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## *Gender and Sexualities in African American Literature*

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This course will explore how African American authors have engaged in the politics of representing gender and sexualities from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century to the present. We will begin with James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* (1956) because it was one of the first African American literary texts to explicitly introduce alternative forms of sexualities. During this class, we will explore the myriad ways that African American authors have constructed gender and asserted sexualities while establishing complex black identities at multiple intersections. We will consider the following: How have African American authors treated gender and sexualities in their work? How do African American authors use conceptions of gender and sexualities as identities that can be both enslaving and liberating? How has literary criticism responded to these works?

This course does not aim to be an exhaustive take on all the ways African American authors have considered black identity at the intersection of gender and sexualities, but rather aims to situate each text within their historical context, so that students may be able to form a sense of how conversations about gender and sexualities in African American literature have developed over time. To narrow the scope of the course, we will direct our attention to mostly novels in addition to two memoirs written by African Americans that have had an impact on shaping the study of gender and sexualities in African American literary criticism.

### Required Texts

- ✚ James Baldwin—*Giovanni's Room* (1956)
- ✚ Ann Allen Shockley—*Loving Her* (1974)
- ✚ Randall Kenan—*A Visitation of Spirits* (1989)
- ✚ Pearl Cleage—*What Looks like Crazy on an Ordinary Day* (1997)
- ✚ Delores Phillips—*The Darkest Child* (2004)
- ✚ Dolen Perkins-Valdez—*Wench* (2010)
- ✚ Daniel Black—*Perfect Peace* (2011)
- ✚ Janet Mock—*Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love & So Much More* (2014)
- ✚ Roxanne Gay—*Hunger: A Memoir of (my) Body* (2017)

## Course Distribution

- **Discussion Leader (10%)**
  - Once throughout the semester you will be required to lead discussion for the chosen texts of the day. The way you choose to lead discussion is up to you. The point is to give the class critical points of departure for discussing that day's texts. It doesn't mean that you have to fill *every* minute. Feel free to be creative. For instance, you can bring in outside texts (historical documents, blogs, current events, films, art, music, literature, etc) or create an in-class assignment. Whatever your "lesson plan" will be for that day, please **email to me by 5pm the Tuesday before** the Thursday you present, your lesson plan that includes **6-8 discussion questions**.
  
- **Talk Back Responses** (Two at 10% each= **20%**)
  - Twice throughout the semester, you will write a response that allows you to "talk back" to the readings. You may approach the response in many ways. Perhaps you were struck by a specific comment in class and you want to respond to the comment. Maybe you want to respond directly to the text, because you were moved by a specific passage, image, or concept. Maybe you completely disagree with one of the secondary articles and you want to offer an alternative critique. Perhaps you want to relate the text and/or our class discussions with specific events/moments that are happening today. You may choose to respond in whatever style you see fit. Talk back in your voice. However, you must firmly situate your response in that day's readings. (min. 1000 words)
  - You may turn in a talk back response during any week that you choose. You must turn in the talk back response to me via email or in a paper document by the beginning of the class period of the texts we are discussing.
  
- **Abstract and Conference Presentation (10%)**
  - You will craft a **200-250 word** abstract of your conference presentation. Email me your abstract **and a two-sentence biography by the Tuesday before the presentation at 5pm**. I will then name our conference panel(s) and circulate the abstracts to the class before the panel(s) on Thursday.
  - You will deliver a **12-15-minute** presentation of your research to the class. You will need to time yourself, but it is generally around seven pages double-spaced. You will receive feedback from your fellow classmates and myself, which will ideally help you in crafting your final paper. Be sure to stay within the time frame.
    - *Notice:* I am not requiring a proposal, but I *highly* suggest you come talk to me about your project in advance.
  
- **Seminar Paper (60%)**
  - Your final seminar paper (**18-20 pages**) will be an extension of your conference paper and will be due **Tuesday, December 10<sup>th</sup> at 11pm**. Email to me in .doc format.

**Attendance and Participation**—It should go without saying that attendance and participation in a graduate seminar are imperative to your success in the program. However, I do understand that sometimes things happen. If you miss one class (due to extraordinary circumstances) there will be no penalty. If you miss two classes, I will subtract a letter grade from your final grade. Three or more absences will result in a failure of the course.

**Late Work**—Any assignments that are turned in after the due date will be penalized half a letter grade for each day the assignment is late.

**Disability accommodation**—If you seek additional accommodations, please register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, [www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/](http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/)) and feel free to be in touch with me about how I can better accommodate your needs.

### Schedule of Readings

- Week 1  
8/22 Intro to the course; assign discussion leaders  
Stacey Patton—“Who’s Afraid of Black Sexuality”  
<https://www.chronicle.com/article/Whos-Afraid-of-Black/135960>
- Week 2  
8/29 **James Baldwin—*Giovanni’s Room* (1956)**  
Mae Henderson—“James Baldwin: Expatriation, Homosexual Panic and Man’s Estate” (2000)  
Dwight McBride—“Straight Black Studies: On African American Studies, James Baldwin, and Black Queer Studies (2005)
- Discussion Leader:
- Week 3  
9/5 **Ann Allen Shockley—*Loving Her* (1974)**  
Ann Allen Shockley—“The Black Lesbian in American Literature: An Overview” (1979)  
Trimiko C. Melancon—“Towards An Aesthetic of Transgression” (2008)  
Evelyn Hammonds—“Black (W)holes and the Geometry of Black Female Sexuality” (1994)
- Discussion Leader:

- Week 4  
9/12      **Randall Kenan—*A Visitation of Spirits* (1989)**  
E. Patrick Johnson—Selections from *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South* (2008) Ch3:  
Church sissies: Gayness and the Black Church (183-204)  
Marlon Riggs—*Tongue Untied* (1989) (in class)  
Marlon Riggs—“Black Macho Revisited: Reflections of a Snap! Queen” (1991)
- Discussion Leader:
- Week 5  
9/19      **Pearl Cleage—*What Looks like Crazy on an Ordinary Day* (1997)**  
Cathy Cohen—*Boundaries of Blackness* Ch3—“Enter AIDS: Context and Confrontation  
(1999)  
Timothy Lyle—“Tryin’ to Scrub that *Death Pussy* Clean Again” (2017)
- Discussion Leader:
- Week 6  
9/26      **Delores Phillips—*The Darkest Child* (2004)**  
Kaila Philo—“Agency, Activism, and the Black Domestic Worker in Kathryn  
Stockett’s *The Help* and Delores Phillips’ *The Darkest Child*” (2017)
- Discussion Leader:
- Week 7  
10/3      **Dolen Perkins-Valdez—*Wench* (2010)**  
Ashraf Rushdy—“The Neo-slave Narrative” in *Cambridge Companion to African  
American Novel*  
Trudier Harris—“Does Northern Travel Relieve Slavery?: ‘Vacations’ in Dolen  
Perkins-Valdez’s *Wench*”
- Discussion Leader:
- Week 8  
10/10      Film screening and discussion  
*The Last Black Man in San Francisco* (2019)
- Week 9  
10/17      **Daniel Black—*Perfect Peace* (2011)**  
Susan Stryker—“(De)Subjugated Knowledges: An Introduction to Transgender  
Studies” (2006)  
Uzzie T. Cannon—“Tears, Fears, and Queers: Transgendering Black Masculinity in  
Daniel Black’s *Perfect Peace*” (2016)
- Discussion Leader:
- Week 10  
10/24      No Class—Dr. Dee out of Town

Week 11 **Janet Mock—*Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love & So Much More* (2014)**  
10/31  
Ellison et al—“We Got Issues: Toward a Black Trans\*/Studies” (2017)  
Timothy Lyle—“An Interview with Janet Mock” (2015)  
C. Riley Snorton—“A New Hope”: The Psychic Life of Passing” (2009)

Discussion Leader:

Week 12 **Roxane Gay—*Hunger: A Memoir of (my) Body* (2017)**  
11/7  
Roxane Gay—“What Fullness Is” <https://gay.medium.com/the-body-that-understands-what-fullness-is-f2e40c40cd75> (2018)  
Melissa Harris Perry—“Shame” in *Sister Citizen* (2011)

Discussion Leader:

Week 13 **Abstracts and two-sentence biography due by Tuesday 11/12 at 5pm**  
11/14 **Conference Presentations Pugh 215**

Week 14 **Abstracts and two-sentence biography due by Tuesday 11/19 at 5pm**  
11/21 **Conference Presentations Pugh 215**

Week 15 **NO CLASS—Holiday**  
11/28

**Final paper due Tuesday December 10<sup>th</sup> at 11pm**