Resources for a Constructive Ethic: The Black Women's Literary Tradition

Instructor

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Institution

Temple University

Course Level and Type

Graduate Seminar

Enrolment and Last Year Taught

20 students/Spring 1997

Course Description

This course is an examination of the Black Women's Literary Tradition to understand how it functions as a continuing symbolic expression and transformer of value patterns fashioned by the female members of the African American community. The focus is on the ethical perspectives of those severely disadvantaged by racial, sexual, and economic discrimination, and on the implications of these perspectives for going beyond dominant ethical systems which assume freedom and a wide range of choices.

Requirements

Regular class attendance and reading that is complete (a 200 page minimum), careful and on schedule are essential for this course, since the format is one of discussion and lecture. To help promote lively, meaningful exchange, each student enrolled for regular credit is asked to prepare a brief (no more than two typewritten pages) Diaspora Literacy Notebook entry each Tuesday, beginning January 28, 1997 and to submit a metaethical essay on a specific contestable issue or five "anatomy of metaethical ideas" on May 8, 1997. Guidelines are included in the syllabus. In addition, everyone (regular and audit credit) must facilitate one seminar discussion of a required text.

Procedure

The class will meet weekly for two and a half hours. The time will be divided into two-parts. During the first part of the class a seminar style will be used to place readings in their contexts, to supply the connecting analysis between the various ethical orientations, and to raise to visibility the social consequences of particular ethical principles, norms, values and taboos that people seeking justice must keep in the forefront of our consciousness.
Each student will volunteer to facilitate a discussion of a required text by sharing a copy of her/his facilitator's entry in the Diaspora Literacy Notebook. After the facilitator has walked through the notebook entry the entire class will enter into the discussion.

Following a ten-minute break, the Professor will lecture on the process of doing womanist/feminist/liberationist metaethics and discuss answers emerging from questions in Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community.

**Outline**

January 21
Introduction: Womanist/Feminist/Liberationist Metaethics

Recommended Reading:


Holloway, Karla F.C. *Codes of Conduct: Race, Ethics and the Color of Character*, 1995.


January 28

Required Reading:

*Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* by Toni Morrison

*Katie's Canon*, pp. 9 - 25.

Recommended Reading:


*Song of Solomon*, 1977.

Tar Baby, 1981.


February 4

Required Reading

Leaving Pipe Shop: Memories of Kin by Deborah McDowell

Katie's Canon, pp. 162 - 170.

Recommended Reading:

"The Changing Same": Black Women's Literature, Criticism, and Theory, 1995


Viewing the Remains: On Violence, Mourning, and the Symbolics of Loss (forthcoming)

February 11

Required Reading:

Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde

Katie's Canon, pp. 144 - 161.

Recommended Reading:

The First Cities, 1968.

Cables to Rage, 1970.


Coal, 1976.


Our Dead Behind Us: Poems, 1986.


February 18
Required Reading:

Possessing the Secret of Joy by Alice Walker
Katie's Canon, pp. 47-56.

Recommended Reading:

The Color Purple, 1982.
Her Blue Body Everything We Know, 1991.
Horses Make the Landscape Look More Beautiful, 1984.
In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose, 1983.
Living by the Word: Selected Writings, 1973 -1987, 1988
Meridan, 1976.
Once, 1968.
The Same River Twice: Honoring the Difficult, 1996
The Third Life of Grange Copeland, 1970.
Warrior Marks, 1993.
You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down, 1981.

February 25

Required Reading:

The Alchemy of Race and Rights: Diary of a Law Professor by Patricia J. Williams
Katie's Canon, pp. 27 - 37.

Recommended Reading:


A Small Gathering of Bones by Patricia Powell, 1994

The Hottest Water in Chicago: Family, Race, Time and American Culture by Gayle Pemberton


Beloved Sisters and Loving Friends: The Rebecca Primus Correspondence by Farah J. Griffin, 1997.

The Rooster's Egg, by Patricia J. Williams, 1995.

March 4

Required Reading:

 Bailey's Cafe by Gloria Naylor or

The Autobiography of My Mother by Jamaica Kincaid

Katie's Canon, pp. 57 - 68.

Recommended Reading by Gloria Naylor


The Women of Brewster Place, 1982.


Children of the Night, ed. Gloria Naylor

Recommended Reading by Jamaica Kincaid

A Small Place

Annie, Gwen, Lily, Pam & Tulip, 1989.


At the Bottom of the River, 1983.

Lucy, 1990.

March 11

Spring Vacation

March 18
Required Reading:

Technical Difficulties: African American Notes on the State of the Union by June Jordan
Katie's Canon, pp. 69 - 76.

Recommended Reading:

Civil Wars, 1981.

His Own Where, 1971.


March 25

Required Reading:

Some Love, Some Pain, Sometime by J. California Cooper
Katie's Canon, pp. 129 -135.

Recommended Reading:

A Piece of Mine, 1984


In Search of Satisfaction, 1994.


April 1

Required Reading:

Voodoo Dreams: A Novel of Marie Laveau by Jewell Parker Rhodes
Katie's Canon, pp. 38 - 46.

Recommended Reading:


Deals with the Devil: And Other Reasons to Riot, by Pearl Cleage, 1993.
April 8

Required Reading:

**Black Looks: Race and Representation** by bell hooks

Katie's Canon, pp. 136 - 143.

Recommended Reading:

**Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism**, 1981.


**Bone Black**, 1996.

**Breaking Bread** with Cornel West, 1991.


**Reel to Real: Race, Sex and Class at the Movies**, 1996.


**Teaching to Transgress:**

**Education as the Practice of Freedom**, 1994.

**Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics**, 1990.

April 15
Required Reading:

Sarah's Psalm by Florence Ladd or All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes by Maya Angelou

Katie's Canon, pp. 101-112.

Recommended Reading by Maya Angelou


Gather Together in My Name, 1974.

The Heart of a Woman, 1981.

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, 1969.

I Shall Not Be Moved, 1990.

Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water 'fore I Diie, 1971.

Oh Pray My Wings Are Gonna Fit Me Well, 1975.


Shaker, Why Don't You Sing?, 1983.

Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas, 1976.


April 22

Required Reading:

Wounded in the House of a Friend by Sonia Sanchez

Katie's Canon, pp. 77 - 100.

Recommended Reading:


A Sound Investment, 1980.


Homecoming, 1969.


Ima Talken bout the Nation of Islam, 1971.
I've Been a Woman: New and Selected Poems, 1981.

It's A New Day: poems for Young Brothas and Sistuh, 1971.

Liberation Poem, 1970.


We a BaddDDD People, 1970.

April 29

Closure & Evaluation

May 11

*DUE: Metaethical Essay or Five "Anatomy of the Ideas"

**BONUS: Essay submitted for publication consideration

Selected Assignments

Diaspora Literacy Notebook Entry
(due each Tuesday)

1. As a result of this week's reading, identify an ethical principle, norm, value or taboo that you would most like to address.

2. Using a "traditional" reference source (e.g. Dictionary of Feminist Theologies, or The Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms or The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics), a) determine the origin of an ethical principle, norm, value or taboo, b) describe who benefits, and c) give one reason why the benefactors strive to maintain it.

3. Draft a contestable metaethical problem: what/how/why (Due: following lecture on this topic.)

4. Write a metaethical component following the lecture on a specific topic.)

5. Does the required reading in Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community make you wonder? If so, about what? Include your answer to the question you pose.

Diaspora Notebook Entry for Facilitator

1. Share a sentence you like especially in the text.

2. What sort of book is this? What subject(s) is covered? What is the chronological limit?

3. Briefly, discuss the author's thesis. Is the thesis substantiated to your satisfaction?

4. Read a published review of this text and set out fairly one possible objection to the writer's central thesis.
5. Note the extent to which the objection successfully limits or enhances the writer's contribution as a resource for constructive ethics.

6. What community, organization, institution and/or movement is connected to this writer's audience of accountability?

7. What contribution does this author make to spark new ethical considerations?

8. Propose a research topic related to critical theorizing that will transform human life in the direction of non-alienating experience for members of our species and the wider environment in which we are set.

Anatomy of the Idea (5 entries due on May 11, 1997)

1. Origin of the Idea (include complete bibliographical citation)

2. Metaethical Problem (what/how/why)

3. Why Crisis = SO WHAT? (ethos/ pathos/ logos/theos)

4. Metaethical Solution

5. Title (Being/ Thinking/ Doing)

6. Body Points:
   - Definition of Point One (What/How/Why)
   - Definition of Point Two (What/How/Why)
   - Definition of Point Three (What/How/Why)

http://www.wlu.ca/~wwwaar/syllabi/resources_for_a_constructive_ethic-cannon.html

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