

Black Radical Women
AFR 269A
Winter 2021
T/R 2:30 PM – 4:05 PM
All class will be held virtually via Zoom

Instructor: Professor Nneka D. Dennie

Email: ndennie@wlu.edu

Virtual Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 1:00 PM – 2:00 PM and by appointment

Zoom Link to Attend Class:

<https://wlu.zoom.us/j/93038657930?pwd=Z25CR0tsQ1NaeG5EaUMwakY3NlBRdz09>

Zoom Link for Virtual Office Hours: <https://wlu.zoom.us/j/9184661994>

Course Description

African-diasporic women have consistently imagined new futures in their pursuits of freedom and justice. In so doing, they have resisted patriarchy, racial violence, and state-sanctioned oppression. This course will offer an introduction to the theories and activism that have characterized Black women's radicalism from the nineteenth century to the present. By examining sources including writings by Frances Harper; articles by Claudia Jones; songs by Miriam Makeba; contemporary, digital activist campaigns; and more, students will evaluate how Black women have critiqued racism, sexism, and class exploitation. The course will also investigate how women navigated racial, gender, and class dynamics within activist organizations. Key topics for consideration include abolition, suffrage, Garveyism, Négritude, the anti-apartheid movement, Black Power, and #BlackLivesMatter. Ultimately, students will analyze Black women's roles in movements for Black liberation, feminism, and Black internationalism.

Learning Objectives

- Develop familiarity with key topics and debates within the Black radical tradition
- Identify the historical processes that have shaped Black women's activism and theorizing
- Describe the different forms that Black women's radicalism has taken throughout the African diaspora from the nineteenth century to the present
- Compare and contrast the continuities and points of departure between Black women's radicalism across time and space
- Synthesize primary and secondary sources about Black women's theories and activism

Course Format

In any other semester, this course may be structured a bit differently. Yet, in light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, social unrest, and recent white supremacist assaults on American democracy, this course offers a unique opportunity to contextualize the contemporary moment. That being said, this iteration of Black Radical Women will focus primarily on three key themes:

Black women's critiques of American democracy and other political systems; the criminalization of Black people in general and Black activists in particular; and the persistence of, as well as overlap between, state violence and mob violence. We will begin by examining the foundations of Black women's radicalism, then move thematically (rather than chronologically) to study other notable topics.

This course will rely on both lectures and discussion. You can expect to read a combination of primary sources such as pamphlets, letters, or speeches written in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries alongside secondary sources that provide necessary historical context. We will also use online interviews and videos to study contemporary Black women's radicalism.

Required Texts

You are not required to purchase any books for this class. All readings will be available as e-books on the library website, through Canvas, or on reserve at the library. Films will occasionally be required. While some will be available on YouTube, you may occasionally need to watch it through a paid service (i.e. Netflix or rent it on Amazon Prime for \$3.99). If it costs more than \$5, the library can purchase it for you. Films are marked with an asterisk (*) on the reading schedule.

Academic Misconduct

All students are expected to abide by the Honor System. Instances of academic misconduct may result in failing the assignment. Academic misconduct includes but is not limited to: aiding and abetting academic misconduct; cheating; fabrication; plagiarism; and violating ethical or professional standards. For further information, see <https://my.wlu.edu/executive-committee/the-honor-system/plagiarism/plagiarism-pamphlet>.

Disability Resources

I am committed to ensuring equitable access to course content for all students. Reasonable accommodations are available for students with disabilities. Contact Lauren Kozak, Title IX Coordinator and Director of Disability Resources, at kozakl@wlu.edu or 540-458-4055 to confidentially discuss your individual needs and the accommodation process. More information can be found at <https://www.wlu.edu/disability-accommodations/undergraduate-accommodations>.

If you have already been approved for accommodations, please meet with me within the first two weeks of the term so we can develop an implementation plan together. It is important to meet as early in the term as possible; this will ensure that your accommodations are implemented early on. If you have accommodations for test-taking, please remember that arrangements must be made at least a week before the date of the test or exam.

Attendance Policy

Class attendance is mandatory. Material that we cover in class, including lectures, small-group discussions, and in-class assignments will be essential to developing a comprehensive

understanding of African American intellectual history. However, due to the unpredictability of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, we will need to be flexible. In the event that you will miss class, please email me in advance so that I can plan accordingly. I encourage you to prioritize your health and do not expect you to attend class if you are ill, whether it is from the coronavirus, a chronic illness, or simply the common cold. I do not require a doctor's note and will take you at your word if you are sick. In turn, I trust that you will attend our virtual classes if you are well enough to do so. Tardiness and repeated absences for reasons other than illness or emergencies will affect your daily class participation grade. A student who is absent from more than one-fourth of the course meetings (six classes) may receive a zero for class participation.

Instructor Communication

I look forward to working with you throughout the semester to ensure that you have a fulfilling learning experience. I will hold drop-in virtual office hours twice a week and you are more than welcome to stop by. I encourage students to speak to me during office hours about any questions or concerns regarding the course. You can make an appointment for office hours at <https://calendly.com/nnekadennie>.

Please consult the syllabus, Canvas, and your classmates prior to sending emails about class procedures and requirements. If we have not resolved your issue after exchanging three emails, meet with me during office hours. I will respond to emails within three business days. This includes emails sent after 5 PM on weeknights or any time on weekends. I will not answer last minute questions via email the night before an assignment is due.

Evaluation of Students

- Class Participation (15%)
- Discussion Board Posts (20%)
- Position Papers (30%)
- Current Events Essay (15%)
- Final Project (20%)

Class Participation (15%)

All students are expected to contribute to discussion consistently. In order to do so, you **must** come to class having completed the assigned readings. Students will receive a participation grade for each class. A rubric is available on the handout titled "Class Participation Guidelines" on Canvas. Given our virtual format, participation can take various forms, like speaking on Zoom, commenting using the chat function, or participating in Zoom polls. Engaged participation might entail asking thoughtful questions, responding to your classmates, or orienting us towards particular points for further inquiry.

Discussion Board Posts (20%)

Throughout the semester, write five discussion board posts about the assigned readings and five responses to classmates. You may choose which days you would like to write a post or a

response, but need to make five of your ten total posts by **February 25**. Each post should be approximately 200-250 words long and each response should be approximately 100-150 words. Discussion board posts are due by **11:59 PM the night before we are scheduled to discuss the readings as a class**. Responses are due by **2 PM on the day of class**. For example, if you are writing a post about Tuesday's readings, you must turn it in by 11:59 PM on Monday night and responses must be submitted by 2 PM on Tuesday. I will monitor the discussion board, but will not participate. Late discussion board posts/responses will not be accepted. Please refer to the Discussion Board Guidelines document on Canvas for further information.

Position Papers (30%)

Two position papers of 2-3 pages each will be due during the term. **These papers are due by 2 PM on the day we are discussing the reading you selected.** You may submit the position papers at any time, however, please refrain from submitting the second paper until after you have received feedback on the first. Your position paper should take a stance on a single course reading. Identify the author's goals, offer analyses of the ideas presented, assess the strengths and/or weaknesses of the authors' arguments, and ask questions about the course texts. These responses should not summarize the readings. Avoid speaking from anecdotal evidence and personal experience. Instead, consider whether you agree or disagree with the author and explain your decision. Your grade will not be based on which stance you take; it will be based on your ability to explain your position with clarity and substantiate it with evidence. **Your paper should use at least three sources to support your argument.** They do not need to be sources from this class and you are encouraged to consult outside resources. Please consult the "Paper Submission Checklist" handout on Canvas before submitting your papers.

Current Events Essay (15%)

Write a 2-3 page critique of a contemporary political issue of your choosing in the style of one of the Black radical women on our syllabus. The topic you write about should be related to our class. As you write your essay, ask yourself: how would this historical figure respond to a particular current event if they witnessed it today? For example, a paper might analyze police brutality in the style of Assata Shakur, or the January 6, 2021 attempted coup in the style of Ida B. Wells. This assignment is due on **March 23** by 11:59 PM.

Final Project (20%)

In groups of 2 or 3, create a 30-45 minute long playlist that represents themes we've examined in this course. Select songs that you think reflect Black women's radicalism or address their political concerns in some way. Each member of the group should individually write their own 3-4 page analysis of the playlist explaining each song choice. The songs on your playlist do not necessarily need to be by Black women, nor from genres of music that have predominately Black artists. I invite you to draw both explicit and implicit connections to course material through your song choice. For example, hypothetically speaking, your playlist could include a song by a rock band that criticized the Vietnam War if you explain how certain Black women radicals critiqued American imperialism. One could then, hypothetically, make the argument that Black radical women's political concerns bridged racial and gender lines.

Grading Scale

A	93-100	B-	80-82	D+	67-69
A-	90-92	C+	77-79	D	60-66
B+	87-89	C	73-76	F	0-59
B	83-86	C-	70-72		

Late Policy and Extensions

Late submissions will be penalized by 1/3 of a letter grade per day (i.e. A- becomes B+ after one day; A- becomes B after two days). A maximum of one extension will be available during the term. If requesting an extension, please do so at least 48 hours in advance of the deadline.

I reserve the right to edit this syllabus. In the event of any changes, I will notify you in a timely manner.

READING SCHEDULE

Week 1: Foundations of Black Women's Radicalism

January 21

- ABWH TV, [Black Women's Resistance and History](#) (Youtube)*
- Ashley Farmer, ["Tracking Activists: The FBI's Surveillance of Black Women Activists Then and Now"](#)

Week 2: Foundations of Black Women's Radicalism (cont.)

January 26

- Martha Jones, *All Bound Up Together: The Woman Question in African American Public Culture, 1830-1900*, Introduction, pg. 1-23
- Mary Ann Shadd Cary, "Meeting at Philadelphia"
- Shadd Cary, "Our Free Colored Emigrants"
- Shadd Cary, "The Emigration Convention"

January 28

- Anna Julia Cooper, "Womanhood: A Vital Element in the Regeneration and Progress of a Race"
- Anna Julia Cooper, "The Status of Woman in America"

Week 3: Anti-Black Violence

February 2

- Ida B. Wells, "Lynch Law in All its Phases"
- Wells, "Lynch Law in Georgia"

February 4

- Mary Church Terrell, "Lynching from the Negro's Point of View"
- Listen to the following versions of "Strange Fruit" (YouTube)*
 - a. Billie Holiday
 - b. Nina Simone
 - c. Andra Day
 - d. Bettye LaVette
- Listen to Mississippi Goddam by Nina Simone (YouTube)*

Week 4: Anti-Black Violence

February 9

- Danielle L. McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance—A New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power*, Prologue and Chapter 1, "They'd Kill Me if I Told," pg. xv-xx, pg. 1-18
Rosa Parks

February 11 – WELLNESS DAY; NO CLASS

Week 5: Anti-Black Violence

February 16

- McGuire, Chapter 1, pg. 18-39

February 18

- ABWH TV, [Black Women, History, and State Violence](#)
- Andrea J. Ritchie, *Invisible No More: Police Violence against Black Women and Women of Color*, Chapter 6, “Policing Gender Lines,” pg. 127-143

Week 6: Political Consciousness and Activism

February 23

- Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, *African American Women in the Struggle for the Vote, 1850-1920*, Chapter 2: “African American Women in the First Generation of Woman Suffragists: 1850-1869,” pg. 13-35
- Sojourner Truth, “Aint I a Woman?” Speech, 1851 and 1863 versions*
- Frances Harper, “We Are All Bound up Together,” 1866*

February 25

- Claudia Jones, *Claudia Jones: Beyond Containment*, “Lift Every Voice – For Victory,” pg. 51-59
- Jones, “On the Right to Self-Determination for the Negro People in the Black Belt,” pg. 60-70

Week 7: Political Consciousness and Activism

March 2 – WINTER TERM BREAK; NO CLASS

March 4

- McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street*, Chapter 6, “A Black Woman’s Body was Never Hers Alone,” pg. 156-173
- [Fannie Lou Hamer 1964 DNC Speech](#), (YouTube)*
- [Sweet Honey in the Rock, Ella’s Song](#) (YouTube)*

Week 8: Political Consciousness and Activism

March 9

- [Angela Davis on Black Lives Matter Protests, Joe Biden vs. Donald Trump, and Communism](#), (YouTube)*
- Beyonce, [“Freedom” Music Video](#) (YouTube)*

March 11 – WELLNESS DAY; NO CLASS

Week 9: Criminalization

March 16

- Assata Shakur, “To My People”
- Shakur, *Assata: An Autobiography*, Chapter 1 and Chapter 3, pg. 1-17, 45-52

March 18

- [Assata Shakur, Open Letter to Pope John Paul II](#)
- FBI, [Most Wanted Terrorist, Joanne Deborah Chesimard](#)
- Bim Adewunmi, [Assata Shakur: from Civil Rights Activist to FBI’s Most Wanted](#)

Week 10: Criminalization

March 23

- Patrisse Khan-Cullors and Asha Bandele, *When They Call You A Terrorist: A Black Lives Matter Memoir*, Chapters 11-13, pg. 166-210

March 25

- Patrisse Khan-Cullors and Asha Bandele, *When They Call You A Terrorist: A Black Lives Matter Memoir*, Chapter 14-16, pg. 211-254

Week 11: Criminalization

March 30

- Angela Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, Chapter 1: “Introduction—Prison Reform or Prison Abolition?”, Chapter 4: “How Gender Structures the Prison System,” pg. 9-21, 60-83

April 1

- [Ruth Gilmore Wilson on COVID-19, Decarceration, and Abolition](#) (YouTube)*

Week 12: Wrap Up

April 6

- Charlene Carruthers, *Unapologetic: A Black, Queer, and Feminist Mandate for Radical Movements*, Chapter 2: “Reviving the Black Radical Imagination,” pg. 31-48

April 8

- Carruthers, *Unapologetic*, Chapter 3: “The Case for Reimagining the Black Radical Tradition,” pg. 49-63

APRIL 14 – FINAL PROJECT DUE