Black Feminist Theory, WGSS 305/AFAM 315

W from 3:30 to 5:20

(Syllabus Subject to Change)

Professor: Roderick A. Ferguson

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This course is designed to introduce you to some of the major themes in black feminist theory. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the protests against anti-black racism in 2020, we will pay particular attention to those texts that help us interpret those occurences and the urgencies that led to them. The course will present classic texts with more recent ones to give you a sense of the vibrancy of black feminist theory for addressing past and present concerns. Rather than interpret black feminist theory as a critical formation that simply puts race, gender, sexuality, and class into conversation with one another, the course apprehends that formation as one that produces epistemic and political shifts in how we understand social movements, empire, history, the law, and aesthetic culture. This is by no means an exhaustive list of the areas into which black feminism intervened. It is merely a sample of some of the most vibrant ideological and discursive contexts in which black feminism caused certain epistemic and political transformations. The course is designed to also encourage you to extend the social and intellectual dimensions of black feminist theory.

One week this semester, we’ll interrupt and go deeper, meaning that we’ll concentrate solely on the issue of police violence in BIPOC (Black, Indigenous People of Color) communities. This is our effort to say that as long as the U.S. state deploys its repressive apparatus against minoritized populations, we will momentarily stop what we’re doing and focus on that phenomenon and unpack it as best we can. This appears on your syllabus as “Abolition Week.”

**Grading**

Attendance—15%. You will be allowed two unexcused absences. After that, all absences will require notification to your instructor or to one of your TF’s. A word on notification: Members of the disability community sometimes will say, “I’m only working with X number of spoons today,” meaning that I have a limited supply of energy to complete today’s tasks. Notification simply means that you let me or your TF’s know that you’re working only with a limited number of spoons. You can also use this if you need extra time with assignments.

Assignments—5 assignments at 10% each=50%. These short assignments will be designed to enhance your reading, writing, and creative thinking skills as well as to build to your final assignment. These assignments will be due before the Thanksgiving break.

Final Assignment—35%. Your final assignment will be a digital scrapbook that links black feminist theory to some political concern of your choice.

**Accommodations**

If you require disability accommodations to meet any of the course assignments or to participate actively in class, please contact the instructor as soon as possible to work out suitable arrangements.

September 2

Introductions and Syllabus

September 9

Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color”

September 16

Angela Davis, “Reflections on the Black Woman’s Role in the Community of Slaves”

September 23

Hortense Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book”

September 30

Christina Sharpe, selection from *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* Saidiyah

October 7 (**Abolition Week)**

Interviews with Angela Davis and Ruth Wilson Gilmore from *Revolutionary Feminisms: Conversations on Collective Action and Radical Thought*, eds Brenna Bhandar and Rafeef Ziadah

October 14 (**Abolition Week)**

Beth Richie, selections from *Arrested Justice: Black Women, Violence and America’s Prison Nation*

\*Beth Richie will be joining us for the last hour

October 21

Assata Shakur, *Assata: An Autobiography*

October 28

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November 4

M. Jacqui Alexander, Not Just (Any)Body Can be a Citizen: The Politics of Law, Sexuality, and Postcoloniality in Trinidad and Tobago and the Bahamas

November 11

Fatima El-Tayeb, selection from European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Post-National Europe

Gloria Wekker, selection from *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race*

November 18

Gail Lewis, “Birthing Racial Difference: Conversations with My Mother and Others”

December 2

You Decide