Professor Johnson  
Office: 218 Mandel Center for the Humanities  
Phone: 781.736.2286  
Email: jejohnson@brandeis.edu  
Office hours: Wednesday 10-12

Graduate Assistants  
Alex Montgomery (arenmonty@brandeis.edu) | Office hours: Tuesday 3:30-5:30 @ Rabb 355  
Brie McLemore (bmclemore@brandeis.edu) | Office hours: Mon 10-12 @ Rabb 261

Peer Assistants  
Amaris Brown (amarisb@brandeis.edu) — Discussion section @ Brown 115 (Last name A-E)  
Naya Stevens (jstevens1193@gmail.com) — Discussion section @ Brown 218 (Last name F-L)  
Brontë Velez (bvelez@brandeis.edu) — Discussion section @ Brown 224 (Last name M-Z)  
Community office hours: Tuesday 12:30-1:50 @ Mandel Center for the Humanities Study Lobby (2nd Floor)

Course Description

In 1892, Anna Julia Cooper wrote that, “Only the black woman can say ‘when and where I enter, in the quiet, undisputed dignity of my womanhood, without violence and without suing, or special patronage, then and there the whole….race enters with me.’” In its commitment to applying black feminism to examine notions of belonging, justice, and freedom, this course follows Cooper’s lead.

Beginning with the institution of slavery and carrying on to the present day, we will examine the field of Black Feminist Thought—or, the political, social, and economic forces that shape black American women’s lives. We will ask: How do black women’s lives, labor, and social location lay bare the limits of maleness and whiteness as dominant frames? Why and how do black women matter to us all? Together, we’ll ride the three waves of black feminism to explore the ways black women have been consequential to notions of citizenship, liberation, and culture.

Learning Goals and Objectives

Through this course, students will:
- Understand the centrality of black women to race and sex/gender movements and debates
- Engage the works of key figures in the field of Black Feminist Thought
- Become familiar with the long history of black feminism, its historical significance and its contemporary valences
- Be able to apply theories of intersectionality to political, social, and economic arenas
- Hone their critical reading and written communication skills

Intellectual Citizenship
The class space is one that depends on your being actively present; that is, an intellectual citizen. We all share the honor of being engaged in the material, of respecting the class community, and pushing ourselves past our previous knowledge. Students are expected to be fully prepared for every class, to have completed the assigned reading and to be ready to pose questions, try out ideas, listen to and challenge the ideas of others, and actively engage the material as a group. Please come ready to discuss the day’s reading in depth. This means reading not only for content, but also for overarching themes that emerge, for context and form, and for the silences and absences present.

**Required Materials**

**Books**
- Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861)
- Toni Morrison, *Sula* (1973)

Additional readings available on Latte

**Films**

**Course Components**

- Attendance (10%) is mandatory; the class thrives on your active presence. Absences must be communicated at least one week in advance and accompany documentation to be excused. Unexcused absences and tardies will affect your final grade. **More than two unexcused absences will result in a 0 for your attendance grade.**
- Clapbacks (10%)
- Midterm (30%)
- Analytical Paper (25%)
- Final exam (25%)

**Time Commitment**
Success in this 4-credit course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings, papers, discussion sections, preparation for exams, etc.).

**Non-Negotiables**
Deadlines and exam dates are non-negotiable. All written assignments must be Times New Roman 12, double-spaced with one-inch margins and adhere to Chicago or MLA citation format. Only hard copies will be accepted. Assignments are due at the beginning of class and will be deducted by 1/3 of a letter grade for each day late. Please allow 48 hours for a response to email inquiries.

**Computers**
While computers/tablets may be used to reference readings, this is an off-line zone. Phones should be silenced and left undisturbed for the duration of the class.

**Academic Integrity**

You are expected to be familiar with, and to follow, the University’s policies on academic integrity. Please consult Brandeis University Rights and Responsibilities for all policies and procedures. All policies related to academic integrity apply to in-class and take home projects, assignments, exams, and quizzes. Students may only collaborate on assignments with permission from the instructor. Allegations of alleged dishonesty will be forwarded to the Director of Academic Integrity. Sanctions for academic dishonesty can include failing grades and/or suspension from the university. Students may not turn in work submitted for another class. Doing so will yield a failing final grade.

**Accommodations**

If you are a student who needs academic accommodations because of a documented disability on record at Brandeis University, please present your letter of accommodation immediately. Letters of accommodation must be presented at the start of the semester to ensure the provision of accommodations. Accommodations cannot be granted retroactively.

**Course Outline**

**UNIT ONE: FOUNDATIONS**

**Jan 14** Introductions


**Jan 21** **What** Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex” (BFR); bell hooks, “Black Women Shaping Feminist Theory” (BFR)

**Jan 26** **Why** Barbara Smith, “Racism and Women’s Studies” in Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies; Toni Morrison, “Unspeakable Things Unspoken” (BFR)

**UNIT TWO: FIRST WAVE**

**Jan 28** **Private as Public** Thaviola Glymph “Introduction” and “The Gender of Violence” in Out of The House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household; Harriet Jacobs, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl (Chapters I-X)

**Feb 2** **Enslavement** Harriet Jacobs, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl (Chapters XI-XXII)

**Feb 4** **Abolition** Harriet Jacobs, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Gill (Chapters XXIII-XLI); Sojourner Truth, “Ain’t I a Woman?”

**Feb 9** **Discussion Sections - Freedoms** W.E.B Du Bois, “The Damnation of Women” in Darkwater; Mary Church Terrell, “What it Means to be Colored”; Frederick Douglass, “Why I Became a Women’s Rights Man” in Frederick Douglass on Women’s Rights
UNIT THREE: SECOND WAVE


> Feb 16, Feb 18 — No class (Midterm Recess)


Feb 25 Relationships | Toni Morrison, Sula (67-end)


Mar 3 Midterm

3/3 — Margo Jefferson @ 5-7pm

UNIT FOUR: THIRD WAVE

Mar 8 Discussion Section - Breaks | Rebecca Walker, "Becoming the Third Wave"; Maya Angelou, “On the Pulse of the Morning”; Combahee River Collective Statement (BFR); Michael Awkward, “A Black Man’s Place in Black Feminist Criticism” (BFR)


Mar 17 Queer, Quare | E. Patrick Johnson, “‘Quare’ Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know about Queer Studies I Learned from My Grandmother” in Black Queer Studies; Cathy Cohen, “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics” in GLQ; Janet Mock, Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love & So Much More (Part 1)

Mar 22 Transfeminism | Janet Mock, Redefining Realness (Part 2-3); Lavern Cox Presents: The T Word

3/22 — Janet Mock @ 5:30pm-7pm (WGS Lubin Symposium) in Sherman Hall

Mar 24 Sexual Harassment | Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Whose Story is it Anyway? Feminist and Antiracist Appropriations of Anita Hill” in Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power; “African American Women in Defense of Ourselves” (BFR); Freida Mock, Anita

> Mar 25-28 — No class

UNIT 5: TODAY

Mar 31 Captivities | Angela Davis, Abolition Democracy: Beyond Empire, Prisons, and Torture; Nneka Onuorah, The Same Difference


Apr 7 Cyber Feminism | Angela Davis, “From Michael Brown to Assata Shakur, the Racist State of America Persists” in The Guardian; Shaadi Deveareax, et al., “Why These Tweets Are Called My Back” in The New Inquiry; Claudia Rankine, Citizen: An American Lyric (1-66)

> Apr 11 @2pm sign up for Medium

Apr 12 Discussion Sections - Quotidian Violence | Claudia Rankine, Citizen: An American Lyric (67-end); Dee Rees, Pariah

UNIT 6: TOMORROWS

Apr 14 Analytical Paper Due


Apr 21 No class (Brandeis Friday)

> Apr 22-29 — No class

May 9 Final exam (6-9pm)
ASSIGNMENTS

Clapback (Weekly)

In 100 words or more, respond to the day’s reading via Google Forms (link provided on Latte). Articulate moments of theoretical excitement, confusion, or engagement with your classmates. Posts should be succinct and include details from the reading (vague responses will be treated as a non-submission). Clapbacks are due by 12pm on the day of class.

Analytical Paper (April 14)

Throughout this course, we’ve examined the historical legacy of black feminist theory and practice. Analytical papers require you to apply a black feminist analytic to a topic of your choosing. Your final work may take the form of an extended reading or critical analysis of a cultural object produced by a black woman (one not already considered during the course of the semester); a review essay of a scholarly text in the field; an engagement with a theoretical issue; or on a topic of your own choosing.

You will submit:

1) a 3,000-word analytical paper on your chosen topic which will incorporate at least eight scholarly sources (not already assigned for class).

2) a 700-word abbreviated version that will be published in our Medium Collection. The online format will allow you space to design an intertextual publication. You might, for example, include photographs, interviews, or primary sources. This exercise intends for you to continue a black feminist writing practice by moving thorough and well-crafted research beyond the boundaries of the classroom.

Midterm (March 3) and Final (May 9 @ 6-9pm)

The midterm and final exam will provide the opportunity to display your comprehensive knowledge of the material covered in the course.