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SOCIOLOGY XXXX: BLACK WOMEN'S POLITICAL ACTIVISM

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The course provides an overview of Black women's grassroots political activism, focusing primarily on women in the United States with comparisons to Black women's activism in South Africa and the UK. We will also discuss and analyze how Black women engage the political with the personal, demonstrating political activism in their everyday lives. You will examine the mutual influence of sex, gender, race, sexuality, and class on Black women's politicization and social movement strategies. How do intersecting identities shape Black women's claims for citizenship, autonomy, respect, and security? What constraints and opportunities do they face?

This course is also an opportunity to practice scholar-activism, and to move theorizing beyond the Ivory Tower. A central tenant of Black feminist thought is that theorizing should not be divorced from social life and social change. We are talking about real-life, ongoing issues with quality of life, human rights, civil rights, and life or death consequences. You will be required to participate in a social movement or community-based organization doing work around an issue that interests you. You will then analyze your experiences and your group's social movement strategies in reflective essays and in a class presentation.

Our specific goals in this course are:

- To be able to explain how intersecting social hierarchies mutually influence Black women's relationships to the state, men, and differently racialized women.
- To understand how race, class and gender have influenced Black women's pathways to politicization and strategies for social change.
- To be able to analyze how race, class, and gender have influenced Black women's experiences and roles within feminist, anti-racist, and Black feminist social movement organizations
- To be able to explain the connection between course content (theory) and an ongoing social movement advancing a cause that is important to you (praxis)

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Gill, Tiffany M. 2010. *Beauty Shop Politics: African American Women's Activism in the Beauty Industry*. Champagne: University of Illinois Press

Harris-Perry, Melissa. 2011. *Sister Citizen: Shame Stereotypes, and Black Women in America*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

McMurry, Linda. 1998. *To Keep the Waters Troubled: The Life Ida B. Wells*. New York: Oxford

University Press.

Shakur, Assata. 1987. *Assata: An Autobiography*. Westport: Lawrence Hill Books. Wallace, Michelle. 1990. *Black Macho and The Myth of the Superwoman*. New York: Verso Classics.

Springer, Kimberly. 1999. *Still Lifting, Still Climbing: African American Women's Contemporary Activism*. New York: New York University Press.

** Most of the readings will be photocopied chapters from books, and some materials are accessible for free online. On the first day of class we will discuss how to access them.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS:

Class Participation: You are expected not only to attend class regularly but to participate in class discussions. The more you talk about the material, the better you will understand it and your relationship to it. To gain practice in developing your sociological imagination, it is essential that you complete all of the assigned reading prior to class and come prepared for intellectual discussion.

Discussion Facilitator: You will select one week to present the readings to the class with a partner. There is no set structure you are expected to adhere to. However, the presentation should include a discussion of the readings historical context, summarize the main perspective, present critiques, and end with discussion questions. Your questions might deal with “comprehension,” pondering the significance of one passage or theme in the text. Or, your questions might be evaluative or comparative. You may use your classmates’ weekly memos as inspiration for your presentations.

Memo Blog Posts: This is a reading intensive seminar course. Each week from weeks 2-13, you will write a short 1 paragraph response to the readings for inclusion on our course blog, due Sunday by 5pm. Discussion facilitator pairs may use these response papers to develop their ideas and prepare questions for that week’s class.

Activist Memos: During this semester, you will engage with a social movement organization, on or off campus, related to a cause you are passionate about. You will attend meetings regularly, and write three memos describing organizing strategies, collective identity formation, and structure. In these memos, you will connect your activist experience to the historical and contemporary political activism employed by Black women featured in our readings.

Final Essay: A final paper that employs that puts readings on the syllabus in conversation with your literature review. Feminist and anti-racist theories/frameworks engage, critique, and extend one another. This paper is an opportunity to participate in the process of theorizing, knowledge production, and critique.

Final Presentation: You will present your activist experience in a 10 minute presentation to the class at the end of the semester. You have options for how you present your material. Formats include, but are not limited to a PowerPoint Presentation, a Podcast interview with lead organizers, or a short film or digital narrative.

GRADING BREAKDOWN

Participation (20%)

Memo Blog Posts (10%)

Discussion Facilitator (10%)

Activist Memos (30%)

Final Paper (20%)

Final Presentation (10%)

SCHEDULE:

Week 1: Introducing Ourselves, Introduction to Social Activism

Truth, Sojourner. 1851. Speech at the Akron Convention. Pp. 426-429 in Rossi's (Ed.), *The Feminist Papers*. Northeastern University Press.

Combahee River Collective. 1977. "A Black Feminist Statement." Pp. 231-232 in *Words of Fire: A Black Feminist Anthology*. Edited by Beverly Guy-Sheftall. New York: The New Press.

Skakur, Afeni. 2008. "How Committed Are you? Excerpts from a Talk at Green for All's 'Dream Reborn' Conference."

Week 2: Theorizing Gender from the Social Movement Space

Kuumba, Bahati. 2001. Chapters 1& 2 In *Gender and Social Movements*. Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press.

Week 3: Portrait of a Foundational Activist: Ida B. Wells

McMurry, Linda. 1998. Chapters 5, 9-12 in *To Keep the Waters Troubled: The Life Ida B. Wells*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Wells, Ida B. 1997. *Southern Horrors and Other Writings: The Anti-Lynching Campaign of Ida B. Wells, 1892-1900*. Bedford Books. (Available online).

***Activist Group Must Be Identified by Today**

Week 4: Collective Identities

Roth, Benita. 2004. "Introduction: The Emergence and Development of Racial/Ethnic Feminisms in the 1960s and 1970s" and "Chapter 3: The Vanguard Center: Intramovement Experience and the Emergence of Black Feminism" In *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana and White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Sudbury, Julia. 2001. "(Re)Constructing Multiracial Blackness: Women's Activism, Difference, and Collective Identity in Britain." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 24(1):29-49.

Extra:

Buggs, Shantel Gabriel. 2017. "Dating in the Time of #BlackLivesMatter: Exploring Mixed-Race Discourses of Race and Racism." *Racialized Discourse* 3(4): 538-551.

Reger, Jo. 2014. "The Story of a Slut Walk: Sexuality, Race, and Generational Divisions in Contemporary Feminist Activism." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 44(1): 84-112.

Week 5: Constraints in Race and Gender Relations

Wallace, Michelle. 1990. *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*. New York: Verso Classics.

***Activist Memo 1 Due**

Week 6: Examples in Black Feminist Praxis

Davis, Angela. 1981. "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves." *Black Scholar* 12(6): 2-15.

Lorde, Audre. 2007. "The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism." In *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde*. Berkeley: Crossing Press.

Kuumba, Bahati. 2002. "You've Struck a Rock: Comparing Gender, Social Movements, and Transformations in the United States and South Africa." *Gender & Society*, 16, 4: 504-523.

***In class screening:** "You Have Struck a Rock!" (May 1981)

Week 7: Portrait of a Foundational Activist: Assata Shakur

Shakur, Assata. 1987. *Assata: An Autobiography*. Westport: Lawrence Hill Books.

See also:

Brown, Elaine. 1992. *A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story*. New York: Anchor Books.

Week 8: Black Women and Religious Activism

Humez, Jean M. 1993. "In Search of Harriet Tubman's Spiritual Autobiography." *NWSA Journal* 5(2): 162-182.

McFadden, Grace J. 1990. "Septima P. Clark and the Struggle for Human Rights." Pp. 85-97 in *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965*, edited by Vicki L. Crawford, Jacqueline A. Rouse and Barbara Woods. Brooklyn: Carlson Publishers.

On Being Interview with Patrisse Cullors and Robbert Ross. 2017. "The Spiritual Work of Black Lives Matter." <https://onbeing.org/programs/patrisse-cullors-and-robert-ross-the-spiritual-work-of-black-lives-matter-may2017/>

***Activist Memo 2 Due**

Week 9: Health Activism

Grayson, Deborah R. 1999. "'Necessity was the Midwife of Our Politics': Black Women's Health Activism in the 'Post'-Civil Rights Era," in *Still Lifting, Still Climbing: African American Women's Contemporary Activism*, edited by Kimberly Springer, 131-149. New York: New York University Press.

Reynolds, Sean. 1990. "Bar None: The Health of Incarcerated Black Women," Pp. 193-198 in *The Black Women's Health Book: Speaking for Ourselves*, edited by Evelyn White. Seattle: Seal Press.

Gomez, Jewelle L. and Barbara, Smith. 1990. "Taking the Home out of Homophobia: Black Lesbian Health." Pp. 198-214 in *The Black Women's Health Book*. Seattle: Seal Press.

Week 10: Anti-Domestic and Sexual Violence Activism

- Crenshaw, Kimberle. 1991. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43(6): 1241- 1299.
- Hine, Darlene Clark. 1995. "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West: Preliminary Thoughts on the Culture of Dissemblance," in *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*, edited by Beverley Guy-Sheftall. New York: New Press.
- White, Aaronette M. "Talking Black, Talking Feminist: Gendered Micromobilization Processes in a Collective Process against Rape." Pp. 189-219 in *Still Lifting, Still Climbing*.

Week 11: Prison Abolition

- Davis, Angela. 2011. "Chapter 4: How Gender Structures the Prison System" in *Are Prisons Obsolete?* New York: Seven Stories Press.
- Smith, Jennifer E. 1999. "ONAMOVE: African American Women Confronting the Prison Crisis." Pp. 219-240 in *Still Lifting, Still Climbing*.

Week 12: Black Women as Citizens

- Harris-Perry, Melissa. 2011. Chapter 1, 4 and 5 in *Sister Citizen: Shame Stereotypes, and Black Women in America*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

***Activist Memo 3 Due**

Week 13: Activism in the Beauty Industry

- Gill, Tiffany M. 2010. Introduction, Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 in *Beauty Shop Politics: African American Women's Activism in the Beauty Industry*. Champagne: University of Illinois Press
- Gill, Tiffany M. 2015. "#Teamnatural: Black Hair and the Politics of Community in Digital Media." *NKA: Journal of Contemporary African Art* 37: 70-79.

Week 14: Black Lives Matter

- African American Policy Forum. 2015. "Say Her Name: Resisting Police Brutality Against Black Women." Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies.
http://static1.squarespace.com/static/53f20d90e4b0b80451158d8c/t/55a810d7e4b058f342f55873/1437077719984/AAPF_SMN_Brief_full_singles.compressed.pdf
- Garza, Alicia. October 7, 2014. "A Herstory of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement by Alicia Garza." *The Feminist Wire*. <http://www.thefeministwire.com/2014/10/blacklivesmatter-2/>

- *NPR Interview with Patrisse Cullors, Alicia Garza and Opal Tometti. "Black Lives Matter Founders Describe 'Paradigm Shift' In The Movement"

Week 15: In Class Presentations

***Final Paper Due in My Mailbox**