

**Gender and Women's Studies 220  
Feminist Theories  
Spring, 2007**

**Professor Amy L. Brandzel**

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**Course Description:**

Feminist theory, at its best, interrogates the relationships between identity, knowledge and power through the discourses of race, class, gender, sexuality and nation. This means that feminist theory necessarily overlaps, if not infringes upon, other critical bodies of theory, such as queer theory, critical race theory, and postcolonial theory. This course attempts to navigate these intersections (or collisions) by focusing our discussion around four hotly contested debates, namely the politics (or "crisis") of representation, the relationship between theory and praxis, the subversive potential of identities, and the project of "inclusion." The four central questions posed in the course will be as follows: In what ways does feminist theory produce and limit subjects and objects of analysis? Is ethical representation, particularly of the disenfranchised and the subaltern, possible? How might we disrupt or subvert the process of subjectification and/or normative identities? And, lastly, how can feminist theory address the critiques of its exclusions without deploying a limited understanding of the project of "inclusion" that mirrors the ethos of universal citizenship?

**Course Materials:**

Nell Irvin Painter, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol*

Articles on ERES\*

\*You are required to bring either copies or reading notes to class, demonstrating careful reading and preparation for class discussions.

**Course Requirements:**

Attendance, Participation and Facilitation	20% of Final Grade
Reading Summaries	20% of Final Grade
Mid-term Essay	20% of Final Grade
Anthology Review/Analysis	15% of Final Grade
Final Take-Home Essay	25% of Final Grade

**I. Attendance, Participation and Facilitation**

***Participation:*** This class relies upon the intellectual commitment and active participation of all students. In order for the course to be effective, all students must have the reading assignments completed and ready for in-depth discussion for each class. The topics we will be discussing can be politically charged, so I expect everyone to *actively* listen to others as well as be respectful of each other's ideas. If for some reason you do not feel comfortable talking in class, or find something uncomfortable about our classroom atmosphere, *please* let me know as soon as possible so I can try to help alleviate the situation.

***Attendance and Timeliness:*** Regular attendance and timely arrival is required. *Attendance in class, however, does not constitute participation.* More than **two** unexcused absences will result in a lowered grade. Two class sessions of late attendance will count as one absence for the purpose of the class participation grade. An *excused* absence requires that you provide official, written verification of your absence (i.e. a "doctor's note"). For any situations that may cause you to miss class, please talk to me as soon as possible and make arrangements to get notes from a peer.

**Reading Engagement and Note-Taking:** Importantly, you need to bring assigned readings to class each day as we will access them throughout our meetings. Moreover, I expect these texts to demonstrate your engagement - i.e. I expect a significant amount of marginalia and notes, either located on the book/article or listed separately in a notebook. The best readers are engaged readers.

**Meeting with Me:** Please make sure you come to my office hours at least once before mid-term so we can get to know each other and check in regarding the class.

**Discussion Facilitation/Presentations:** Students will be organized into 4 presentation groups of approximately 5 students, whereby each group will be responsible for facilitating our discussion twice during the semester (beginning week 3). You will need to meet beforehand as a group in order to prepare your presentation/discussion leadership. Plan on being extremely intimate with the readings due during your presentation week, and as a group I expect you to 1) lead us into spirited debates or discussions regarding the central arguments of the texts assigned this week, and 2) help us confront questions/concerns/ideas raised by your peers from Blackboard postings. You can feel free to bring in outside materials to help in this process, as sometimes a specific example or context can help us bring these theoretical ideas to fruition.

## **II. Reading Summaries**

Students will sign up for 5 “Reading Summaries” in which you will be responsible for posting your summary and analysis of that week’s course material on Blackboard (listed under “Discussion Board”) by 6pm Wednesday of that week. Your summary should be in the format shown below, and will be graded according to comprehensiveness, as well as careful comprehension of the material. Your postings will not only be extremely helpful in sharing your understanding of the course material with the class, but will also be vital in helping the facilitation groups organize our discussions. Sharing your work with others is an extremely generous exercise, and I thank you in advance for your generous contributions as well as your respectful treatment of each other’s work.

*Please note that if I am concerned that the class, as a whole, is not doing thorough and timely reading, I will extend this assignment to all students and make it a weekly requirement.* Regardless, I highly recommend you perform this exercise for each reading in order to have an extremely useful record of your reading accomplishments and to use them for course essays and future coursework.

Include for each article or chapter due that week:

- A. Author Name and Article/Chapter Title
- B. Thesis: In your own words (not the author’s), what is the central thesis? That is, what is the central Problem and what is the Solution? I prefer for you to get the thesis to one full sentence, however you are welcome to write it in two full sentences with one sentence describing the problem and one sentence describing the solution (especially for the first half of the class). Statements must be written in argumentative (not descriptive) form. See “thesis tips” below for more information.
- C. Main Points: Using bullet format, list 4-6 main points/arguments deployed in the article. Be thorough but also selective – i.e. include the points that are necessary for the thesis. One of the easiest ways to make sure you hit the main points in your reading summary is to assume you are writing to someone who hasn’t read the material – what do they need to know to understand what the article is about?)
- D. Analysis: Provide an analysis (in 3-5 sentences) of the reading, focusing on the Thesis or on another main point you found interesting. Do not focus on superficial details such as writing style or level of difficulty. Moreover, an analysis is not a personal evaluation (i.e. “I like it” or “I don’t like it”), but an in-depth discussion of what you think the implications of these arguments are, and most importantly, **WHY**.

*Thesis Tips:* To assist in making sure you write the thesis as an *argument*, one trick is to start the sentence with the phrase, “The author argues that [problem goes here] and suggests that we must [solution goes here].” To grasp an author’s thesis, you need to read the full article (of course), but you will notice some hints early on. For example, the title often reflects a central part of the thesis (problem and/or solution), and usually there is a

“roadmap” paragraph or two in the introduction section that will point towards the main points as well as a thesis. Moreover, while the “problem” tends to be discussed in the introduction, “solutions” are often more explicit in the conclusions. It is common to get distracted by smaller “main” points, so to get to the thesis you’ll need to thoroughly read the article, pull out the main points first, then sit back and reflect: what is the overall problem that is being posed and overall solution that encompasses the whole article?

### **III. Mid-Term Essay - Due March 12 via attachment on Blackboard by 9:30 am**

For this assignment, you will write an integrative, analytical essay (5-7 pgs.) that will require you to synthesize arguments addressed in the readings and class discussions through a sustained and innovative argumentative essay. I will distribute essay questions on March 9<sup>th</sup>.

### **IV. Anthology Analysis - Due April 13 via attachment on Blackboard by 9:30 am**

For this assignment you will write an argumentative essay (5-7 pgs) that will provide a sustained argument regarding your analysis of your assigned anthology, using the course readings to help you. More information on this assignment will be forthcoming.

### **V. Final Essay - Due Finals Week**

Your final essay will be a 10-12 page paper offering a sustained and thorough argument about the politics of knowledge production in regards to feminist theory. While details on this essay will follow, you should note that you will be asked to formulate an argument that will allow you to engage with the following problematics: the objects and subjects of feminist theory, the politics of knowledge production, the crisis of representation, the transparency of language and theory/practice, and the project of “inclusion.” In this process, you will need to configure a solution to these problematics, such as an argument as to how we might “transnationalize and queer” the project of feminist theory. Moreover, you will be asked to use numerous authors/articles assigned throughout the whole semester.

#### **Dates To Remember**

Your Group Facilitation/Presentation dates  
 Your personal Reading Summaries dates  
 March 12: Mid-term Essay Due  
 April 13: Anthology Analysis Due  
 Finals Week: Take Home Final Essay Due

#### **Class and Grading Policies:**

**Written work:** I expect all written work to be grammatically correct, spell-checked, and proofread *thoroughly*. Moreover, work must be typed, double-spaced, 1 inch margins, Times New Roman 12 font, stapled, paginated, and with your name and honor code pledge and signature. Please comply with the page limits. All references must be properly cited using MLA or Chicago citation manuals. If needed, contact me or a librarian for more information or help. If your work does not satisfy these requirements, it will not be accepted. Also, assignments must be handed in to me at the beginning of the class session in which they are due (which means I don’t accept assignments via email).

**Late Work:** I do not accept late papers unless you have made specific arrangements with me in advance and received my approval. This does not apply to medical emergencies.

**P/NP or CR/NE:** If you opt for this grading system, you must complete all assignments to receive credit.

**Academic Incompletes:** No “educational” incompletes are possible in this course.

**Honor Code:** This course adheres to the policies of the Oberlin College Honor Code which applies to all work submitted for academic credit, whether it is a creative project, a quiz, an exam or a paper. For quizzes and exams, this

means you must complete the assignment independently of other students. For papers, you must cite all written sources that you consulted, whether you quote directly or paraphrase (for online guides, scroll to the bottom of <http://www.oberlin.edu/library/research/refsources.html>). This is true whether you are using electronic or printed materials. Incomplete or improper citations are a form of plagiarism. If you are unfamiliar with proper citation formats, or have questions please consult me, a reference librarian, a writing tutor and/or a style manual. Lack of familiarity with proper procedures is not a defense. At the end of each academic exercise, students shall write in full and sign the Honor Pledge: "I affirm that I have adhered to the Honor Code in this assignment."

See Oberlin Honor Code, [http://www.oberlin.edu/students/student\\_pages/honor\\_code2.html](http://www.oberlin.edu/students/student_pages/honor_code2.html) for more information.

**Plagiarism, Again:** While I hate to be repetitive, it is critical that you understand that plagiarism is a serious problem and can happen far too easily. Place quotation marks around any phrase taken directly from someone else, and cite them accordingly - including the internet. Moreover, when you take ideas from others but are rephrasing significantly, you still must cite them accordingly. Give people credit for their ideas, and take responsibility for when you are borrowing from others.

**Accommodations:** If you need disability-related accommodations for your work in this class, please let me know. Support is available through Student Academic Services. Contact Jane Boomer, Coordinator of Services for Students with Disabilities, for assistance in developing a plan to address your academic needs.

### Schedule

#### **Part I: Objects and Subjects of Feminist Theorizing**

##### **Week 1 (Feb 5): The Project of "Feminist Theory"**

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**Monday:**

Syllabus review

**Wednesday:**

Whelehan, Imelda. "Introduction." In *Modern Feminist Thought: From the Second Wave to 'Post-Feminism,'* ed. Imelda Whelehan, 1-21. New York: New York UP, 1998.

Tong, Rosemary. "Introduction: The Diversity of Feminist Thinking." *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1998: 1-10.

**\*\*Sign up for Reading Summaries\*\***

**Friday:** \*No class meeting today. Instead, read today's readings and send me a 1-2 page (single-spaced) reading response via email (copy and paste into body of email rather than sending attachments) *comparing* Whelehan, Tong, Lorber and Weedon's explicit and/or implicit definitions of "feminism" and "theory." Then, discuss what your definitions are and, most importantly, your reasoning/argument for them. Email should be sent by 5pm today.

Lorber, Judith. "The Variety of Feminisms & Their Contributions to Gender Equality." *Gender Inequality*. Los Angeles: Roxbury Publishing, 2001: 1-17.

Weedon, Chris. "The Question of Difference." *Feminism, Theory and the Politics of Difference*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999: 1-25.

##### **Week 2 (Feb 12): The Subject(s) of Feminist Theory**

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**Monday:**

Lanser, Susan. "Feminist Criticism, 'The Yellow Wallpaper,' and the Politics of Color." *Feminist Studies* 15.3 (Fall 1989): 415-441.

**\*\* Facilitation Groups Assigned today\*\***

**Wednesday:**

Alarcón, Norma. "The Theoretical Subject of *This Bridge Called My Back*." In *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*, ed. Linda Nicholson, 288-299. New York: Routledge, 1997.

**Friday:** Discussion - Dr. Brandzel

**Week 3 (Feb 19): The Object(s) of Feminist Theory**

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**Monday:**

Mohanty, Chandra. "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse." In *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation & Postcolonial Perspectives*, eds. McClintock, Mufti and Shohat, 255-277. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1997.

**Wednesday:**

Lee, Rachel. "Notes from the (Non)Field: Teaching and Theorizing Women of Color." In *Women's Studies On Its Own*, ed. Robyn Wiegman, 82-105. Durham: Duke UP, 2002.

**Friday:** Discussion - All

**II. Interrogating Feminist Theories and Practices**

**Week 4 (Feb 26): Race for Theory**

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**Monday:**

Christian, Barbara. "Race for Theory." In *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Padmini Mongia, 148-157. New York: Arnold Press, 1996.

Rushin, Donna Kate. "The Bridge Poem." In *This Bridge Called My Back*, eds. Moraga and Anzaldúa, lvii-lviii. Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 2002, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition.

Carillo, Jo. "And When You Leave, Take Your Pictures With You." In *This Bridge Called My Back*, eds. Moraga and Anzaldúa, 66-67. Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 2002, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition.

**Wednesday:**

Anzaldúa, Gloria. "Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to Third World Women's Writers." In *This Bridge Called My Back*, eds. Moraga and Anzaldúa, 183-193. Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 2002, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition.

Lorde, Audre. "An Open Letter to Mary Daly." In *This Bridge Called My Back*, eds. Moraga and Anzaldúa, 101-105. Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 2002, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition.

Lorde, Audre. "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House." In *This Bridge Called My Back*, eds. Moraga and Anzaldúa, 106-109. Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 2002, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition.

**Friday:** Discussion - Facilitation Group 1

**Week 5 (Mar 5): Theory/Practice**

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**Monday:**

McDowell, Deborah. "Transferences: Black Feminist Discourse: The 'Practice' of 'Theory.'" In *Feminism Beside Itself*, eds. Diane Elam and Robyn Wiegman, 95-118. New York: Routledge, 1995.

**Wednesday:**

Wiegman, Robyn. "Feminism's Broken English." In *Just Being Difficult? Academic Writing in the Public Arena*, eds. Jonathan Culler and Kevin Lamb, 75-94. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003.

**Friday:** Prof. Brandzel runs discussion and hands out midterms.

**\*\*Midterm essay questions distributed today at end of class\*\***

### **Week 6 (Mar 12): Theorizing Identity As/And Difference**

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**Monday:** In class videos, including *On Cannibalism* by Fatimah Tobing Rony

**\*\*Midterm essay due via attachment on Blackboard by 9:30 am \*\***

**Wednesday:**

*Skim or read in full if you'd like:* Trinh, T. Minh-ha. "Commitment from the Mirror-Writing Box." *Woman, Native, Other*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989: 5-44.

Trinh, T. Minh-ha. "Difference: A Special Third World Women Issue." *Woman, Native, Other*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989: 78-116.\*

**Friday:**

Reread: Trinh, T. Minh-ha. "Difference: A Special Third World Women Issue." *Woman, Native, Other*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989: 78-116.\*

\*Reading Summaries for this week are due Friday at 6pm

### **Week 7 (Mar 19): The Crisis of Representation**

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**Monday:**

Chow, Rey. "Where Have All the Natives Gone." In *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Padmini Mongia, 122-147. New York: Arnold Press, 1996.

**Wednesday:**

Spivak, Gayatri with Ellen Rooney. "'In a Word': Interview." In *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*, ed. Linda Nicholson, 356-378. New York: Routledge, 1997.

**Friday:** Class cancelled

**\*\*Week 8: Spring Break\*\***

### **Week 9 (Apr 2): The Project of Inclusion**

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**Monday & Wednesday:**

Painter, Nell Irvin, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol* (feel free to read whole book, but I want you to focus on the following chapters: 1, 2, 13, 14, 17-26 and the Coda)\*

\*Chapters for Reading Summaries to be determined

**Friday:** Discussion

### **Week 10 (Apr 9): The Project of Feminist Theory & the Politics of Knowledge Production**

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**Monday & Wednesday**

Students will work through and share analyses of their assigned anthologies.

**Friday:** No class meeting

**\*\*Anthology Analysis Due via attachment on Blackboard by 9:30 am\*\***

### **III: Theorizing Identity and Subversion**

### **Week 11 (Apr 16): Language and Subjectification**

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**Monday:**

de Beauvoir, Simone. "'Introduction' to *The Second Sex*." In *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*, ed. Linda Nicholson, 11-18. New York: Routledge, 1997.

Wittig, Monique. "One is Not Born a Woman." In *Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Abelove, Barale and Halperin, 103-109. New York: Routledge, 1993.

**Wednesday:**

Fuss, Diana. "Interior Colonies: Frantz Fanon and the Politics of Identification." In *Identification Papers* New York: Routledge, 1995: 141-172.

**Friday:** Discussion

**Week 12 (Apr 23): Gender, Identity, Subversion**

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**Monday:**

*Skim or Read in full if you'd like:* Salih, Sara. "Introduction." In *The Judith Butler Reader*, ed. Sara Salih, 1-17. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004.

Butler, Judith. "Bodily Inscriptions, Performative Subversions (1990)." In *The Judith Butler Reader*, ed. Sara Salih, 90-118. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004.

**Wednesday:**

Butler, Judith. "Imitation and Gender Insubordination." In *Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Abelove, Barale and Halperin, 307-320. New York: Routledge, 1993.

**Friday:** Discussion

**\*\*Please note, all students need to view the film *Paris is Burning* (1992) by Jennie Livingston before doing the readings for next week\*\***

**Week 13 (Apr 30): Race, Gender, Performativity**

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**Monday: \*\*Please note, all students need to view the film *Paris is Burning* (1992) by Jennie Livingston before doing the readings for this week\*\***

Butler, Judith. "Gender is Burning: Questions of Appropriation and Subversion." *Bodies that Matter*. New York: Routledge, 1993: 121-140.

hooks, bell. "Is Paris Burning?" *Reel to Real: Race, Sex, and Class at the Movies*. New York : Routledge, 1996: 214-226.

**Wednesday:**

Reddy, Chandan. "Home, Houses, Nonidentity: Paris is Burning." In *Burning Down the House: Recycling Domesticity*, ed. Rosemary George, 355-379. Boulder: Westview Press, 1998.

**Friday:** Discussion

**IV: Feminist Theory, Revisited**

**Week 14 (May 7): Transnationalizing and Queering the Project?**

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**Monday:**

Kaplan, Caren and Inderpal Grewal. "Transnational Practices and Interdisciplinary Feminist Scholarship: Refiguring Women's and Gender Studies." In *Women's Studies On Its Own: A Next Wave Reader in Institutional Change*, ed. Robyn Wiegman, 66-81. Durham: Duke UP, 2002.

Grewal, Inderpal and Caren Kaplan. "Global Identities: Theorizing Transnational Studies of Sexuality." *GLQ* 7.4 (2001): 663-679.

**Wednesday:**

Butler, Judith. "Against Proper Objects." *Differences* 6.2+3 (1994): 1-26.

**Friday:** Celebration