

**Performing Black Feminisms**  
**T D 387D 24195**  
**Fall 2003**

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*“Now, women forget all those things they don’t want to remember, and remember everything they don’t want to forget. The dream is the truth. Then they act and do things accordingly.”*  
--Zora Neale Hurston, *THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD*

*“What is so riveting to me is that the term black feminist criticism continues to be undefinable—not fixed. For many that might seem catastrophic: for me it is an indication that so much still needs to be done—for example, reading the works of the writers, in order to understand their ramifications.”*  
--Barbara Christian, “What Are We Doing Anyway?”

This course examines the confluence of art and feminism through an investigation of Black Feminist theory and the cultural production of Black women. Students will develop their own understanding of a Black Feminist Aesthetic and apply that aesthetic to the development of performance pieces. The performances will be based on Chamber Theatre adaptations of prose fiction. As a class we will read novels and scholarly essays, view videos, critique performances and share our sense of feminism in our everyday lives. The novels will allow us to discuss childhood, sexuality, spirituality, womanhood and relations with white folk. The essays will allow us to discuss the nature of a Black Feminist Aesthetic and the politics of feminism. While the readings are important tools for the course, we will maintain a body-centered knowledge of feminism that requires spending much of class time with exercises, performances and improvisations.

**Texts:** BLACK FEMINIST CULTURAL CRITICISM, Jacqueline Bobo

THE FEMINIST READER, Joy James and T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting

**Course Packet:** Available at Longhorn Copies, 2520 Guadalupe, 476-4498.

**Assignments:**

Performance I

You will work with a group to create a Chamber Theatre adaptation of an excerpt of either MAUD MARTHA or SO LONG A LETTER. In addition to Chamber Theatre, your company will employ elements of Black Feminism that suit your adaptation. The company may also use signifying and intertextuality to build the adaptation. The performance will be 8-10 minutes and must use all company members. One member may serve as director. Another member may create the adaptation, or the company may collaborate on the adaptation. You will receive a combined group and individual grade. (20 pts.)

## Performance II

Your company will create a Chamber Theatre adaptation of an excerpt of either BREATH, EYES, MEMORY or THE BLUEST EYE. You will follow the same guidelines as for Performance I. (20pts.)

## Final Performance

Your company will revisit one of its previous performances. You will modify the performance to reflect your deepening understanding of a Black Feminist Aesthetic, and to respond to the critique when the performance was previously presented. The company may shift roles or any other elements of the performance.

OR

You will create a solo performance that combines two or more of the novels/essays read this semester. (30 pts.)

## Essay

You will create an essay that theorizes a Black Feminist Aesthetic. The essay should employ the performative writing style of many of the essays we will read in class. You might answer the question, Is there a Black Feminist Aesthetic? You might identify features of a Black Feminist Aesthetic. You might take one or more novels, or one or more essays and discuss specifically how it relates to a Black Feminist Aesthetic. Feel free to incorporate theory from other areas with which you might be more familiar such as anthropology, English, communications, theatre, or radio, television and film. Consider the ways in which many of the writers we will read incorporate their everyday experiences into their theorizing; this may be a strategy you would like to use. While this essay may use personal reflection, it should also respond to the theoretical ideas explored in the course. The essay is to be 8-10 pages in length. (20 pts.)

## Commentary

You will be asked to offer brief commentary on one of the readings from the course. You might be asked to discuss the imagery, the nature of childhood, or narrative structure in one of the novels; or critique one of the essays; or lead a discussion of one of the films. This commentary is designed to help the class think through their upcoming performances and essay. You may incorporate an exercise into your commentary as a way of illustrating the concept you are examining. (10 pts.)

## Course Schedule:

### 4 Sep

Introduction to the Course

11

MAUD MARTHA; "Hollering Place" (H); "unrecovered losses" (H); "Toward a Black Feminist Critique" (B); "New Directions in Black Feminism" (B); "But What Do We Think We Are Doing?" (B); "Black Bodies, White Bodies" (P)

18

THE BLUEST EYE; "Combahee River Collective" (W); "Social Construction of. . ."

(W); "Hearts of Darkness" (W); "Introduction" by Sydne Mahone (P)

**25**

Performance as a Site of . . ." (P); "Thought on My Career" (P); "The Cult of True Womanhood"  
(P); "Toward a Black Feminist Cultural Critique" (P)

**2 Oct**

"Preaching the Blues" (P); "Up in Harlem. . ." (P)

**9**

Rehearsal

**16**

**Performance I**

**23**

BREATH, EYES, MEMORY; Readings TBA

**30**

EFURU; Readings TBA

**6 Nov**

Readings TBA

**13**

Rehearsal

**20**

**Performance II**

**27**

Theorizing a Black Feminist Aesthetic---Exercises

**4 Dec**

**Essay Due**

**17**

**Final Performance; Monday; 9-12**