sula*, “Part One.”**

Wed.: **Group II Presentation: Introduction to Toni Morrison’s *Sula*, “Part Two.”**

Fri.: Open Class Discussion of *Sula*.

Week 13—Nov. 12-16

Mon.: Open Class Discussion of *Sula*.

Wed.: **Group III Presentation: Introduction to Zora Neal Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Chapters 1-9.**

Fri.: **Group IV Presentation: Introduction to Zora Neal Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Chapters 10-20.**

Week 14—Nov. 19-23

Mon.: Open Class Discussion of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

Wed.: Open Class Discussion of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

Fri.: Thanksgiving Holiday—no class

Week 15—Nov. 26-30

Mon.: Recap and continued discussions of *Sula*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Jubilee*.

Wed.: Required Reading: Spillers, Hortense. "A Hateful Passion, A Lost Love: Three Women's Fiction," *Black, White and in Color*.

Fri.: Class Discussion of "A Hateful Passion" concluded.

Week 16—Dec. 3-5

Mon.: Writing Day--No class

Wed.: Final papers due in Canvas by 1:30 pm.

Assignments and Grade Distribution

150 points: Reading Response Journals

Write one (1) entry for reading assignments so identified in the course calendar for a total of five (5) entries. Each entry should present your thoughts concerning the reading material within 300 to 500 words (two pages). Number each entry in the upper left corner of the entry's first page and identify its assigned date of completion. This is not the place for self-evaluation and life meditations. Here you demonstrate your knowledge, compare theories, and engage the text -- the more original your contemplations and assessments, the better your grade. Keep the course objectives in mind when writing (but you may also expand your comments beyond this boundary). Refer to previous entries to demonstrate your growth in understanding and knowledge. Research the text and share your thoughts. I evaluate response journals once at midterm (five entries).

Here is an example of a thoughtful and original journal entry on Alice Walker's *Meridian*. It was submitted by a student (in a class with a different focus than ours). It will be helpful for you to read and provides a guideline for my expectations. If you want to earn an A, this is what your entries will resemble. Note: the submission is written within page requirements and includes commentary about critical texts read or researched independently during the semester, previous knowledge, meaningful analysis, and questions for further consideration:

Meridian may be either a perfect or a perfectly tragic way to end the semester's discussion. Most of the narrative offers a rather grim postmortem of the Civil Rights and Black Nationalist-eras' failures pertaining to race and gender, as well as how these seemingly irreconcilable issues tear people apart at both the political and personal levels. Pamela Barnett's article, "'Miscegenation,' Rape, and 'Race'" in Alice Walker's *Meridian*"

offers a reading of the novel that seems to echo Truman Held's "sinking, hopeless feeling about opposites, and what they do to each other" (135). Although the text elucidates, complicates, and undermines these opposites, Barnett argues that ultimately, it "tragic[ally]" "reinstalls" them.

Bennett writes that Camara, the "miscegenetic" child, who exists at the extreme margins of the narrative and is ultimately "erased" by her murder represents the impossibility of reconciling the "opposites" black and white (and perhaps also between personal and political concerns, desire and the reality principle, etc.).

While Camara can be read as what Fredric Jameson, by way of A.J. Greimas, calls an "impossible synthesis" of opposed terms, I think that Meridian herself, through her "journey" and rebirth (or "collapse?") offers, possibly, after this long and painful story, a rekindled but unrepresented hope for an inchoate or as-yet-indiscernible future. Instead of a synthesis (which contains, although it sublimates, both opposites) Meridian would represent what Greimas calls the "neutral," the negation of negation that nullifies both terms (for Meridian these are many: black/white, male/female, Lynne/Truman, mother/infanticide, housewife/activist, dying/killing, "ambivalen[t]"/"unorthodox" as Truman puts it) to become a "neither/nor that is something radically "else" entirely. I would suggest we ought to read the text like Lacan reads Antigone, not as tragedy, but as transformative, with Meridian as an "anamorphosis" that exists outside these oppositions and which, at the end of the novel, we still lack the perspectival angle to "see" correctly.

Is the novel tragic? Is it hopeful? Can it be read as a precursor of what Cornel West would later paradoxically call "unhopeful hope?" If Meridian is read this way, is there anything in the novel that provides clues as to how others may heal as she has? Or about what might be the contours of the "group" that will later join her ("maybe") to know the "truth?"—Student (Fall 2010)

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

You are required to select one of your reading response submissions to expand as a final paper. This is why the questions ending your response submissions are so important. They can help guide your thoughts when expanding the discussion into a six (6) page paper. You may consider and discuss any text read this term, but the paper must be in-line with the focus of the original reading response submitted. This final paper is due by 1:30 the last day of class.

50 points: Panel Sessions

These forty-minute panel 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! One week of class is dedicated to final panel planning so there should be no excuse for any member's lack of participation. From this planning period, the panel is expected to produce a one paragraph abstract of the proposed presentation and submit it to me before the next class period. Send the abstract to me via email (dwking@ufl.edu). In addition, each panel member is asked to write a brief summary of the group's work, individual effort, and the panel's contribution to the class objectives. These two or three-page summaries are due the day of the panel presentation--post in Canvas. Individual grades are assigned for these papers and averaged with panel presentation grades. I record only the final score.

Other Expectations and Assignments—200 points

Points breakdown is available in Canvas under "Assignments"

Attendance: Discussions cannot be replicated so if you miss a day of class, you will have missed the lesson for that day. Therefore, I take attendance very seriously and expect you to come to class every day on time. 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 nine (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.

Entrance Passes: Purchase a pack of 3x5 index cards. These cards are your entrance passes and will be used to inform me of your attendance and reading progress (see additional instructions below). Take them seriously! Bring **one** with you every class session. Without an entrance pass you will be considered absent, so be sure to put your name on them. Tardy attendees' cards will be collected at the end of class. Tardiness will be recorded and considered during grading. Consistent tardiness will result in a final letter grade reduction.

Preparation: All readings, entrance passes, and take-home assignments must be prepared and ready for each class session. Write a comment or a question on your entrance pass cards, demonstrating your preparation for the day's session. Poorly constructed, irrelevant or perfunctory comments will result in point reductions in this area of grading. I do not want you to tell me you liked a particular reading, for instance. Your response to assigned readings must be brief, intelligent, thoughtful and scholarly. Identify why the material is valuable to our class discussion (or objectives). Ask an engaging discussion question prefaced by brief contextualizing commentary.

Occasionally, these cards will be graded for content and returned so do your best work at all times. I will select cards for class / group discussions randomly. Your contribution during these discussions will be evaluated. **Take home projects derived from entrance passes may be**

graded. Even if I do not ask you to turn in these assignments, your in-class responses to them are required. Be prepared at all times.

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, shared entrance passes, 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. entrance pass 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 ones responsibility to advancing positive class or group dynamics
9. originality in thought, discussion and entrance card 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.

Exams, Quizzes and Other assignments: There may be pop quizzes—no makeup quizzes. Your performance during class, progress evaluations (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.

Extra Credit (5 bonus points): *This is an optional assignment.* You may give a fifteen minute oral report to the class on an issue or author under discussion. You decided what you want to do. All reports must be approved prior to presentation, however. Submit a short proposal describing what you plan to do. The assignment will earn scores ranging from 1/2 to 5 points (added to your overall course score).

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 450 points or more out of 500 possible points (90 %⁺).

435 to 449 (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>

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.

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.

- 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.
- 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 will be available after midterm indicating your current status in the class. These reports will offer information on all graded aspects of the course, including attendance, as recorded in the e-learning grade book. 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: 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>.”*

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>.”