

## **HST 418 African American Women's History**

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TTh 9:30a-10:45a | Bishop 107

In this course (crosslisted with AAS 362 and GST 362), we will explore aspects of African American women's lives from slavery to the present. The course will acquaint you with many of the critical questions and concepts African women activists and scholars have developed as tools for thinking about the social construction of gender and race and how these intersect with other relations of power. Consequently, we will explore the very different kinds of experiences black women have had over time and across lines of class, region, and sexual orientation. We explore how historians, musicians, novelists, filmmakers, bloggers, and others interpret not only the past but also contemporary issues. Throughout, we consider how other groups have sought to represent and control black women's lives and bodies, and how black women themselves have worked to represent themselves. The important goals of this class, then, include encouraging you to think and read like a historian (i.e., contextualize, interrogate, and evaluate sources, evidence, and perspectives) and to apply those insights to the world around you.

### **Course Format**

The course combines lecture, discussion, and small-group activities, but you—the student—drive the course. Because of the central role discussion plays, it is essential that you complete the required readings, albums, and films by the dates indicated on the syllabus. You will complete one ten-page writing project and receive feedback from your instructor to help you improve your writing. You will have the opportunity to revise writing assignments, and you may be asked to read and discuss your peers' work. Finally, as a class, we will develop and engage in a social justice/advocacy project, working toward a greater understanding of “the personal is political.”

### **Learning Outcomes**

- Students will demonstrate the ability to conduct interdisciplinary and intersectional analysis.
- Students will examine and critique ideological assumptions underlying social institutions and systems of representation, including but not limited to assumptions regarding gender, race, class, nationality, ability, age, and sexual orientation.
- Students will comprehend the impact of gender and race on individual and collective historical and contemporary agency, and how black women's ability to express agency has shaped and been shaped by U.S. contexts.

### **Method of Evaluation**

Exams	40 points (4 at 10 points each)
Paper	20 points
Film and Music Analyses	20 points (4 3-page analyses at 5 points each)
Social Justice Project	10 points
Class Participation	10 points

### **Course Organization**

The course is organized thematically rather than chronologically. We will tackle an important theme/issue in four separate but interrelated modules, looking at each module historically (i.e., from slavery to the contemporary period). The modules are:

1. “Everything Is Everything”: Race, Gender, and Power/Class  
Introduces key black feminist epistemologies, theories, and methods related to specific cultural, intellectual, and historical U.S. contexts.
2. “I Used to Love Him”: Public and Private Sexual Violence  
Explores violence against women operating on multiple levels (i.e., individual, structural, cultural, economic, and political), including rape, domestic abuse, lynching, incarceration, reproductive rights, and health disparities. Highlights women’s oppression, resistance, and empowerment. Interrogates the ways forms of violence carry over different historical periods, cultural forms, and social spaces.
3. “Final Hour”: The Politics of Labor and Leisure  
Focuses on work, employment, and entrepreneurship, including working, middle, and professional “classes” of work as well as work in the entertainment industry and in informal, extralegal, and illegal economies.
4. “Doo Wop (That Thing)”: Popular Culture Images and Stereotypes  
Critically analyzes stereotypes and images of black womanhood and the ideologies surrounding these images to explore the social, political and policy implications.

### **Books, Albums, and Films**

This is a tentative list of books and visual resources with estimated prices (Note: this list is subject to change and does not include shorter works, like blogs, Twitter hashtags, book chapters, and video clips):

Patricia Hill Collins, *From Black Power to Hip Hop: Racism, Nationalism, and Feminism* [\$26.95 new, used under \$10]

Harriet A. Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself...*, edited and with an introduction by Jean Fagan Yellin [\$21.50 new, used under \$5]

Eric McDuffie, *Sojourning for Freedom: Black Women, American Communism, and the Making of Black Left Feminism* [\$26.95 new, used under \$25]

Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* [\$14.95 new, used under \$5]

Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty* [\$13.50 new, used under \$10]

E. Frances White, *Dark Continent of Our Bodies: Black Feminism and Politics of Respectability* [\$26.95 new, used under \$15]

Rhonda Y. Williams, *Politics of Public Housing: Black Women’s Struggles against Urban Inequality* [\$28.95 new, used under \$10]

*Optional (not required but suggested):* Darlene Clark Hine and Kathleen Thompson, *A Shining Thread of Hope: The History of Black Women in America* [used under \$10]

*Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* (2017)

Beyoncé, *Lemonade* (2016)

*Confirmation* (2016)

*Bessie* (2015)

*Twelve Years a Slave* (2013)  
*For Colored Girls* (2010)  
*Mississippi Damned* (2009)  
*Set It Off* (1996)  
Queen Latifah, *All Hail the Queen* (1989)  
*Color Purple* (1985)  
*Claudine* (1974)  
*Cleopatra Jones* (1973)  
Aretha Franklin, *Amazing Grace* (1972)  
*Imitation of Life* (1934)