

**Black Feminist Theory**  
**AFS/WGS 380**  
Tuesday & Thursday 10:15-11:30am  
Room 124 1911 Building

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Office hours: by appointment

**Course Description**

WGS 350 is an interdisciplinary course in the Women's and Gender Studies Program that will allow students to explore contemporary and emerging topics related to women and gender. Women and Gender Studies (WGS) is an interdisciplinary field that examines sex, gender, and gendered experiences as a central feature of human existence. WGS is an interdisciplinary exploration that incorporates theories and methods from across the humanities, social, life and physical sciences. Accordingly, students will gain exposure to Black Feminist Theory in WGS 350 in order to interrogate and sharpen their understandings of the intersection of race, class, gender, and sexuality as related to women of African descent (Black women), particularly African American women. This class will seek to explain how Black women are defined in a variety of cultural contexts, as well as examine how race, class, gender and sexuality are central to the analysis of Black Feminist Theory. This course will utilize a variety of texts to define womanhood, and examine how social and institutional mechanisms of power and privilege, and a variety of everyday practices, impact Black women. Texts may include critical texts, films and personal narratives. Course content will be delivered by lecture, student lead discussions, quizzes, examinations, written assignments, and group projects.

**Course Objectives/Goals**

Students will develop a knowledge base about the realities facing Black women world-wide, and will contemplate the social reality and impact of systems of oppression on the life outcomes of Black women. Moreover, students will reflect critically on the concept of intersectionality, which dominates the relationship between race, social class, gender and sexual identity.

**Student Learning Outcomes**

**At the end of the course, students will be able to:**

1. Describe the cultural impact of Black women intellectuals in the production of Black feminist theory on US, and to some extent, international Black women.
2. Employ a working knowledge of Black feminist theory and the intersectionality of race, class, gender and sexual orientation of women of African descent.
3. Explain and differentiate between the three waves of feminism and the impact of

socially constructed stereotypes on Black women of African descent.

4. Formulate their personal life philosophy as it aligns with the concepts of black feminist theory.

### Required Texts

Davis, Angela Y. *Women, Race & Class*. New York, NY. Vintage Books via Random House. 1981.

The text is available at the NCSU bookstore. Additional readings and resources will be available on Moodle and as directed in the syllabus.

### Attendance Policy

Attendance for this class is mandatory; investment is expected. To ensure your success you are allowed **two unexcused absences**. Each unexcused absence after this point will result in five points off your participation grade. Excused absences will not negatively impact your participation grade. If you accumulate three or more excused absences we will schedule a meeting to discuss your progress in the course.

Per University regulations, excused absences must fall into one of two categories: sanctioned anticipated situations and documented emergency situations. Anticipated situations (e.g., participation in official University functions, court attendance, religious observances, or military duty) **must be submitted in writing at the beginning of the semester or one week prior to the anticipated absence**. Emergency absences (e.g., student illness, injury or death of immediate family member) **must be documented by the Student Organization Resource Center 515-3323 within one week following the emergency**. Make-up work will be allowed for excused absences only. For information regarding NCSU's attendance policy: <http://policies.ncsu.edu/regulation/reg-02-20-3>

### Letter Grades

This Course uses Standard NC State University Letter Grading Scale

97 ≤	A+	≤100	77 ≤	C+	<80
93 ≤	A	< 97	73 ≤	C	< 77
90 ≤	A-	< 93	70 ≤	C-	< 73
87 ≤	B+	< 90	67 ≤	D+	< 70
83 ≤	B	< 87	63 ≤	D	< 67
80 ≤	B-	< 83	60 ≤	D-	< 63
			0 ≤	F	< 60

### Requirements for Credit-Only (S/U) Grading

In order to receive a grade of S, students are required to take all exams and quizzes, complete all assignments, and earn a grade of C- or better. Conversion from letter grading to credit only (S/U) grading is subject to university deadlines. Refer to the Registration and Records calendar for deadlines related to grading. For more details refer to [http://www.ncsu.edu/policies/academic\\_affairs/courses\\_undergrad/REG02.20.15.php](http://www.ncsu.edu/policies/academic_affairs/courses_undergrad/REG02.20.15.php).

### **Requirements for Auditors (AU)**

Information about and requirements for auditing a course can be found at [http://www.ncsu.edu/policies/academic\\_affairs/pols\\_regs/REG205.00.5.php](http://www.ncsu.edu/policies/academic_affairs/pols_regs/REG205.00.5.php).

### **Policy on Incomplete Grades**

If an extended deadline is not authorized by the instructor or department, an unfinished incomplete grade will automatically change to an F after either (a) the end of the next regular semester in which the student is enrolled (not including summer sessions), or (b) the end of 12 months if the student is not enrolled, whichever is shorter. Incompletes that change to F will count as an attempted course on transcripts. The burden of fulfilling an incomplete grade is the responsibility of the student. The university policy on incomplete grades is located at <http://policies.ncsu.edu/regulation/reg-02-50-03>

### **Late/Incomplete Assignments**

No late assignments will be accepted unless arrangements are made with the instructor prior to the due date. For excused absences you will be allowed to make up work missed in class, but will not be exempt from due dates for major assignments. Points earned for incomplete assignments will be reduced in proportion to the degree to which the assignment was completed. Points earned for late assignments will be reduced by 50% if received within 24 hours of due date and time due. Assignments received later will be reduced by an additional 10% with every 24-hour period.

### **Academic Integrity**

All students are expected to follow the University policy on academic integrity found in the student code of conduct. All standards of academic honesty will be strictly enforced. All students are bound by the honor code, which states: "I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this test or assignment." Your signature on any test or assignment, as well as all other submitted work or delivered speeches, is considered a confirmation that you are following the honor code. Please consult the following website for further details on student conduct: <http://studentconduct.ncsu.edu/>

### **Electronically Hosted Course Components**

Moodle will be used to track absences, grades and reminders about classes. Moodle will also be used to share readings and relevant information. Please refer to Moodle throughout the semester.

### **Laptop Computers and Other Electronic Devices.**

You will only be allowed to use a laptop computer or tablet for class if it is not distracting to other students. If you use your computer/tablet for any activity unrelated to the class during which you are using it then you will be counted as absent (unexcused). You may not use your cell phone without permission. No course recording may occur without prior permission from the instructor (<http://policies.ncsu.edu/regulation/reg-02-20-11>).

### **Accommodations for Disabilities**

Reasonable accommodations will be made for students with verifiable disabilities. In order to take advantage of available accommodations, student must register with the

Disability Services Office (<http://www.ncsu.edu/dso>) located at 1900 Student Health Center, Campus Box 7509, 919-515-7653. For more information on NC State's policy on working with students with disabilities, please see the Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities Regulation at [http://www.ncsu.edu/policies/academic\\_affairs/courses\\_undergrad/REG02.20.1.php](http://www.ncsu.edu/policies/academic_affairs/courses_undergrad/REG02.20.1.php).

### **Non-Discrimination Policy**

NC State University provides equality of opportunity in education and employment for all students and employees. Accordingly, NC State affirms its commitment to maintain a work environment for all employees and an academic environment for all students that is free from all forms of discrimination. Discrimination based on race, color, religion, creed, sex, national origin, age, disability, veteran status, or sexual orientation is a violation of state and federal law and/or NC State University policy and will not be tolerated. Harassment of any person (either in the form of quid pro quo or creation of a hostile environment) based on race, color, religion, creed, sex, national origin, age, disability, veteran status, or sexual orientation also is a violation of state and federal law and/or NC State University policy and will not be tolerated. Retaliation against any person who complains about discrimination is also prohibited. NC State's policies and regulations covering discrimination, harassment, and retaliation may be accessed at <http://policies.ncsu.edu/policy/pol-04-25-5> or [http://www.ncsu.edu/equal\\_op](http://www.ncsu.edu/equal_op). Any person who feels that he or she has been the subject of prohibited discrimination, harassment, or retaliation should contact the Office for Equal Opportunity (OEO) at 919-515-3148. *Please note that I welcome any concerns you have about inclusion in the class and invite you to come speak with me first if you feel comfortable doing so.*

### **CHASS Career Services:**

Explore career options related to your major, make decisions about your major or minor, build resumes and cover letters, prepare for interviews, develop internship/ job search strategies, maximize career fairs, and more. Use ePACK to make an appointment with your career counselor -- Jane Matthews or Woody Catoe -- through ePACK. Career Development Center, 2100 Pullen Hall. [careers.ncsu.edu](http://careers.ncsu.edu)

### **Student Resources:**

Writing and Speaking Tutorial Services: <http://tutorial.ncsu.edu/wsts>  
Academic Policies: [www.ncsu.edu/policies/sitemap.php#acad-pols\\_regs](http://www.ncsu.edu/policies/sitemap.php#acad-pols_regs)  
University Career Center: <http://www.ncsu.edu/career/>  
Disability Services Office (DSO): <http://www.ncsu.edu/dso/>  
Adverse Weather: Complete information about adverse weather policies is available at [http://www.ncsu.edu/human\\_resources/benefits/leave/adverseweather.php](http://www.ncsu.edu/human_resources/benefits/leave/adverseweather.php)  
Check email, news, the NCSU home page, or call 513-8888 for the latest information.

### **Assignments:**

#### **The Formation of Black Feminist Theory (15%)**

What IS black feminist theory? How did black feminist theory come about? Who were/are the leaders of black feminist movement? What is the movement all about? What is the purpose of

black feminist theory? How and why is the black feminist movement relevant in the 21st century? Write a 2-3 page paper using the following readings, as well as what you've already gleaned from everything you've read so far in the course to help you better understand the advancement of the movement in response to the abolition of slavery, the black liberation movement and the women's movement.

**READ:**

bell hooks. "Black Women: Shaping Feminist Theory," *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, 1-15. Boston: South End Press, 1984. (posted on Moodle)

Hill, Patricia Collins. "Distinguishing Features of Black Feminist Thought," *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 19-40. New York: Routledge: Routledge, Chapman and Hill, Inc., 1990.

The Combahee River Collective: A Feminist Statement," in *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*, 231-239. Guy-Sheftall, Beverly, ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995.

**Stereotypical Images of Black Women (10%)**

Black women in the United States have been haunted by images meant to control and police that have actually spread and impacted the experiences of Black women and girls worldwide. These images have persisted for centuries – since slavery - and have been a negative force in the liberation of black women. For this assignment, you will explore the black woman's struggle for self-definition and issues of identity, and think about how stereotypes work to impede black women's and girls' safety, protection, credibility, freedom, etc., particularly in the context of the Surviving R. Kelly docuseries.

**Read:**

West, Carolyn M. "Mammy, Jezebel, Sapphire and Their Homegirls: Developing an "Oppositional Gaze" Toward Images of Black Women"

**Watch:**

Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes and Black Women in America

Melissa Harris-Perry is the Maya Angelou Presidential Chair at Wake Forest University and former MSNBC commentator. In her book "Sister Citizen" Harris-Perry examines black women's political and emotional responses to pervasive negative race and gender images. This presentation was published in December 2011 at the University of California Santa Barbara. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=blX2YHdqUJA>

Consider all the components of the social construction of stereotypes by reflecting on the following questions:

What did you learn from the videos/readings, and what sticks out to you? How might this information impact the lived experiences of black women in the US? How does this information impact your lived experience? How does what you learned figure into your

understanding of what happened and is what is happening with the women and girls featured in *Surviving R. Kelly*?

**Sarah Baartman (10%)** After watching the film *Venus Noire* in class, you will do your own research on Saartjie “Sarah” Baartman, and write a 3-5 page paper on how the oppression she experienced was grounded in the intersection of her race and gender. In other words, apply black feminist theory to your discussion of Baartman’s life. Use examples from the film to support your points, and use your supplemental research to ground what the film depicts. Additionally, discuss how Baartman’s experience as a 19<sup>th</sup> century South African woman living in Europe foreshadows or differs from what you know about African American women’s experiences today.

**Intersectionality – Critical Response Forum (10%)** In class, we have discussed intersectionality and its origins related to black feminist theory. For this assignment, you will have the opportunity to hear from two notable scholars on the topic: Dr. Patricia Hill Collins, and Kimberle W. Crenshaw, who coined the term, intersectionality. Both women have compelling views on the topic. You will watch the following:

“Sharpening Intersectionality’s Critical Edge,” Patricia Hill Collins Keynote at the 2015 Social Theory Forum @ UMass Boston, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pqToqQCZtvq>

“The Urgency of Intersectionality,” Kimberlé Crenshaw TED Talk  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=akOe5-UsQ2o>

After viewing the assigned videos, write a 2 page critical reflection based on your perspectives of what was shared by both scholars. Questions you might consider: What is your interpretation of each lecture? What are the most important/interesting/useful/relevant points that you can pull from these lectures? Where are the points of similarity and divergence in these presentations? In your paper, please reflect critically on the questions listed below. Make sure to identify places of agreement and disagreement between the speakers and offer your own thoughts to further the dialogue. Submission should be no more than two pages in length.

### **The Nature of Sisterhood Between Black and White Women (15%)**

Black women have engaged for decades in an ongoing struggle for recognition of their unique plight as members of several different oppressed groups. Their experiences and concerns have traditionally been subsumed under those of black men and white women. For centuries, tensions have existed in the relationships of black women and white women for that very reason, plus slavery. For this assignment, you will write a 3-5 page paper that explores the nature of the relationship between black and white women, the origins of the tensions between them, and examine the current status of their relationship especially as it relates to feminist movement (ie. white feminism, national Women’s March, #MeToo appropriation, etc).

Read:

Cooper, Brittney “My White Liberal Frenemies,” Salon, August 13, 2013.

[https://www.salon.com/2014/04/01/my\\_white\\_liberal\\_frenemies\\_when\\_twitter\\_exchanges\\_reveal\\_untrustworthy\\_allies/](https://www.salon.com/2014/04/01/my_white_liberal_frenemies_when_twitter_exchanges_reveal_untrustworthy_allies/)

Focus specifically on the following paragraph from Cooper's article:

"Grappling with that kind of inelegant, heavy-handed, seemingly exclusionary (and "racist") understanding of knowledge systems can be difficult for white people, because the myth of universalism, backed up by histories of pillaging and conquest, make it easy to believe that there is nothing beyond the reach of the white gaze. But the way people of color survive is precisely by having what feminist theorist Chela Sandoval called an "oppositional consciousness," a way of seeing and understanding that by its very nature remains inaccessible to the dominant group."

Is the black woman's experience – with all of its contours and nuances – something that their white women friends should resolve themselves to never being able to know or understand? Would this resolution help to promote the type of respect of experience that is lacking in mainstream feminism? What other areas of black life might be "inaccessible" to white women – and white people in general - who seek to be friends with black women?

**New Thought, New Theory (30%)** For this assignment, you will focus on a portion of text from bell hooks' **Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center** which suggests, among other things, the following: "Any movement to resist the co-optation of feminist struggle must begin by introducing a different feminist perspective-a new theory-one that is not informed by the ideology of liberal individualism." You will develop a 10-15 slide PowerPoint presentation in which you apply YOUR OWN THOUGHTS about ONE ISSUE that black feminism seeks to address. You must use what you have learned from the course via readings, class discussions, film screenings, guest presentations, etc. in your analysis. This is an analytical assignment. Make sure that you think critically about the issue you want to present, and how you want to present it. You will need to utilize audio and visuals to support your work. You will also need to write an abstract that summarizes the content of your presentation to turn in.

hooks, bell. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. Pg. 8

[https://diyworkshop.noblogs.org/files/2015/10/Bell\\_Hooks\\_Feminist\\_Theory\\_from\\_Margin\\_to\\_CenteBookZZ.org.pdf](https://diyworkshop.noblogs.org/files/2015/10/Bell_Hooks_Feminist_Theory_from_Margin_to_CenterBookZZ.org.pdf)

**Participation (10%)** – You are expected to show up to class prepared and ready to engage the course materials.

### **Assignment Details:**

1. All assignments are due ON TIME by the dates and times spelled out in the course schedule. Please include a proper heading in the upper left corner of each written assignment, including your name, the date, and the name of the course with the course number.

2. Paper format: Times New Roman 12-point font, single-spaced, one-inch margins. DO NOT forget to cite sources properly. Use APA or MLA style.

3. The following will be used to evaluate and grade your assignments:

a. Depth of analysis

1. Papers should go beyond the assignment to explore the implications of arguments or evidence in a particularly thoughtful, insightful, and/or original ways.
2. Papers should represent the authors' arguments, evidence and conclusion accurately and fairly.
3. Papers should demonstrate a firm understanding of the readings
4. Papers should be well-presented and argued; ideas should be detailed, well developed, and supported with specific evidence and examples

b. Clarity

1. Sentence structure should be consistently clear and lucid
2. Wording should be precise and unambiguous
3. Quotes should be framed effectively (i.e. integrated properly in terms of both grammar and meaning) and explicated where necessary.
4. Writing should be concise and persuasive

c. Research (if required for the assignment)

1. Sources should be exceptionally well integrated and should effectively support claims argued in the paper. Quotations and works cited should conform to APA or MLA style.

d. Writing

1. Thoughts and points should be coherently organized and the logic easy to follow. There should be no or few spelling or grammatical errors and terminology should be clearly defined.
2. Conclusions must clearly state connections to the reading(s) and research, and your position should be clear and relevant.

\* The schedule may change. Please read all emails and check the Moodle site for any updates.