

## AML 4685: Black Women Writers

Dr. Debra Walker King

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Class Time: 9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> periods

Office hours: M 6-8<sup>th</sup> periods &

Via Skype by Appointment

**Description:** This course examines the subject positions of African American women within the social and political context of the United States, focusing foremost on representations of the captive female body as explored in works published from 1975-1985. Since Feminist and Womanist praxis and epistemology of this period were grounded in notions of freedom of the body to “labor” and achieve full self expression, this course asks: how far have we come in accomplishing such “freedoms”? What can we learn about our progress as cultural and social beings in the twenty-first century by reviewing the culture work of Black women during the twentieth century’s so-called “renaissance” in Black women’s writing and cultural assessment? Have we advanced at all? What gaps must be brought to light in order for the current discourse of Womanist “wholeness” to achieve a broader articulation? What cultural configurations are (and might be) derived from taking a look back at the past and comparing it to the lives and challenges women face today?

**Format:** The readings and teaching methods of this course are eclectic in pursuit of a variety of texts and experiences. The class sessions include lectures, discussions, and student reports. We will focus on five novels and one choreopoem. As investigators and scholars, our inquiries will play in the spaces between practice and theory in order to address the commonalties, disruptions, gaps, absences, and silences that exist among the primary texts.

**Required Texts and Materials:** (asterisked texts are available as eBooks)

You will need a pack of 3x5 cards for this class

1. Shange, Ntozake. *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide*, 1975
2. Jones, Gayl. *Eva’s Man*, 1976,
3. Butler, Octavia. *Kindred*, 1979
4. Morrison, Toni. *Sula*, 1982
5. Walker, Alice. *The Color Purple*, 1983
6. Naylor, Gloria. *Linden Hills*, 1985

### Course Schedule

Week 1—8/21

Course Introduction: Purpose and Goals

Consider the following questions and be prepared to discuss them in class: How would you define Black Feminism? To what degree do the texts you have read in the past articulate that point of view? In what ways do they fall short? How would you define *the captive female body* present and past? How valid is this charge of captivity today?

**Assignment Tips:** Begin thinking about your desired group session assignment. Submit an email to me with your request before 6:00 pm Wednesday the 30<sup>th</sup>. Please use subject heading “**AML 4685 group request.**”

Week 2 –8/28

Writing the Body / Reading the Flesh

Required Readings:

1. Henderson, Mae G. “Speaking in Tongues: Dialogics, Dialectics, and the Black Woman Writer’s Tradition.” <http://sfonline.barnard.edu/sfxxx/documents/henderson.pdf> or find a copy under *Files* in Canvas.
2. Cixous, “Laugh of the Medusa” <http://lavachequilit.typepad.com/files/cixous-read.pdf> or find a copy under *Files* in Canvas

**Suggested Reading:**

Hortense Spillers. “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe.”

[https://people.ucsc.edu/~nmitchel/hortense\\_spillers\\_-\\_mamas\\_baby\\_papas\\_maybe.pdf](https://people.ucsc.edu/~nmitchel/hortense_spillers_-_mamas_baby_papas_maybe.pdf) or find a copy under *Files* in Canvas.

**\*Assignment Tips:** Begin your journal entries with this reading assignment. Be prepared to discuss your entry if asked in class. This is **Journal Entry #1**

Week 3 –9/4 LABOR DAY—No Class

Week 4 –9/11

Lecture: “Liminal States of Being”

**Note: Impromptu Discussions begin today**

Required Reading:

Butler, Octavia. *Kindred* (1979) “Prologue”- “The Fire”

**Assignment: Journal entry #2**

**Please Note: Group assignments will be available in CANVAS by 6:00pm today. You will find the list under “Resources.”**

Week 5 –9/18

Required Reading:

Butler, Octavia. *Kindred* (1979) “The Fall”- “The Storm”

**Assignment: Journal entry #3**

Week 6 –9/25

Ntozake Shange’s 1975 choreopoem, *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf*.

**Assignment: Journal entry #4**

Week 7 –10/2

Film viewing and discussion session

Tyler Perry's 2010 film adaptation of Ntozake Shange's 1975 choreopoem, *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf*.

Week 8 –10/9 MIDTERM EXAM

Week 9 –10/16

Required Reading:

Jones, Gayl. *Eva's Man* "Part One" and "Part Two," (1976)

**Assignment: Journal entry #5**

Week 10 –10/23

Required Reading:

"Part Three" and "Part Four," *Eva's Man* (1976)

**Assignment: Journal entry #6**

Week 11 –10/30

Required Group Preparation Session:

This class session is for the benefit of group session preparations. Please come prepared to work with your group.

Week 12 –11/6 Please Note: Response Journals due today by 1:30

**Group Session I**

Required Reading:

Naylor, Gloria. *Linden Hills* (1985)

Through section "December 21<sup>st</sup>" *Linden Hills* (1985)

Week 13 –11/13

**Group Session II**

Required Reading:

From section "December 22<sup>nd</sup>" to the end. *Linden Hills* (1985)

Week 14 –11/20

**Group Session III**

Required Reading:

Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* (1983) The beginning through page 125, which ends with the words: "They postmark right here."

Week 15 –11/17

**Group Session IV**

Required Reading:

Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* (1983) From page 126, which begins: "Dear Celie, the first letter say," to the end of the novel.

Week 16 –12/4 Last Day of Class – TBD

All journals are due for final grading (10 entries)—See assignment note below for instructions on how and what to submit for your final review grade. I **must** receive all journals electronically (via Canvas) before the start of class.

## Assignments and Grade Distribution

### 200 points: Response Journals

Write one (1) entry for each week's reading assignment so identified in the course calendar for a total of six (6) entries. Each journal entry should present your thoughts concerning the reading material within 300 to 500 words (two pages maximum). Number each entry in the upper left corner of the entry's first page and date it. This is not the place for self-evaluation and life meditations. Here you demonstrate your knowledge, compare theories, and engage the text -- the more original your contemplations and assessments, the better your grade. Keep the course objectives in mind when writing (but you may also expand your comments beyond this boundary). Refer to previous entries to demonstrate your growth in understanding and knowledge. Research the text and share your thoughts. I evaluate journals at midterm (11/6 due date). If you run into problems, see me before the journal due date. (My office hours are listed above.)

Here is an example of a thoughtful and original journal entry. It was submitted by a student (in a class with a different focus than ours). It will be helpful for you to read and provides a guideline for my expectations. This is what your entries will resemble. Note: the submission is written within page requirements (375 words) and includes commentary about texts read or individually researched during the semester, previous knowledge, meaningful analysis and questions for further consideration:

*Meridian* may be either a perfect or a perfectly tragic way to end the semester's discussion. Most of the narrative offers a rather grim postmortem of the Civil Rights and Black Nationalist-eras' failures pertaining to race and gender, as well as how these seemingly irreconcilable issues tear people apart at both the political and personal levels. Pamela Barnett's article, "'Miscegenation,' Rape, and 'Race'" in Alice Walker's *Meridian* offers a reading of the novel that seems to echo Truman Held's "sinking, hopeless feeling about opposites, and what they do to each other" (135). Although the text elucidates, complicates, and undermines these opposites, Barnett argues that ultimately, it "tragic[ally]" "reinstalls" them.

Bennett writes that Camara, the "miscegenetic" child, who exists at the extreme margins of the narrative and is ultimately "erased" by her murder represents the impossibility of reconciling the "opposites" black and white (and perhaps also between personal and political concerns, desire and the reality principle, etc.).

While Camara can be read as what Fredric Jameson, by way of A.J. Greimas, calls an "impossible synthesis" of opposed terms, I think that *Meridian* herself, through her "journey" and rebirth (or "collapse?") offers, possibly, after this long and painful story, a rekindled but unrepresented hope for an inchoate or as-yet-indiscernible future. Instead of a synthesis (which contains, although it sublimates, both opposites) *Meridian* would represent what Greimas calls the "neutral," the negation of negation that nullifies both terms (for *Meridian* these are many: black/white, male/female, Lynne/Truman, mother/infanticide, housewife/activist, dying/killing, "ambivalen[t]"/"unorthodox" as Truman puts it) to become a "neither/nor that is something radically "else" entirely. I would suggest we ought to read the text like Lacan reads Antigone, not as tragedy, but as transformative, with *Meridian* as an "anamorphosis" that exists

outside these oppositions and which, at the end of the novel, we still lack the perspectival angle to "see" correctly.

Is the novel tragic? Is it hopeful? Can it be read as a precursor of what Cornel West would later paradoxically call "unhopeful hope?" If Meridian is read this way, is there anything in the novel that provides clues as to how others may heal as she has? Or about what might be the contours of the "group" that will later join her ("maybe") to know the "truth?"—Student (Fall 2010)

**50 points: Panel Sessions.** These forty minute panel sessions probe previously discussed questions and explore new ones. Be creative in your presentations. Do not line up and give reports. I repeat: DO NOT. Have fun with this project! Present your analysis and interpretations through narration while acting out a scene or revising a scene; stage a debate or a trial; juxtapose the novel with artwork, music, or poems. Be sure to involve the class. Only your imagination limits the possibilities! One class period is dedicated to panel planning so there should be no excuse for any member's lack of participation. From this planning period, the panel is expected to produce a one paragraph abstract of the proposed presentation and submit it to me during the next class period. The first group should plan to do this earlier (if my assistance is required). In addition, each panel member is asked to write a brief summary of the group's work, individual effort, and the panel's contribution to the class objectives. These two or three page summaries are due the day of the panel presentation. Individual grades are assigned for these papers and averaged with panel presentation grades. I record only the final score.

### **Other Expectations and Assignments—250 points**

Points breakdown is available in Canvas gradebook

**Attendance:** Discussions cannot be replicated so if you miss a day of class, you will have missed the lesson for that day. Therefore, I take attendance very seriously and expect you to come to class every day on time. You are allowed **up to two** unexcused absences, your grade will automatically drop a half letter grade after the third unexcused absence. **If you reach nine absences (three full class sessions) you will automatically fail the course and should withdraw from the class or you will receive an "E" for the semester.** Remember, this class meets once a week, representing three class sessions. That is three absences--if the entire class is missed. No INCOMPLETES are given for this course.

*Caveat: Excused absences are permitted if you provide a typewritten letter documenting an illness, a family crisis, or participation in a university sponsored event. All students should consult with me to make up material missed during an absence. Unfortunately, given the nature of the course, if you miss more than three weeks of class (equaling nine sessions) you will automatically fail and receive an E. For additional information, please see our University guidelines as indicated in the "Course Policies" section of this syllabus.*

**Entrance Passes:** Purchase a pack of 3x5 index cards. These cards are your entrance passes and will be used to inform me of your attendance and reading progress. Bring one with you every class session. Without an entrance pass you will be considered absent so be sure to put your name on them. Tardy attendees' cards will be collected at the end of class. Tardiness will be recorded and considered during grading. Consistent tardiness will result in a final letter grade reduction.

**Preparation:** All readings, entrance passes and take-home assignments must be prepared and ready for each class session. Write a comment or a question on your entrance pass cards demonstrating your preparation for the day's session. Poorly constructed, irrelevant or perfunctory comments will result in point reductions in this area of grading. I do not want you to tell me you liked a particular reading, for instance. Your response to assigned readings must be brief, intelligent, thoughtful and scholarly. Identify why the material is valuable to our class discussion (or objectives). Ask an engaging discussion question prefaced by brief contextualizing commentary.

**Occasionally, these cards will be graded for content and returned** so do your best work at all times. I will present cards for class / group discussions randomly. Your contribution during these discussions will be evaluated. **Take home projects for entrance passes may be graded.** Even if I do not ask you to turn in these assignments, your in-class responses to them are required. Be prepared at all times.

**Participation:** Students should complete all readings prior to the class meeting and participate fully in class discussion. Assessment is made in the areas of attendance, shared entrance passes, interlocutory engagement, leadership, teamwork, and originality.

### **Weekly IMPROMPTU Discussions**

**Beginning on September 11<sup>th</sup>** I will select several students each week (during class) to enter into discussions guided by issues raised in your entrance cards. You must bring depth to the idea on the floor for discussion as well as offer your own card remarks for consideration. Discussions will proceed as follows:

1<sup>st</sup> Speaker—offers entry card commentary on the assigned reading

2<sup>nd</sup> Speaker—responds with reflections on the opening statement

You may agree with the opening speaker or disagree, but you must discuss why.

1<sup>st</sup> Speaker—responds to the reflections of speaker #2 with depth of insight

2<sup>nd</sup> Speaker—adds additional information from his or her own entry card

1<sup>st</sup> Speaker—responds to the additional information

You may agree with the opening speaker or disagree, but you must discuss why.

2<sup>nd</sup> Speaker—responds to the reflections of speaker #2 with depth of insight

Speaker #2—concluding statements

Speaker #1—concluding statements

Speaker #3—Summary of the issues raised

Summary participants review **the main points** of what was argued or discussed and offer insights overlooked or not fully considered. The selected 3<sup>rd</sup> speaker must not only summarize but also introduce related information from additional texts read that week, from texts read in previous weeks, or from his/her own entry pass and open the floor for class discussion.

Open Class Discussion—volunteers from the class and professor offer insights

This pattern will repeat with new speakers. I hope to have at least six (6) assigned participants in discussions such as this each week. Be prepared for participation without prior notice. Please note: this assignment is worth a minimum of 25pts per assigned impromptu discussion.

### **Strong participation includes:**

1. only excused absences with no recorded tardiness
2. adherence to course policies and guidelines
3. entrance pass evidence that readings are completed and ready for class discussions
4. outside research done and shared with class on multiple occasions

5. clear and respectful exchanges with other students and the professor
6. volunteering to enter or begin discussions(brief presentations included)
7. leadership within small group activities noted by reporting out for the group or taking a guiding role
8. an understanding of teamwork and ones responsibility to advancing positive class or group dynamics
9. originality in thought, discussion and entrance card information and sharing
10. encouraging others' ability to enter or sustain participation in discussions
11. engaging questions from the professor or other students without hesitation or persuasion

### ***Rubric***

✚ “A” level participation is strong in all key areas.

✚ “B” level participation, albeit promising, is notably weak in TWO key areas.

✚ “C” level participation is notably weak in THREE key areas.

✚ “D” level participation is significantly weak in THREE or more of the key areas.

**Exams, Quizzes and Other assignments:** There will pop quizzes—no makeup quizzes. Your performance during class, progress evaluations (tests and quizzes) and in-class discussions will determine whether a final exam is necessary. I will inform you of my decision.

**Extra Credit (5 bonus points):** *This is an optional assignment.* You may give a fifteen minute oral report to the class on an issue or author under discussion. You decided what you want to do. You may wish to do a report on one of the “Essential Terms” listed and defined in the “Resources” section of the course in Sakai, for instance. All reports must be approved prior to presentation, however. Submit a short proposal describing what you plan to do. The assignment will earn scores ranging from 1/2 to 5 points (added to your overall course score).

### **GRADE DISTRIBUTION AND GRADING METHOD**

All papers and short essay quizzes are evaluated on content, originality, creativity, connections to course objectives, and form (grammar, spelling, bibliography, etc.). Grades will be calculated in terms of possible score percentages with no curve. You are guaranteed an A or A- if you earn 450 points or more out of 500 possible points (90 %<sup>+</sup>). Your journal assignment is worth 250 points.

|                                 |                |                                 |                |                                 |                |
|---------------------------------|----------------|---------------------------------|----------------|---------------------------------|----------------|
| 435 to 449 (87% <sup>+</sup> )  | B <sup>+</sup> | 385 to 399 (77 % <sup>+</sup> ) | C <sup>+</sup> | 335 to 363 (67 % <sup>+</sup> ) | D <sup>+</sup> |
| 415 to 434 (83% <sup>+</sup> )  | B              | 365 to 384 (73 % <sup>+</sup> ) | C              | 315 to 334 (63 % <sup>+</sup> ) | D              |
| 400 to 414 (80 % <sup>+</sup> ) | B <sup>-</sup> | 350 to 364 (70 % <sup>+</sup> ) | C <sup>-</sup> | 300 to 314 (60 % <sup>+</sup> ) | D <sup>-</sup> |

### ***Grading Criteria***

**Assignments will be graded on how proficiently they meet expectations in the key areas of content, organization, and grammar/mechanics.**

**Strong content includes:**

- a clearly delineated and/ or interpreted topic
- a strong, clear, and logically developed thesis that is supported by fully developed ideas in the form of relevant textual evidence and research
- ideas that show evidence of independent thinking
- commentary that explains how the concrete details support the thesis. Commentary may include interpretation, analysis, argument, insight, and/or reflection.

-research supporting materials (note: Google and Wikipedia searches are fine for starters, but please use academic journals and books for strong research effort)

**Strong organization includes:**

- the effective arrangement of points that reveals itself in very good incorporation of evidence (use of summary, paraphrase) and the sparing and judicious use of quotations
- rounded and well-connected paragraphs
- the use of appropriate transitions

**Strong grammar, mechanics, and prose style is characterized by:**

- mature sentence structure, syntax, and diction
- strong audience awareness as evidenced in the use of appropriate style, register, tone, and vocabulary
- little to no errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation
- the formatting of document in keeping with prescribed guidelines—including length of journal entries

***Rubric***

The “A or A-” submission has strong content, strong organization, AND strong grammar/mechanics. To receive an “A or A-,” work needs to offer support in the form of textual evidence and secondary research materials (using direct quotes and paraphrase), present original insight in argumentation, and be organized clearly and logically with sources documented using MLA style guidelines.

The “B” submission is notably weak in ONE of the above key areas.

The “C” submission, albeit promising, is notably weak in TWO or more of the above key areas.

The “D” submission is significantly weak in TWO or more of the above key areas.

Additional information concerning UF grading policies may be found on the undergraduate catalog web page <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

***Course Policies***

1) “FATAL ERRORS” POLICY: Students must meet high standards in writing. To this end, all written assignments must meet minimal presentation criteria to be acceptable. These standards address spelling, punctuation, format and basic grammar. The term *Fatal Errors* refers to formal writing errors of form. Specifically, they include the following and will be identified in evaluated written assignments by error number:

- ✚ 1. Each different word misspelled,
- ✚ 2. Each sentence fragment,
- ✚ 3. Each run-on sentence or comma splice,
- ✚ 4. Each mistake in capitalization,
- ✚ 5. Each serious error in punctuation that obscures meaning, including errors in the use or failure to use italics and quotation marks,
- ✚ 6. Each error in verb tense or subject/verb agreement,
- ✚ 7. Each instance of ending a sentence with a preposition,
- ✚ 8. Each improper citation, or lack of citation, where one is needed
- ✚ 9. Each misuse of words (*who* for *that* or unwarranted use of clichés, for instance) and reference problems,
- ✚ 10. Poor Paragraphing or lack of paragraphing,
- ✚ 11. Lack of conformity with assignment format.

Papers with more than **three (3) fatal errors on any one page** or more than **seven (7) for the entire document** will be returned to the student and will suffer a half letter grade deduction. Only one resubmission is allowed. Penalties for final course papers (where there is no time for a resubmission) will be based on the relative importance of the assignment to the determination of the final course grade. This policy applies to all assignments, excluding entrance cards and portfolio progress grading.

- 2) **Cell phones and computers:** Cell phones must be muted during the class session. If an emergency occurs and you have to respond to calls or texts, please leave the classroom. Computers (iPads or other electronics) are allowed for note taking, access to eBooks and presentations only. Anyone using a computer for any other purpose will be asked to deliver the device to me for retrieval after class. You may record the class (presentations, for instance) with my permission only.
- 3) **Papers / Journals:** All papers must be typed and double spaced using the 8 1/2 x 11 page layout with one inch margins all around. Use Courier or New York Times font at 12 point size. Documentation and form should follow the MLA style manual. Number all pages after the first within the upper right margin.
- 4) **Grade Disputes:** Questions about assigned grades are acceptable during my office hours only. If my written responses do not address your concerns, I will explain why a grade was earned. With the exception of miscalculation or oversight, I will not consider grade changes. **Please do not ask; I consider it harassment.** You may consult the English Department Associate Chair, for grade appeals, however. Please note: appeals may result in a higher, unchanged, or lower final grade.
- 5) **Missed class sessions:** Make up work for approved absences must be addressed within one week of your return. See me for submission deadlines for missed work within this time frame.
- 6) **Journal Submission guidelines:** This assignment **must be submitted electronically**. Microsoft Word compatible documents only please. Unreadable documents will be returned ungraded. Submit your project via email ([dwking@ufl.edu](mailto:dwking@ufl.edu)) by 1:30 p.m. on the due date. Late submissions will suffer a half letter grade reduction. Include the course number in the subject heading. Your subject line for final journal submission should look like this: **Final Journal 4453**.
- 7) *“Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found in the online catalog at: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>.”*

### *University Policies*

**DISABILITY SERVICES:** The Disability Resource Center in the Dean of Students Office provides students and faculty with information and support regarding accommodations for students with disabilities in the classroom. It is your responsibility to contact the school administration regarding any disability you may have, and to inform me so we can make any necessary arrangements. For more information, see: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>

**ACADEMIC HONESTY:** Honor Code. “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honesty and integrity.” This oath represents UF’s commitment to academic honesty and integrity. “Cheating, plagiarism, bribery, misrepresentation, conspiracy and fabrication” are violations of the Honor Code. All students must abide

by the student honor code. For more information about academic honesty, including definitions of plagiarism and unauthorized collaboration, see:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/advising/info/student---honor---code.aspx>

HARASSMENT: UF provides an educational and working environment for its students, faculty, and staff free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment. For more about UF policies regarding harassment, see: <http://www.hr.ufl.edu/eo/sexharassment.htm>

COURSE EVALUATIONS: “Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course based on 10 criteria. These evaluations are conducted online at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results>.”