

## **AWS 2550-80: The Black Woman Experience\* Winter Session 2014**

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“Black women are called, in the folklore that so aptly identifies one’s status in society, ‘the mule of the world,’ because we have been handed the burdens that everyone else - everyone else - refused to carry. We have also been called ‘Matriarchs,’ ‘Superwomen,’ and ‘Mean and Evil Bitches.’ Not to mention ‘Castraters’ and ‘Sapphire’s Mama.’ When we have pleaded for understanding, our character has been distorted; when we have asked for simple caring, we have been handed empty inspirational appellations, then stuck in the farthest corner. When we have asked for love, we have been given children. In short, even our plainer gifts, our labors of fidelity and love, have been knocked down our throats.” (Walker, 1984)

### **Course Description:**

This course examines historical and contemporary issues relevant to the Black woman. The purpose of this course is to introduce students to the experiences and representations of the Black woman and her historical presence in the United States from a variety of Black Feminist, Womanist and other scholarly perspectives. This course will increase students’ familiarity with Black women’s unique and challenging position in a capitalist, patriarchal and racist society. Through scholarly, anecdotal, historical and biographical readings, written and oral assignments, and class discussions students will review and analyze intellectual, cultural, political, social, and psychological issues that have shaped and defined Black women’s lives.

### **Course Objectives:**

1. To demonstrate a broad understanding of the important socio-historical events currently affecting Black women;
2. To understand the critical role that racism, sexism and classism play in the lives of Black women;
3. To articulately refute myths and misrepresentations of the Black woman and Black family by Eurocentric thinkers, authors and/or researchers;
4. To formulate alternative perspectives for Black women that are empowering and differ from mainstream perspectives.

### **Student Learning Outcomes:**

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate a broad understanding of the important socio-historical events currently affecting Black women in writing, online discussions, and exams;
2. Effectively express in online discussions and in writing an understanding the critical role that racism, sexism and classism play in the lives of Black women;
3. Articulately refute myths and misrepresentations of the Black woman and Black family by Eurocentric thinkers, authors and/or researchers in writing and in online discussions;
4. Formulate alternative perspectives for Black women that are empowering and differ from mainstream perspectives in written assignments.

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### Text & Readings:

I will be providing the readings for the semester via Blackboard along with any other pertinent course information (syllabus, guidelines for assignments, etc.). *All students enrolled in this class have been automatically enrolled in Blackboard.* As a supplement to the readings, assorted viewings will be assigned periodically. Those that can be found on YouTube will be indicated. If you are having any trouble locating a clip/video/film on YouTube, please contact me and I will post a link for it. ***Please make sure to check Blackboard and your WPUNJ email accounts regularly for any announcements, information or changes that may be made to the class schedule.***

### Course Requirements:

#### **Participation: (200 points)**

Course participation will be determined via two criteria. First, you must log on at least 4 (four) times per week during the duration of this course. Three (3) of these days should be between Monday - Friday, and one day should be on Saturday or Sunday. Second, you must participate in the course Discussion Board by providing substantive comments and critical questions of the ideas expressed by your fellow classmates, instructor and the readings. Thus, you must not only log on at least four (4) times a week, but also provide substantive comments and questions on at least two (2) occasions within the course of a week in order to gain the minimum portion of your participation grade. *Please note that at least three (3) posts within the course of 7 days is the minimum and is equivalent to passing (i.e. a D), you must do more than the minimum to receive a higher grade.* Please also understand that I am concerned with the **quality** and **relevance** of your discussion board comments. Regarding **quality**, please keep your comments simple, clear and to the point. Furthermore, your comments should be well written and grammatically clear. Regarding **relevance**, your comments should speak directly to the question or topic under review. Irrelevant or side-tangents that are not directly linked to the material at hand will only work against you for this portion of your grade, thus try to stay on task with clarity.

***\*Please keep in mind that if there is an issue that will impact your attendance and/or participation in this class significantly, it is imperative that I be notified immediately in order to prevent issues when final grades are due. It is so much easier for me to be sympathetic and helpful if we can plan before things go wrong rather than after.\****

### Assignments:

Be aware that it is only under EXTREME (i.e. documented illness, a death in the family, etc.) circumstances that late work will be accepted. ***Any work submitted after the due date will not be graded.***

### Readings:

The weekly reading assignments should be critically analyzed and understood. My expectation is that students are able to answer the following questions about the assigned readings for the week:

1. What is the main idea of the article(s)?
2. How do the article(s) relate to the larger issue/class topic? What is the relevance of this article?
3. How do the articles relate to each other?

In order to answer these questions, you should be performing a “close reading” of the assigned articles. Below are a couple of suggestions on how to perform close readings:

- When you read the articles for this course (and for any course, for that matter) you should be aware of and analyze the authors’ approach to the subject, his/her general argument(s), position(s), conclusion(s), etc.

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- Again, you should ask yourself questions such as, “What is the author’s main thesis? What are the general strengths and weaknesses of the piece? Did the author sufficiently support his/her thesis by providing sufficient research and evidence to support his/her claims? Did he/she answer my own questions on this topic? Are there any themes in the readings or between selected readings?”

**WebQuest Assignments: (50 Points each, 100 points total)**

Two (2) WebQuest assignments will be given throughout the course of this semester. WebQuest assignments are investigative web-based searches that you are required to perform. Instructions and directions for each WebQuest assignment will be given one week prior to their due dates.

**Reaction Papers: (50 points each, 100 points total)**

Students will be required to hand in two (2) short reaction papers throughout the course of the session. The 3 page typed papers will be assigned periodically and will cover various topics discussed in class as well as assigned course readings. (Paper guidelines will be distributed prior to the first paper’s due date).

**Final Paper: (200 points)**

Students will be required to complete a final paper based on the issues throughout the course of the session. For this paper, students will be asked to write a synthesis paper discussing the lived experiences of Black women in America based on the framework of intersectionality developed over the course of the semester. Papers should be a *critical* and thoughtful analysis of the course materials in which students explore the Black female experience particularly as related to race, class, gender and sexuality. In addition, students are required to reflect on their answers to the questions about what it means and has meant to be a Black woman. In doing so, they should discuss how, or if, their responses to these questions would be different after completion of this course.

**General Comments on the Course Workload:**

Given that this course is completely online, the workload may seem a bit much but, in actuality, it is not more than what you would regularly experience over the course of a regular class meeting during the course of a semester. As the above course outline and outline of requirements explains, you will be expected to complete: 2 reaction papers, 2 webquest assignments, a final paper and participate regularly during our online discussions. You will have access to your grades once assignments have been graded and the grades are posted on the Gradebook in Blackboard. This means that you can keep track of your progress throughout the duration of the semester.

**General Comments on Electronic Communication:**

Blackboard allows a variety of means to communicate. As discussed throughout this syllabus we will rely heavily upon Discussion Boards throughout this semester. When communicating with the instructor via email make sure your email subject line includes the course number (AWS2250/80) and that, within the body of the email, you identify yourself as a student in this course.

**Grading Policy:**

Participation	200	points
WebQuest Assignments	100	points
Reaction Papers	100	points
Final Paper	200	points
<b>Total</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>points</b>

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## Grading Scale:

A:	100-95	B-:	82-80	D+:	69-66
A-:	94-90	C+:	79-76	D:	65-63
B+:	89-86	C:	75-73	D-:	62-60
B:	85-83	C-:	72-70	F:	59 and below

## Policy on Academic Honesty

*Plagiarism and academic cheating are prohibited. Essential to intellectual growth is the development of independent thought and a respect for the thoughts of others. The prohibition against plagiarism and cheating is intended to foster this independence and respect.*

*Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of another person's labor, another person's ideas, another person's words, and/or another person's assistance. Normally, all work done for courses -- papers, examinations, homework exercises, laboratory reports, oral presentations -- is expected to be the individual effort of the student presenting the work. Any assistance must be reported to the instructor. If the work has entailed consulting other resources -- journals, books, or other media -- these resources must be cited in a manner appropriate to the course. It is the instructor's responsibility to indicate the appropriate manner of citation. Everything used from other sources -- suggestions for organization of ideas, ideas themselves, or actual language -- must be cited. Failure to cite borrowed material constitutes plagiarism. Undocumented use of materials from the World Wide Web is plagiarism.*

*Academic cheating is, generally, the thwarting or breaking of the general rules of academic work or the specific rules of the individual courses. It includes falsifying data; submitting, without the instructor's approval, work in one course which was done for another; helping others to plagiarize or cheat from one's own or another's work; or actually doing the work of another person. Any student suspected of academic cheating and/or plagiarism will be given a zero for that assignment and will not be allowed to make up those points in any way.*

## Schedule

### Section 1: Introduction

#### Module 1: Introductory Assignment (12/26 - 12/28/13)

- Course Introduction; Student Introductions; Review of Syllabus; Posting of Questions/Comments/Concerns.

Our first few days of class will function as an attempt to orient each of you to the online learning experience and explore your thoughts and ideas on the topics that will be covered in this course.

Your first assignment will be a short essay that answers the following questions:

- Who are you?
- Where are you from? Where were you born? Where are your parents from?
- How would you define yourself racially, ethnically and/or culturally?
- What is your gender?
- What is your major and/or minor? Or intended major/minor?
- Why have you decided to take this class?
- Why did you decide to take this course *online*?
- What do you intend to get out of this class?
- What do you think it means to be a Black woman in the modern day? What did it mean historically? How do you think this has changed, if at all?

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- Have you ever taken a course online before? If so, what was the name of the course? What were the pros and cons of that learning experience?
- How do you think the online learning differs from the in class learning experience?

In a complete essay, answer the questions above to the best of your ability. You can answer the questions in any order you desire, but please keep in mind that there should be some flow and movement of ideas in order for this assignment to manifest itself as a **complete essay**. Student answers are to be posted online for all of the other students to view. Answers should be posted on the Discussion Board in the thread titled **Student Introductions**. As the first assignment of the semester, you must post your personal introduction by December 28, 2013 at 12 noon. Student introductions posted after this date will be considered late (please refer to my policy on late assignments above). Between December 28 and December 31, 2013, I will read each student introduction and provide my own answers to the questions.

In addition to your personal introductions, like in any class, you are required to review and discuss the course syllabus. Therefore, please review the following document (this syllabus) and place any questions, comments or concerns on the Discussion Board in the thread entitled **Questions, Comments and Concerns Regarding Course Syllabus**. This thread can also be found in the Discussion Board Section of Blackboard.

## **Section 2: Gender and Sexism**

### **Module 2 (12/27 - 12/30/13):**

- What is gender?
- Intersectionality
- Gender Socialization
- Sexual/Gender Scripts
- Sexism in the Black Community
- The lives of Black women

**Readings:** Beale, "Double Jeopardy: To be Black and Female" (Bb)  
 Lindsey, "The Black Woman as a Woman" (Bb)  
 Hill, "Teaching and Doing Gender in African American Families" (Bb)

### **WebQuest Assignment #1 due (12/31/13)**

## **Section 2: Women in Africa and the Americas**

### **Module 3 (12/31/13 - 1/3/14):**

- The role of women in community and government
- Forms of female expression
- The role of Black women in communities of enslaved Africans
- The effects of enslavement on the Black woman and family
- Female resistance to enslavement
- Moving on from enslavement

**Readings:** Rashidi, "African Goddesses: Mothers of Civilization" (Bb)  
 Davis, "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves" (Bb)  
 Hine & Wittenstein, "Female Slave Resistance: The Economics of Sex" (Bb)

### **Writing Assignment #1 due (1/4/14)**

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## **Section 4: Black Women and American Society**

### **Module 4 (1/4 - 1/7/14):**

- Media images
- Portrayal of Black women in the media
- Black female beauty and sexuality
- Black women and body image

**Readings:** Collins, "Get Your Freak On: Sex, Babies and Images of Black Femininity" (Bb)  
Durkin, "Relationship between Female's Body Image and the Mass Media" (Bb)

**WebQuest Assignment #2 due (1/8/14)**

## **Section 5: Black Women, Family and Relationships**

### **Module 5 (1/8 - 1/11/14): Writing Assignment #2 due**

- Understanding the Black family and its members
- Role definition within the Black family
- Dominant views on Black mothers and motherhood
- Black male/female relations

**Readings:** Littlejohn-Blake & Darling, "Understanding the Strengths of African American Families" (Bb)  
Staples, "The Myth of the Black Matriarchy" (Bb)  
Patton, "Black People and the Victorian Ethos" (Bb)  
Giddings, "Strong Women and Strutting Men: The Moynihan Report" (Bb)

**Writing Assignment #2 due (1/12/14)**

## **Section 6: Black Women and Mental, Emotional and Physical Health**

### **Module 6 (1/12 - 1/14/14):**

- Sexual violence
- Physical Violence
- HIV/AIDS epidemic
- Course wrap-up

**Readings:** Lincoln, "To Whom Will She Cry Rape?" (Bb)  
Cleage, "Mad at Miles" (Bb)  
Foreman, "Intimate Risk: Sexual Risk Behavior among African American College Women" (Bb)

**Final Paper due (1/14/14)**

**LAST DAY TO WITHDRAW FROM A COURSE: FRIDAY, DECEMBER 27**

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