ENG 4300-001_4390-099: Black Women Writers on Love, Loss, and Obsession

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Dr. Jamila D. Smith
ENG 4300/4390-3 credits
“Sister, you’ve been on my mind” Black women writers on Love, Loss, and Obsession
Fall 2014
Office: Coleman Hall 3775
Office Hours: MWF 11:00am-12:00pm
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**Please don’t contact me via D2L, as I often don’t receive those emails.**

Course Description:
This course centers the symbolic and thematic exploration of love, loss, and obsession through the writings of and about Black women. As a multi-genred course, special emphasis will be placed on the ways in which race, gender, sexuality, class, and family dynamics act as part and parcel to the lives and literacies of Black women. This is a highly interactive course, so come prepared to engage in close reading, riveting discussion, and critical analysis.

Learning Goals:
- Develop a critical understanding and framework of intersectionality and theme in the works of Black women writers through love, loss, and obsession
- Discuss the historical trajectory of the Black woman in relation to these intersections
- Read, interpret, and generate questions and observations over required and self-selected texts
- Write/rewrite essays and creative works that demonstrate an understanding of theory, literary analysis, and popular culture
- Explore and challenge existing definitions/stereotypes of women and Black womanhood

Required Texts:
*Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie
*The Prisoner’s Wife*, Bandele
*Women, Race & Class*, Davis
*Sula*, Morrison

*for colored girls who have considered suicide when the rainbow is enuf*, Shange
*Blood Dazzler*, Smith

*Films and handouts are also required and will be shown and distributed throughout the semester.*

Special Needs:
If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible.

Cell Phones:
Please put your cell phone on silent or vibrate during class time.
Plagiarism:
Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism—“The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one's original work” (Random House Dictionary of the English Language)—has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignments of a grade of F for the assigned essay and a grade of F for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office. Respect for the work of others should encompass all formats, including print, electronic, and oral sources.

The Student Success Center:
Students who are having difficulty achieving their academic goals are encouraged to contact the Student Success Center (www.eiu.edu/~success) for assistance with time management, test taking, note taking, avoiding procrastination, setting goals, and other skills to support academic achievement. The Student Success Center provides individualized consultations. To make an appointment, call 217-581-6696, or go to 9th Street Hall, Room 1302.

The Writing Center:
I encourage you to use EIU’s Writing Center located at 3110 Coleman Hall. This free service provides one-to-one conferences with writing center consultants who can help you with brainstorming, organizing, developing support, and documenting your papers.

The writing center is open to help any student from any major at any stage of his or her writing process, and its system of one-to-one conferences demonstrates value and respect for individual writers, all of whom can benefit from feedback about their works in progress.

To schedule an appointment and for hours of operation, drop by the center (3110 Coleman Hall) or call 581-5929.

Course Guidelines and Expectations:
1. As this is an interactive, writing intensive course, participation is required. You help create this atmosphere by making an effort to answer and ask questions during class discussion and group work, and by responding thoughtfully to other people’s comments and responses. Participation is worth 30 points of your grade and includes self-directed discussion, questions posed during class, ability to answer questions indicative of close textual reading, and being alert during class sessions (i.e., no cell phone activity, sleeping, disruptive conversations, or use of laptops/lpads/tablets, etc for anything other than work for my class). Points will be deducted for behaviors indicative of anything other than full participation. This is a collaborative learning experience, so constructive criticism and open discussion is encouraged. Attendance is obviously a prerequisite for participation, so if you have more than three (3) un-excused absences, you will lose 5 points per class session you miss.
2. Absences will only be excused when the following conditions are met: a) Circumstances that can be documented on paper (illness, police accident report, university events, etc) b) I receive notification PRIOR to the class that you will be unable to attend. If there is an assignment due the day you will be absent, please email it to me PRIOR to the start of class. In the same manner, I expect each student to be on time to class. If you happen to be tardy, please do not disrupt the class. If you are over 10 minutes late to class with no prior notification, you will be marked absent.

3. You are expected to have ALL assignments prepared to turn in on the due date. All assignments should be typed, double-spaced, Times New Roman 12 pt. font. Please proofread and edit all papers. Do not put extra space between paragraphs to “add” length to your writing, as I will deduct points. Student information (name, class title, assignment) is single-spaced, in the top left-hand corner of your paper. Additionally, you are expected to bring the proper supplies with you to class each session, including the text we’re reading. NO LATE ASSIGNMENTS ACCEPTED OR MAKE-UP WORK PROVIDED unless you are in compliance with the extreme circumstances section above.

Caveat:
In the event that class participation begins to fade, I reserve the right to distribute a pop quiz over the readings and/or class lectures. The quiz will be worth 10 points and will be taken from the final project.

Assignments:
*Please be prepared for possible changes.
**Please be aware that homework (readings and writing) is distributed at my discretion and its completion is a requirement for the next class session.

1. Reading Reflections (70 points total): As I am interested in your process of unpacking intersectional connections of love, loss, and obsession through the readings, films, and discussion by and about Black women, you will produce three (3) typed 1-page reading reflections each week. You may write throughout the process of our weekly readings, conversations, films, etc. For example, during week 2, we will begin an exploration of the historical trajectory of the Black woman. I’d like you to discuss initial connections to the theme of this course through the readings, questions/confusions that arise, thoughts on the depictions of Black women, thoughts on our class discussions, connections to the film and chapter, etc. You don’t have to follow this format of reflection each week, but your reflections should always be rooted in critical thinking about the novels/films/handouts. Each set of reflections is worth 5 points. These reflections will be handed to me on Fridays. *You do not have to produce reflections for Week One.

2. Essays (50 points total): As we journey together through the texts, I will provide you with a writing prompt based on the questions, comments, and critiques derived from our discussions. This prompt will be the foundation of your 5-7 page essays. Please note that
each of the two (2) essays must be grounded in theory and supported by textual evidence. I highly encourage writing from personal narrative in order to form and further your position(s).

Essay One Due: October 13th 25 points
Essay Two Due: November 10th 25 points

3. Final Projects: I believe that students, particularly those at the final stages of their undergraduate experience, should be able to create a proposal for a final project and execute it in such a manner that demonstrates a robust grasp of subject matter, extensive research, and creativity. This is your opportunity to combine all that you’ve learned this semester with what you still seek. You will design and implement a final project that speaks to your current and/or future research interests surrounding the theme of this course. Additional discussion of this assignment will occur throughout the semester. DUE December 12th

*Tentative Schedule of Readings:

Week One: Introductions/“The Color Purple”
- Watch and discuss film
- Begin exploring course theme
- Ch.1 “The Legacy of Slavery: Standards for a New Womanhood” (Davis)

Week Two: Historical framework of Black women/intersectionality
- (M 9/1) NO SCHOOL-LABOR DAY
- Discuss Davis chapter/stereotypes of Black women
- Reflect on film

Week Three: Continued discussion of intersectionality
- Distribute and discuss Lorde/Crenshaw/Nash articles
- Finish part one of historical frameworks
- Begin Purple Hibiscus pp. 3-16

Week Four: Gender roles/Voice as subject/Religion/Coming-of-age
- Discussion/Continue reading pp.19-109
- Group discussion of reading/thematic connections
- Read and discuss pp. 110-253

Week Five: Final reading and discussion of Purple Hibiscus
- Complete novel pp. 257-307
- Final thoughts and reflection of novel
- (F-9/26) NO CLASS-I will be at a conference

Week Six: Gender roles/sisterhood/portraiture
- Read for colored girls independently and as a class
- Read Chapters 8 and 9 (Davis)
Week Seven: Continued from Week Six
- Read Chapter 12 (Davis)
- Watch original “For Colored Girls”
- Class discussions
- Begin exploration of final project

Week Eight: Black women and the Black community
- (M-10/13) Essay One DUE/ Begin Sula read pp. 3-6 aloud in class
- Complete pp. 7-48
- (F-10/17) NO SCHOOL-FALL BREAK

Week Nine: Sula, cont.
- Discuss readings
- Complete and discuss pp. 49-85
- Complete Part Two

Week Ten: Love, desire, betrayal, devotion
- Final discussion of Sula
- Begin The Prisoner’s Wife, pp. 13-98

Week Eleven: The Prisoner’s Wife, cont.
- Finish memoir
- Final discussions

Week Twelve: Final project progression
- (M-11/10) Essay Two DUE
- (W-11/12) Discussion of final projects
- (F-11/14) NO CLASS-I will be at a conference

Week Thirteen: Continued discussion of final projects/introduction to Blood Dazzler
- (M-11/17) NO CLASS-I will be at a conference
- Recap of readings
- Discussion of final projects
- Watch clips of Hurricane Katrina coverage as introduction to Blood Dazzler

Week Fourteen: NO SCHOOL-THANKSGIVING BREAK

Week Fifteen: Final exploration of course theme
- Read and discuss Blood Dazzler
- Read excerpts in class and make connections to news portrayals of Hurricane Katrina
- Discuss final questions
- Begin individual conferences
Week Sixteen: Last week of classes

• Complete individual conferences with Dr. Smith
• (F-12/12) FINAL PROJECTS DUE

Evaluation:
Participation
Reading Reflections
Essays
Final Project
Total

30 points
70 points (total)
50 points (total)
50 points

200 points

Grading:
190-200=A 189-180=B 179-170=C 169-160=D 160 or below=F

**Dr. Smith’s Advice**
If at any point throughout the semester you are confused or unclear about the expectations of the course, course material, a grade you received, or any other matters, I strongly encourage you to come talk with me during office hours. It is my goal that all students succeed in this course, but I can only help if I’m aware of a problem.