

**Sex & Power in the African Diaspora**  
AFR 372G (30430)/ANTH 324L (31363)/WGS 340 (47792)  
Fall 2013  
Tuesday & Thursday, 9:30am-11am  
Parlin Hall (PAR) #306

**Professor Lyndon K. Gill**

**Description**

This multi-disciplinary course explores various experiences and theories of sex/intimacy/desire alongside intellectual and artistic engagements with power hierarchies and spirituality across black communities within and beyond the borders of the United States. We will consider the concept of “erotic subjectivity” from various theoretical and methodological angles principally within African Diasporic contexts.

*\*Please Note:*

1) *This course carries the flag for Cultural Diversity.*

2) *This course deals with aspects of gender and sexuality in a candid and explicit manner at times. Students who do not feel comfortable with this approach should not take the course. If you choose to take this course, you have agreed to respect our classroom as a safe space. Racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, or- of course- ‘erotophobia’ of any sort will not be tolerated.*

**Requirements & Assignments**

**1. Class Attendance:** Each student is required to attend *every* class session. Attendance will be noted. Unexcused absences are unacceptable. More than one unexcused absence during the term will result in a reduction of the overall course grade for each session missed (A→A-, B+→B, etc.).

*\*Note: The use of laptops and mobile phones is NOT permitted in the classroom*

**2. Informed participation:** Each student is required to complete the assigned readings and **MUST** bring hardcopies of these readings to class. Students will come to class on time and prepared with questions and comments on each reading.

**3. Reading responses:** A series of one-page reading response will be **posted on Blackboard by noon on the Monday before class**. Students will be divided into groups and only select groups will post each week. These posts are intended to provoke conversation. The week’s assigned readings must be addressed directly, but no need to summarize. Critique, compare, and pose questions for discussion or clarification. Each

post must comment on at least one other person's reading response. ***The reading response is due on Monday 9/9 at noon.*** These responses will be graded on a credit/no credit basis. Students will receive *no credit* for late posts.

**4. Discussion facilitation:** Each student will choose one class session in which to lead class discussion (co-facilitation may be necessary). ***Facilitation sessions will be chosen at the end of class on Thursday 9/5.*** Facilitators are expected to draft questions for discussion based on the assigned readings and are required to read all conversation pages posted for that week. Students will receive a grade for these facilitations. **Discussion facilitators are NOT required to write conversation pages for the week of their facilitation.**

**5. Final project proposal:** Students will form groups and each group will write a **2-3-page proposal** (12pt. Times New Roman font, double spaced) for a final project. This proposal will explain the form of the final project and the texts the group will be using. These texts must include course related readings/films, but may also include outside resources. This proposal will be ***accompanied by a briefly annotated bibliography*** (the bibliography does NOT count toward the minimum page limit). Each group member will receive the same grade.

**6. Final project:** Each group will complete a ***final project to be accompanied by a 5 page explanatory script*** (12pt. Times New Roman font, double spaced). The project will be ***due on Wednesday 12/11*** (the first day of Final Exams). Each group member will receive the same grade.

- For the ***Final Project*** students will produce a creative work in the medium of their choice (performance, film, painting, sculpture, photography, literary text, web, etc. or using multiple media). This work **MUST** engage directly with texts/films assigned for the course and themes raised by the course. Outside sources are encouraged but not required. ***The artistic work will be accompanied by a written guide/script/description of at least 5 pages.***

**Please note for all assignments:**

\* ***Late proposals and projects will be penalized for every day they are late*** (i.e. A → A- if one day late, A → B+ if two days late, etc.). Students are required to ***proofread*** their material prior to submission (ideally, someone else will also read the material for grammatical/spelling/flow errors your eyes might miss). Materials that show evidence of not having been proofread will be returned and marked late. Extensions may be considered only under extenuating circumstances and in emergency situations. When possible, advance notice is encouraged and documentation will be required.

\* For assistance with cultivating your ideas, outlining your written work and tips on proofreading/editing your polished writing, please make an appointment at the ***Undergraduate Writing Center: [www.uwc.utexas.edu](http://www.uwc.utexas.edu)***

\* Students are expected to comply with the University of Texas at Austin's **Honor Code** and its standards of academic integrity:

[http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acint\\_student.php](http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acint_student.php)

It is each student's responsibility to become familiar with this code and these university-wide standards; ignorance will be unacceptable as an excuse for violations. All written assignments may be scanned for plagiarism.

\* Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the University. To determine if you qualify, please contact the coordinating office at 471-6259 (voice), 232-2937 (video phone) or [www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd](http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd).

### **Course Grade Percentages**

Conversation pages	10%
Class participation/ Discussion facilitation	20%
Final project proposal (due 10/22)	30%
Final paper/project (due 12/11)	40%

### **Required Texts:**

Alexander, M. Jacqui

2005 Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory and the Sacred. Durham: Duke University Press.

Allen, Jafari

2011 ¡Venceremos? The Erotics of Black Self-making in Cuba. Durham: Duke University Press.

Tinsley, Omise'eke

2010 Thieving Sugar: Eroticism Between Women in Caribbean Literature. Durham: Duke University Press.

The above texts are available for purchase at the Co-Op and have been put on reserve at the Perry-Castañeda Library. Additional required readings (book chapters, articles, etc.) are also available as pdf documents on Blackboard.

### **Reading and Assignment Schedule**

*\*Please Note: It may be necessary to make slight changes to this schedule as the course progresses. You will always receive prior notice of any changes.*

***Week #1: Introductions***

**8/29**

Introduction to the course and each other

***Week #2: In the Realm of Our Lorde***

**9/3**

[9 pgs.]

Lorde "Uses of the Erotic" (in Lorde 1984: p. 53-59),

Lorde "Love Poem" & "On a Night of The Full Moon" (in Lorde 1997: p. 127 & 172)

**9/5**

[18 pgs.]

Griffin "Textual Healing" (in *Callaloo* 19:2, 1996) p. 519-536

**[Choose discussion facilitation sessions]**

***Week #3: In the Realm of Our Lorde (II)***

**9/10**

[7pgs.]

Owens *Are You Sisters?* (Owens 2009: p. 69-75)

***Start 21-day Meditation Challenge***

**9/12**

[15pgs.]

Weir-Soley *Eroticism* p. 1-11, 223-226

***Week #4: In the Realm of Our Lorde (III): Mother Love***

**9/17**

[11pgs.]

Gumbs "Prologue" (in Gumbs 2010: p.1-11)

**9/19**

[13pgs.]

Gumbs "Prologue" (Gumbs 2010: p.12-24)

***Week #5: Eros & Power (I)***

**9/24** [10 pgs.]  
Thomas *The Sexual Demon of Colonial Power* (in Thomas 2007: p. 1-10)

**9/26** [13pgs.]  
Thomas *The Sexual Demon of Colonial Power* (in Thomas 2007: p. 11-23)

***Week #6: Eros & Power (II)***

**10/1** [12pgs.]  
Thomas *The Sexual Demon of Colonial Power* (in Thomas 2007: p. 129-140)

**10/3** [14 pgs.]  
Thomas *The Sexual Demon of Colonial Power* (in Thomas 2007: p. 140-153)

***Week #7: Eros & The Crossing***

**10/8** [19 pgs.]  
Glave “He Who Would Have Become Joshua” (in *Callaloo* 30:2, 2007) p.420-438

**10/10** [9 pgs.]  
Alexander *Pedagogies of Crossing* p.1-9

***Week #8: Erotic Autonomy (I)***

**10/15** [9 pgs.]  
Alexander *Pedagogies of Crossing* p.10-18

**[Final paper/project proposals due]**

**10/17** [15pgs.]  
Alexander *Pedagogies of Crossing* p.21-34

**[Midterm course evaluations completed at the end of the class session]**

***Week #9: Erotic Autonomy (II)***

**10/22** [19 pgs.]  
Alexander *Pedagogies of Crossing* p.35-53

**10/24** [12 pgs.]  
Alexander *Pedagogies of Crossing* p.54-65

***Week #10: Bridging & The Sacred (I)***

**10/29** [21 pgs.]  
Alexander *Pedagogies of Crossing* p.280-300

**10/31** [11pgs.]  
Alexander *Pedagogies of Crossing* p. 301-311

***Week #11: Bridging & The Sacred (II)***

**11/5** [12pgs.]  
Alexander *Pedagogies of Crossing* p. 311-322

**11/7** [10pgs.]  
Alexander *Pedagogies of Crossing* p. 323-332

***Week #12: The Erotics of Black Self-making (I)***

**11/12** [17pgs.]  
Allen ;*Venceremos?* p. 1-17

**11/14** [12pgs.]  
Allen ;*Venceremos?* p. 74-85

***Week #13: The Erotics of Black Self-making (II)***

**11/19** [14pgs.]  
Allen ;*Venceremos?* p. 86-99

**11/21** [18pgs.]  
Johnson “Feeling the Spirit in the Dark” (in *Callaloo*, 21:2, 1998) p. 399-416

***Week #14***

**11/26**  
***No Class – Thanksgiving Holiday***

**11/28**  
***No Class – Thanksgiving Holiday***

***Week #15: The Fertile Ground of Eroticism***

**12/3** [15 pgs.]  
Tinsley *Thieving Sugar* p. 1-15

**12/5** [12 pgs.]  
Tinsley *Thieving Sugar* p. 17-28

**12/11** (First day of Final Exams)  
***Final project due***

### **Other Required Reading Text Citations**

Gumbs, Alexis

2010 We Can Learn To Mother Ourselves: The Queer Survival of Black Feminism 1968-1996. Unpublished dissertation. Duke University.

Lorde, Audre

1984 Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches. Trumansburg: Crossing Press.

1997 The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde. New York: Norton.

Owens, Emily A.

2009 Are You Sisters? The Impossibility of Black Lesbian Subjectivity.  
Harvard University undergraduate Honor's Thesis.

Thomas, Greg

2007 The Sexual Demon of Colonial Power: Pan-African Embodiment and erotic Schemes of Empire. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Weir-Soley, Donna Aza

2009 Eroticism, Spirituality, and Resistance in Black Women's Writing. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.

### **Grading Schema**

(informed by "Grading Standards II" by Maxine Rodburg of the Harvard Writing Center)

The following are the standards I adhere to when I grade essays. Pluses and minuses represent shades of difference, as do split grades (e.g. B-/C+). I assign grades on the evidence of the essay submitted, not on effort or time spent.

**A:** An excellent piece of writing (this is not the same as perfect). This is an ambitious, perceptive essay that grapples with interesting, complex ideas, responds discerningly to counter-arguments, and explores well-chosen evidence

revealingly. The discussion enhances— rather than underscores— the reader’s and writer’s knowledge (it doesn’t simply repeat what has been discussed in class). There is a context for all the ideas; someone outside the class would be enriched, not confused, by reading the essay. Its beginning opens up— rather than flatly announces— its thesis. Its end is something more than a summary. The language is clean, precise, often elegant. As a reader I feel surprised, delighted, changed. There’s something new here for me, something only the essay’s writer could have written and explored in this particular way. The writer’s stake in the material is obvious.

**B:** This is a piece of writing that reaches high and achieves many of its aims. The ideas are solid and progressively explored but some thin patches require more analysis and/or some stray thoughts do not quite fit together well. The language is generally clear and precise but occasionally not. The evidence is relevant, but there may be too little. The context for the evidence may not be sufficiently explored, so that I have to make some of the connections that the writer should have made clear for me.

**OR** This is a piece of writing that does not reach as high than an ‘A’ essay, but thoroughly achieves its aims. This is a solid essay whose reasoning and argument may nonetheless be rather routine— in this case the limitation is conceptual.

**C:** This is a piece of writing that has real problems in one of these areas: 1) conception (there is at least one main idea but it is obscure and hard to get to); 2) structure (the logic behind the ordering of the text is far from clear); 3) use of evidence (there is no evidence presented or that which is provided is weak and/or the connections among the ideas are unclear or without context; the text is plagued by generalizations and absent substantial proof); 4) language (the writing is awkward and generally stands in the way of comprehension). Overall, the essay may be repetitive, poorly organized, and/or superficial in its treatment of the subject matter. In addition, punctuation, spelling, grammar, citations, and transitions may be problems as well.

**OR** This is an essay that largely summarizes any given text or other work (of art or analysis), but is written without too many major problems.

**OR** This is an essay that is chiefly a personal reaction to something. This is perhaps well written, but there is scant engagement with course content or other scholarly material; it is mostly opinion.

**D:** This is an essay that demonstrates very little effort to grapple seriously with the ideas it hopes to explore.

**OR** This is a piece of writing that is extremely problematic in many of the areas mentioned above: conception, structure, use of evidence, language, etc.



- OR** This is writing that does not come close to meeting the expectations of the assignment.
- F:** This is a piece of writing that should most definitely be re-conceptualized and revised drastically so that it can be re-submitted if that option is available.

**Grading Scale**

A+	100
A	99 – 95
A-	94 – 90
B+	89 – 85
B	84 – 80
B-	79 – 75
C+	74 – 70
C	69 – 65
C-	64 – 60
D+	59 – 55
D	58 – 54
D-	57 – 53
F	52 or less