

**African American Women's Activism**  
**Professor Marcia Chatelain**  
**Africana Studies**

**Course Description:** This advanced undergraduate course examines African-American women's history in the U.S., with an emphasis on social activism, politics, and cultural production. This course will use first-hand narratives as well as monographs to provide an overview of African-American women's lives from slavery to the contemporary period. Through writing assignments, students will have an opportunity to strengthen their expository writing, as well as their primary and secondary research skills.

**Course Goals and Objectives:**

1. Students will learn how to use primary source documents, interdisciplinary sources and secondary sources to understand and analyze history.
2. Students will be able to view African-American women's history from the perspective of the 'double bind,' the intersection of race and gender, as integral to African-American women's experience.
3. Students will connect historical struggles and activism to contemporary debates due to a sophisticated historical knowledge of U.S. racial and gender history from slavery to the Reconstruction era to the Great Migration era to the Civil Rights Movement to the present.
4. Students will practice historical thinking through assignments that require problem solving.

**Course Requirements:**

**Short Papers and Research Paper:** Students will write 5 **short papers** throughout the semester, **no longer than one to one and a half pages**, for each book. The short papers will reflect what it would be like to complete an assignment in a workplace using a history education. Each assignment will have a specific prompt.

The **research paper** will require students to write about a specific issue raised in the course regard African American women's history. We will develop the topics, paper proposals, and bibliographies for the paper throughout the semester.

**Grade Breakdown:**

Short Papers: 40%

Final Research Paper: 40%

    Research Proposal: 5%

    Bibliography: 5%

    Paper: 30%

Participation: (Engagement, Regular Attendance, Avoiding the lure of your phone): 20%

**Course Materials:**

Gill, Tiffany, Beauty Shop Politics: African American Women's Activism in the Beauty Industry

Harris, LaShawn, Sex Workers, Psychics, and Numbers Runners: Black Women in New York City's Underground Economy

Jacobs, Harriet, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl (available online: <http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/jacobs/jacobs.html>)

Le Flouria, Talitha, Chained in Silence: Black Women and Convict Labor in the New South

McGuire, Danielle. At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance—A New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power

**Course Schedule:**

**Black Women in American History: Hypervisibility and Invisibility**

Syllabus Review

Big Questions

**Slavery and Gender in the Most Peculiar of Institutions**

**Have Read:** Jacobs, Chapters 1-10

**Black Motherhood and the Households that Slavery Built**

**Have Read:** Jacobs, Chapters 11-20

**The Ties that Bind Gender and Race: African-American Women, Slavery and Claims to True Womanhood**

**Have Read:** Complete Harriet Jacobs

**From Slavery to Freedom?**

**Have Read:** LeFlouria, Prologue, Introduction, Chapter One

**The Blueprint for Mass Incarceration**

**Have Read:** LeFlouria, Chapter Two

***First Short Paper:***

**A Response to Russell Simmons**

Russell Simmons's YouTube Channel "All Def Digital" presented a 'comedy' skit, in which abolitionist Harriet Tubman blackmails a slave owner with a sex tape. This skit was not well-received by many. If you worked for Simmons's company, how would you explain to your boss that the idea may not be the best idea. Use your knowledge of black women and slavery to respond.

### **The Old Jim Crow**

**Have Read:** LeFlouria, Chapter Three and Four

### **Gendered Violence and Incarceration**

**Have Read:** Complete the LeFlouria Book

### **#TeamNatural Before Twitter**

**Have Read:** Gill, Introduction and Chapter One

### **The Power of Hair**

**Have Read:** Gill, Chapter Two

### ***Second Short Paper:***

#### **An Exhibit About Black Women and Incarceration for the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History Due**

If the National Museum of African American History and Culture wanted to present an exhibition on black women and incarceration, what 6 items would you include in the project. Write a memo to a curator about why these items can tell a compelling story.

OR

You are an assistant to a developer in the Atlanta metro area. The developer is thinking about repurposing former prisons into luxury housing. You think that this may not be the best idea. How would you use the information from *Chained in Silence* to convince the developer to reconsider the plan?

### **Looking Good for the Cause**

**Have Read:** Gill, Chapter Three and Four

### **The Politics of Beauty**

**Have Read:** Complete Gill

### **Making a Way out of No Way**

**Have Read:** Harris, Introduction, Chapter One

### ***Third Short Paper:***

#### **Hair Raising Politics: The Military, Michelle, and Miss Howard Reflection Paper**

The U.S. military recently determined that many popular hairstyles worn by African American women are not in compliance with military standards. If you were a deputy assistant in the

Office of Protocol, how would you advise your supervisor in making policy decisions about black women and grooming?

## **PAPER PROPOSALS DUE**

### **Playing the Numbers**

**Have Read:** Harris, Chapters Two and Three

### **Sex (Economies) in the City**

**Have Read:** Harris, Chapter Four

### **Many Ways to Make a Living**

**Have Read:** Harris, Chapter Five

### **Black Women and Sexual Assault, A Different Freedom Struggle**

**Have Read:** McGuire, Prologue Chapter One

### ***Fourth Short Paper:***

#### **Film Pitch for Black Women in New York Documentary Due Friday**

If you were an aspiring documentarian and you wanted to make a film about black women in New York City, what would you include in your pitch for the project? What are the kinds of issues your film would address?

### **Everyday Resistance**

**Have Read:** McGuire, Chapter 2

### **Sisterhood is Powerful**

**Have Read:** McGuire, Chapter 3

### **Civil Rights and Gender**

**Have Read:** McGuire, Chapter 4

### **Race and Gender Taken Together**

**Have Read:** McGuire, Chapter 5

### **A Different Story of Civil Rights**

**Have Read:** McGuire, Chapter 6

### **Sex and Civil Rights**

**Have Read:** McGuire, Chapter 7

### **Free Joan Little!**

**Have Read:** Complete McGuire, Chapter and Conclusion

### **Film Screening**

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***Fifth Short Paper: Reparative and Restorative Justice for Victims of Sexual Assault due on***  
You are a member of a state commission that is exploring reparations for victims of racial injustice in Alabama. If you wanted to make a case for reparations for the women we read about in the McGuire book, how would you frame your advocacy strategy?

**PAPER BIBLIOGRAPHIES DUE!**

**Final Thoughts, Course Evaluation**

**Final Papers**