

BLACK AND DIASPORIC QUEER THEORIES

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Course Expectations and Policies:

These are the assignments that you will be expected to complete during the semester. Except for the final paper, which is due in hard copy, **I will only accept assignments electronically, except for the discussion questions.** This policy may change during the semester, with notice.

All assignments are due **on the day and at the time** that has been assigned. After that, **late assignments will be penalized a third of a grade a day** (thus, an A+ will become an A etc), including each weekend day. I will take your commitment, effort and participation in this course into account when it comes to determining final grades. **Final grades are not negotiable.** All class policies subject to change, with notice.

Grade Breakdown

- Questions - 5%
- Attendance and Participation - 20%
- Discussion (with handout) – 20%
- Final Project Proposal – 10%
- Brief Annotated Bibliography – 10%
- Final Project Draft – 15%
- Final Project, including presentation – 20%

PARTICIPATION AND ASSIGNMENTS

ALL ASSIGNMENTS SHOULD BE SENT TO ME AS EMAIL WORD DOCUMENTS

Initial Discussion Questions – 5% Please bring one question to the first two classes to hand in to me, on paper. Please bring it **typed out on a sheet of clean paper with your name and email included on it.** Think of these questions as practice for when you lead discussion. I will be looking for questions that open up conversation, that get to the heart of the text, that push us to rethink how we read these texts. Thus, try to design open-ended questions that will push us to understand, utilize and problematize the interior arguments, possibilities, and limitations of the readings. Do not ask questions that can be answered factually, or with quick reference to the text. Please see the attached note on how to ask a good question; this will also serve as a guideline for your presentation.

Attendance, Participation and Ongoing Discussion Involvement - 20% This class will operate only through your consistent attendance and sustained participation. It is

imperative therefore that you read the assigned texts for each week, and contribute to class discussions in a spirit of constructive and engaging dialogue. More than one unexcused absence will result in your grade being lowered by one-third. This is a heavy reading course – organize your time accordingly.

A note on classroom citizenship: In this class we discuss feminist, diasporic, transnational and queer politics. We talk about race and we talk about sex and sexuality. At times these can be difficult conversations because people feel strongly about these issues. Therefore let me say that I expect us all to speak to each other with kindness and respect. You should offer your ideas to the class with the expectation that you will be held responsible for them, maybe even challenged. But you should also offer them knowing that it is my job to make sure that when we go to dangerous places – and I hope we will – I will make sure that the conversation proceeds along collegial lines. That is my job. We are all mutually invested in the project of exploring ideas, of pushing ourselves to think harder about new ideas, and thus we aim for kindness, mutual respect *and* intellectual rigor.

What will not be rewarded is silence; I understand that some of you may be shy or worried about participating in class and I have thought long and hard about whether to push such people to talk or not. I have decided that each of us are equally responsible for the work and energy that we bring to the classroom and that while I will take shyness into account, each of you are responsible for contributing ideas. Don't be stingy!

Final Project Proposal – 10% Your final project is a twelve-week college-level syllabus designed by you, on a topic of your choice. The syllabus will include assignments, readings presented in the form of a detailed annotated bibliography and a short essay (3 pages or so) that explains the narrative of and your goals for your course. The project should be feminist in orientation if not feminist in argumentation, that is to say, your relationship to feminist/gender/queer studies is ultimately your ideological choice, however the issues that you explore in your syllabus should have some relationship to the history and future of feminist/gender/queer studies, politics or history. **Your proposal should be no longer than one page and should include an explanation of the topic you wish to cover, why you think it is important that students should take a course in this topic and what preliminary resources you have found. What is the inter/disciplinary orientation of this topic? Where would you teach this course? Be sure to discuss your topic with me in office hours.**

Brief Annotated Bibliography – 10% This is a preliminary list of possible assigned readings for your syllabus, briefly annotated, as in a sentence or two.

Final Syllabus Draft – 15% This should include drafted assignments, an expanded or revised bibliography and a draft of your short essay.

Final Draft of Paper/Syllabus Assignment – 20% Due on the last day of class, your final paper should include, as stated above, “assignments, readings presented in the form of a detailed annotated bibliography and a short essay (3 pages or so) that explains the narrative of and your goals for your course.” Please post it to Sakai. Note that a central

goal of my pedagogy is to work with students during the writing process rather than giving extensive feedback after the assignment is done, so you may only receive a grade and little feedback, if any, to the final product.

In-class presentations plus handout – 1 x 20 = 20% Each student is required to make two in-class presentations during the semester (Let's see how the numbers work out – it may only be one.) You will be expected to produce handouts for your discussion that are **well-researched and informative**, that outline the work, the author and their history. More importantly, you should also produce a lucid reading of the text, and generate questions for discussion. Be aware that I will probably lecture for the first five minutes of every class on the general background of the reading as well as its contribution to and place in the canon of feminist theory. Your presentation should be **no longer than 20 minutes long** (or people get bored!) followed by a discussion that you will facilitate for **no longer than 10 minutes more**. Use this opportunity to extend some of the conversations that we have been having in class, or to raise new topics of discussion. You **should** come and speak with me in advance of your presentation so that we can coordinate our presentations. Please provide bibliographic information, summarize the argument and give us your criticisms or insights. (To sum up: presentation = 20 minutes; discussion facilitation = 10 minutes; everything = 30 minutes) Make sure to email me your presentation handout after class is over; feel free to add to your handout, change it, whatever.) NB: if you want an early sense of how you are doing in the class, you will want to sign up for an early presentation.

January 21 - introductions

January 23 –

E. Patrick Johnson, "Queering Black Studies/'Quareing' Queer Studies"

Cheryl Clarke, "Lesbianism: An Act of Resistance"

Combahee River Collective Statement

January 28

Cathy Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers and Welfare Queens"

January 30

Cathy J Cohen, "Deviance as Resistance: a New Research Agenda for the Study of Black Politics"

Feb 4

Michel Foucault. The History of Sexuality, Volume 1. (extracts)

Feb 6

Roderick Ferguson, "Of Our Normative Strivings: African American Studies and the History of Sexuality." *Social Text* 84-85.

Feb 11

Stoler, Ann Laura. "Placing Race in the History of Sexuality" in *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things*

Feb 13

Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley, "Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic: Imagining the Middle Passage as Queer Borderwaters" from *GLQ: Gay and Lesbian Quarterly*

Feb 18 - away

Feb 20

Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman. "The Strangest Freaks of Despotism": Queer Sexuality in Antebellum African Slave Narratives."

Feb 25

Darieck Scott, "Slavery, Rape, and the Black Male Abject: Notes on Black (Power) Bottoms" in *Extravagant Abjection: Blackness, Power, and Sexuality in the African American Literary Imagination*

Feb 27

Nyong'o, Tavia. "In Night's Eye: Amalgamation, Respectability, and Shame" and "Minstrel Trouble: Racial Travesty in the Circum-Atlantic Fold" from *Amalgamation Waltz*.

March 4

Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics." *Public Culture*. 2003.

Giorgio Agamben from *Homo Sacer*

March 6

Sharon Holland, "Death and the Nation's Subjects" and "Critical Conversations at the Boundary Between Life and Death" from *Raising the Dead*

March 11 - library class

March 13 - away

SPRING BREAK

March 25

Audre Lorde, *The Uses of the Erotic*

Jafari Allen, Introduction, Chapter One and Chapter Five from *Venceremos?: The Erotics of Black Self-making in Cuba*

March 27

Gloria Wekker, from *The Politics of Passion: Women's Sexual Culture in the Afro-Surinamese Diaspora*

April 1

Sharon Holland, *The Erotic Life of Racism*

April 3

Sharon Holland, *The Erotic Life of Racism*

April 8

Catch-up or final assignment workshop day

April 10 - away

April 15

Rinaldo Walcott, "Reading from a Queer Place in the Diaspora"

April 17

Catch-up Day

April 22

From Queerness of Hip Hop, Palimpsest Special Issue

Introduction, C. Riley Snorton; forum pieces by Stallings, Brown, Rodriguez, Nyong'o

April 24

From Queerness of Hip Hop, Palimpsest Special Issue

Forum pieces by Holland, Perry, Neal, Walcott

April 29

From Queerness of Hip Hop, Palimpsest Special Issue

Mecca Jamilah Sullivan, Fat Mutha: Hip Hop's Queer Corpulent Poetics

April 30

From Queerness of Hip Hop, Palimpsest Special Issue

C. Riley Snorton, Referential Sights and Sights

May 6 - class party/evaluations

Appendix 1:
Some notes on how to ask a good question about theory,
that will provoke conversation and further discussion from your colleagues:

- Read theory three times: once to get a mental map of the article/chapter/paper; once to get the gist of the argument; and once to find your questions. Take notes in the margins: molest the text. Underline, star, jot down questions. Take a break. Think about the pieces of the text, phrases, expressions, moments that tweak your instincts, that bother and harass you. These intuitions and “feelings” are the ends of intellectual threads that you may want to excavate.
- Linger over passages that are unclear or that strike you as particularly helpful or that don’t jar well with you. Why do those passages set off your instincts?
- Relate those passages to the whole text: how is this piece of the text part of a larger context?
- Contextualize the writing: who wrote it; what is their discipline, or interdisciplinary nexus; what else have they written; what is the/are the central arguments; who is the writer in conversation with; what are some key passages; what are some key terms; what did you not understand?
- Make your discussion question(s) simple, straightforward and jargon-free.
- Proofread your questions so that you catch grammar and spelling mistakes.
- Make your questions open-ended, i.e. not answerable with fact or by direct and immediate reference to the text.
- Make sure your question doesn’t rely on information the rest of the class doesn’t have, OR give the class enough information and background to be able to engage the question. Make sure the question is answerable to start with, i.e., is not vague and does not rely on facts or assumptions not addressable within the confines of our class conversation.
- Make reference to the text with quotes or page numbers: direct the class to look at a relevant passage, read it together out loud, and drill down into the writing and sentence structure itself to get at the problem you are looking at. Sometimes I refer to this model of reading theory as Talmudic. What I am trying to say is that we need not reserve close-reading practices to literature, particularly if we are interested in the refractive effects of language itself.
- A good discussion question reframes some of the problems of the text and then tries to get at internal logical problems and paradoxes or to think through the consequences, implications and applications of the theory.
- As such, questions about “experience” or “responses” or “feelings” tend not to be helpful questions – try to step back from personal responses and instead focus on the intellectual shape of the ideas and argument.
- Often we are tempted to ask the “what about” question: e.g., what about the people who are excluded from this theory? Although not an unreasonable question, asked in this manner this is not really a sophisticated question because it doesn’t open up conversation. The only answer to “what about” is: they aren’t there. More productive is to ask: how do the exclusions at the heart of this work facilitate certain conclusions, problems or paradigms, what are these paradigms and what happens when we consider this theory in a broader context? What would this theory look like if re-written from a different point in history, different assumptions about political economy, etc.?
- It’s not the worst idea to make sure you have some thoughts about how to answer your questions before sending them on to your colleagues. However, sometimes you are just really stumped and need to work through this question with your classmates. That’s okay too.

- Which brings me to: it is often smart and productive to write a preamble to a question. That preamble might be a short intellectual history of your questions, it might contextualize the text you are working with, it might scaffold the question you want to ask by referring to other texts or many points in the same text. Don't make this preamble so long that no-one can excavate the original question, however. Also....
- If you can answer your question while you are writing it, you probably need to just state your point of view and move on to another, related, question.
- Sometimes the question you write is simply the jumping-off point for more developed questions on the part of the class. That is fine! The point is to catalyze inquiry, not perform mastery: good pedagogy means letting go of your ego-investments in your own ideas.
- Sometimes you are stuck with an instinct, a hunch, a nagging feeling and a half-formed question and you simply can't move forward without thinking about it out loud. Bring those seemingly half-formed thoughts to the class: we will figure the direction or shape of your question together.
- Finally: when you don't get it, you don't get it. Ask for help from the professor or your classmates, and feel free and supported in bringing your "I Don't Get It" questions to class. We will all profit from these acts of intellectual humility and generosity.