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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:

Bambara, Toni Cade. Deep Sightings and Rescue Missions: Stories, Essays and Conversations, 1996

Cannon, Katie G. Black Womanist Ethics, 1988.

Collins, Patricia Hill. Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment, 1991.

Foster, Frances Smith. Written By Herself: Literary Production by African American Women, 1746 - 1892, 1993.

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

Lubiano, Wahneema, ed. The House That Race Built: Black Americans, U.S. Terrain, 1997.

Wall, Cheryl, ed. Changing Our Own Words: Essays on Criticism, Theory and Writing by Black Women, 1989.

January 28

Required Reading:

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

Katie's Canon, pp. 9 - 25.

Recommended Reading:

Beloved, 1987.

The Bluest Eye, 1972.

Jazz, 1992.

Song of Solomon, 1977.

Sula, 1973.

Tar Baby, 1981.

Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power. Edited by Toni Morrison, 1992.

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

Slavery and the Literary Imagination, 1989.

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.

From a Land Where Other People Live, 1973.

The New York Head Shop and Museum, 1974.

Coal, 1976.

The Black Unicorn, 1978.

The Cancer Journals, 1980.

Zami: A New Spelling Of My Name, 1982.

Our Dead Behind Us: Poems, 1986.

A Burst of Light: Essays, 1988.

Undersong: Chosen Poems, Old and New, 1992.

February 18

Required Reading:

Possessing the Secret of Joy by Alice Walker

Katie's Canon, pp. 47-56.

Recommended Reading:

The Color Purple, 1982.

Good Night, Willie Lee, I'll See You in the Morning, 1979.

Her Blue Body Everything We Know, 1991.

Horses Make the Landscape Look More Beautiful, 1984.

In Love and Trouble: Stories of Black Women, 1973.

In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose, 1983.

Living by the Word: Selected Writings, 1973 -1987, 1988

Meridan, 1976.

Once, 1968.

Revolutionary Petunias and Other Poems, 1973.

The Same River Twice: Honoring the Difficult, 1996

The Temple of My Familiar, 1989.

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 Hand in the Fire: Rape, Memory, Survival-- Black Women's Voices, by Charlotte Pierce Baker, 1997.

Free Enterprise, by Michelle Cliff, 1993.

Critical Race Theory: Key Documents that Shaped the Movement by Kimberle W. Crenshaw, 1995.

A Small Gathering of Bones by Patricia Powell, 1994

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

The Black Women's Health Book: Speaking for Ourselves, by Evelyn C. White, 1989.

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

Linden Hills, 1985.

The Women of Brewster Place, 1982.

Mama Day, 1988.

Children of the Night, ed. Gloria Naylor

Recommended Reading by Jamaica Kincaid

A Small Place

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

Annie John, 1985.

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.

Moving Towards Home: Political Essays, 1989.

Naming Our Destiny: New and Selected Poems, 1989.

On Call: Political Essays, 1985.

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

Family, 1991.

Homemade Love, 1986.

In Search of Satisfaction, 1994.

The Matter Is Life, 1991.

Some Soul to Keep, 1987.

April 1

Required Reading:

Voodoo Dreams: A Novel of Marie Lauveau by Jewell Parker Rhodes

Katie's Canon, pp. 38 - 46.

Recommended Reading:

Bodies of Water, by Michelle Cliff, 1990.

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

Exorcising Blackness: Historical and Literary Lynching and Burning Rituals, Trudier Harris, 1989.

Beautiful, Also, Are the Souls of My Black Sisters: A History of Black Women in America, by Jeanne Noble, 1978.

Conjuring: Black Women, Fiction and Literary Tradition edited by Majorie Pryse and Hortense J. Spillers, 1985.

The Black Notebook by Toi Derricotte, 1997.

We Are Overcome: Thoughts on Being Black in America by Bonnie Allen, 1995.

Jambalaya: The Natural Woman's Book of Personal Charms and Practical Rituals. Luisah Teish, 1988.

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.

Art on My Mind: Visual Politics, 1995.

Bone Black, 1996.

Breaking Bread with Cornel West, 1991.

Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center, 1984.

Killing Rage: Ending Racism, 1995.

Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representation, 1994.

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

Sisters of the Yam: Black Women and Self Recovery, 1993.

Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black, 1989.

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

And Still I Rise, 1978.

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.

On the Pulse of Morning, 1993.

Shaker, Why Don't You Sing? 1983.

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

Wouldn't Take Nothing for My Journey Now, 1993.

April 22

Required Reading:

Wounded in the House of a Friend by Sonia Sanchez

Katie's Canon, pp. 77 - 100.

Recommended Reading:

A Blues Book for Blue Black Magical Women, 1973.

A Sound Investment, 1980.

Generations: Selected Poetry: 1969 - 1985, 1986.

Homecoming, 1969.

homegirls & handgrenades, 1984.

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 Sistuhs, 1971.

Liberation Poem, 1970.

Love Poems, 1973.

Under a Soprano Sky, 1987.

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)

Select a location 

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

Latest update: August 02, 2002
Number of accesses since April 14, 1998: