ENG 498/598 Contemporary African American Women’s Novels
CRN 26092/26093, 4 credits
Winter 2011, MWF 10-10:50, 302 Gerlinger
Professor Thorsson
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Office Hours: MW 11-1 and by appointment, 521 PLC

Course Description: In this course, we will study contemporary novels by African American women. The 1970 anthology *The Black Woman*, edited by Toni Cade Bambara, will serve as a jumping-off point for our study of how a number of contemporary novelists imagine the category of “Black Woman” in the decades following the Civil Rights Movement. Among the questions we’ll consider: How do we interpret the increased visibility of African American women’s writing in the last three decades of the twentieth century? How do these texts engage with Black Power, Black Arts, Feminism and other political movements? How do these novels envision home, community, and nation? What ideas of the South, the African Diaspora, and the Caribbean are at work in these texts?

Required Readings: The texts on our schedule below are available at the UO bookstore and on reserve in Knight Library. The materials listed at the end of this syllabus are recommended, but not required.

Course Requirements and Policies:
Vigorous participation and regular attendance are mandatory. Bring the assigned readings to class and be prepared to discuss them. Missing class more than twice in the term will result in reduction of your final grade by 1/3 of a letter grade for each absence beyond the two permitted.

Assignments must be submitted in hard copy at the beginning of class on the due dates listed below and formatted according to current MLA guidelines (1 inch margins, single-side print, stapled, correct citation and quotation including works cited). Consult the *MLA Handbook* or *Bedford Handbook* if you are uncertain of correct MLA format. Late assignments will be marked down by 1/3 of a letter grade (B becomes a B-) for each day they are late. No papers will be accepted more than one week after the due date.

Each student will give a brief presentation (5-10 minutes) offering background information, context, or a secondary source to deepen our understanding of the reading for that day. Presentations should end with one question for discussion. You may use the supplementary readings below for your presentation if you wish.

In preparation for your final paper, you will write a close reading and a paper proposal. Your close reading should be 3-5 pages in length and must attend to both formal and thematic aspects of your chosen passage. The length of paper proposals will vary, but proposals should include a preliminary bibliography with primary and secondary sources. The final paper should be 7-10 pages for undergrads, 15-20 pages for grads. We’ll workshop the paper proposal in class. Please use these assignments as opportunities to develop your close reading skills, explore your ideas, and work toward strong and well-supported arguments for your term paper.
If you have a documented disability and anticipate needing accommodations in this course, please meet with me soon. Also please request that the Counselor for Students with Disabilities send me a letter outlining your approved accommodations. Disability Services: disabsrv@darkwing.uoregon.edu, 346-1155; http://ds.uoregon.edu/.

The University Student Conduct Code (available at conduct.uoregon.edu) defines academic misconduct. Students are prohibited from committing or attempting to commit any act that constitutes academic misconduct. By way of example, students should not give or receive unauthorized help on assignments or examinations without express permission from the instructor. Students should properly acknowledge and document all sources of information (e.g. quotations, paraphrases, ideas) and use only the sources and resources authorized by the instructor. If there is any question about whether an act constitutes academic misconduct, it is the students’ obligation to clarify the question with the instructor before committing or attempting to commit the act. Additional information about a common form of academic misconduct, plagiarism, is available at www.libweb.uoregon.edu/guides/plagiarism/students.

Grading:
- Participation 5%
- Presentation 5%
- Close Reading 20%
- Paper Proposal w/ Bibliography 20%
- Final Paper 50%

Week 1: Introduction
- M 1/3  Introduction and Background
- F 1/7  No class

Week 2:
- W 1/12  Toni Morrison, *Sula* (1973) (through p 85)
- F 1/14  Toni Morrison, *Sula* (1973) (p 86-end)

Week 3:
- M 1/17  No class – Martin Luther King Jr.’s Birthday Observed
- W 1/19  Gayl Jones, *Corregidora* (1975) (through p 132)
- F 1/21  Gayl Jones, *Corregidora* (1975) (p 133-end)

Week 4:
  Close Reading Due
Week 5:
W 2/2 Octavia Butler, *Kindred* (1979) (p 102-188)
F 2/4 Octavia Butler, *Kindred* (1979) (p 189-end)

Week 6:

Week 7:
F 2/18 Paper Proposal w/ Bibliography Due – Workshop Day

Week 8:

Week 9:

Week 10:
F 3/11 Marie-Elena John, *Unburnable* (2006) (p 223-end) and Conclusion
Final paper due

Recommended Materials:
- Farah Jasmine Griffin, “That the Mothers May Soar and the Daughters May Know Their Names: A Retrospective of Black Feminist Literary Criticism” *Signs* (2007) - Blackboard
- Audre Lorde, “Learning from the 60s” from *Sister Outsider* – Blackboard
- Audre Lorde, “Uses of the Erotic” from *Sister Outsider* – Blackboard
• *Toni Morrison Uncensored* – Knight Library VIDEOTAPE 04483 c.2
• Alice Walker, “The Black Writer and The Southern Experience” from *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens* – Blackboard