

Feminist and Queer Waves: Reading Canon in Context

Mondays, 11:05 am-12:30 pm: Dudley Lawrence Living Room

Thursdays, 11:05 am-12:30 pm: Alternating archival research day at Yonkers Public Library and Sarah Lawrence Library

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Course Description

In *Waves*, we'll move *backwards* through feminist and queer time as we revisit "classic" pieces within their original historical contexts. Each week we'll look at a deeply influential piece and locate and locate it in place and time by naming its political, intellectual, and social exigencies.

Our goal is to read these texts with close attention and care, asking how they reflect the urgent desires, controversies, frictions, and joys of multiple communities. These are emotionally and intellectually difficult pieces of writing, and it may take us a while to find our bearing as we commit to our time travel. I love many of these pieces, but I'm also disappointed and disturbed by others. Our authors each write from the specifics of their own experience, offering frequently contradictory arguments about the way the world does—and should—work.

Together, we'll build narratives about queer and feminist theoretical history that honor these complexities.

Major Assignments and Grading

As part of work together, we'll build a co-authored public website that will house a timeline, theory cloud, and a digital exhibit of images from your archival research. You'll be responsible for curating discussion for one class period. For your final conference work, you'll conduct an independent project at either the Yonkers Public Library or the Sarah Lawrence College Archives.

Community Membership (15% of final grade):

A classroom is a strange kind of group of people, with its own rules of membership and participation. How can we intentionally build this community together? We will co-author this section of the syllabus together based on an assessment of our individual strengths and our shared goals for our work together. I'll update the syllabus with this co-authored statement, which will provide the grounds for my assessment of your work.

Public "Genealogical" Website (22.5% of final grade):

Each week you will upload short reading notes for each text and your own independent archival research to the class blog. You'll use tagging to name key movements, theories, terms, and time periods. In 5-10 sentences for *each* reading and *each* archival document during your visit to your archive, your reading notes should summarize the key arguments and make a historical or theoretical connections to other texts. These class tags will come together to produce a timeline and a cloud of key concepts across feminist and queer thought. This cloud should grow and morph as we move through time together, and it will part of the public digital archive of the work we do.

Weekly Discussion Curation (22.5% of final grade):

You will be responsible for framing one weekly discussion by yourself or with another member of the class. Discussion curations will begin in week 4.

Due seven days BEFORE you lead:

- Read all of the week's readings.
- In class one week before discussion day, provide 2-3 guiding questions and 3-5 terms for the class to consider as they read. Upload these to the class blog before class and be prepared to answer any clarifying questions in class.
- Prepare a short (5-10 minutes) presentation that puts the week's focal reading into historical context. Include multimedia from the time of the work and your notes on that additional reading.

The day you lead discussion:

- Offer the class a short presentation to enhance our ability to understand the weekly texts' contexts, including information about authors, relevant social history, and other cultural or intellectual work that emerged at the same time.

Final Genealogical Project (40% of final grade)

For your final conference writing, you will write about the history of a single feminist concept, term, or topic, tracing that idea across course texts and archival research in a 18–25-page final paper or comparable project. I'm very open to discussing alternate projects that meet the goals of synthesizing this work and engaging with the archives—do discuss this with me earlier in the semester if you'd like to pursue a different genre.

Your final project will:

- Trace a specific, located term of appropriate scope for a paper this length (i.e. "Race" or "Black Sexualities" are both extremely large concepts for a single piece of writing, but "Black lesbian community" may be a more approachable slice.).
- If you are conducting your research at YPL, you'll chose a term that is specifically relevant to the YPL's public outreach, community building, or local history work.
- Make it clear how your readings and research have helped to define, center, resist, or otherwise respond to your key term. While many of the course texts may use this term explicitly, others may respond obliquely, or with willful ignorance. (For example, how might you understand "disability and sexuality" within a text like "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" that does not directly mention ableism or disability?)
- Summarize key texts succinctly and fairly for an audience of peers (undergraduate interdisciplinary scholars of feminism), synthesizing their contributions to developing your key term.

Class Resources

Course Texts: All readings will be posted on my.sl.c. Please prepare each week's readings listed on the schedule before that class period. For example, for the first day of class, read "'The Archive' is Not an Archives: Acknowledging the Intellectual Contributions of Archival Studies" by Michelle Caswell (2016).

Dis/ability: I am committed to making this course useful and accessible to the widest possible range of students. I will often need your help to make this commitment a reality. Please talk to me about ways that I can structure the course or a specific happening to suit your own learning needs,

whether or not you are registered with [Access and Disability Services](#).

If you have a disability that may interfere with your ability to participate in the activities, coursework, or assessment of the objectives of this course, please contact Daniel Chan by email at dchan@sarahlawrence.edu.

Students with Dependents: University classrooms rarely recognize the unique needs of students with dependents. Please let me know in advance should circumstances require you to bring a dependent to a happening. Breastfeeding children are always welcome.

Additional resources:

- [The Library's Research Assistance and Tools](#): students can meet with a research librarian and access research resources
- [Learning Commons](#): offers academic coaching for time management, organization, note-taking and effective reading; individualized writing support; peer tutoring in math, science, and some languages; workshop series on a variety of academic support topics.
- [Dean of Studies Office](#): helps students and dons navigate academic policies; serves as a resource referral for students
- [DEI@SLC](#): the college offers a number of programs and resources pertaining to diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging
- [Health and Wellness Center](#): provides compassionate, confidential care for students' medical and psychological health concerns

Weekly Schedule

Class is scheduled twice weekly with a "discussion day" and a "research day." In the first two weeks of class, we will use our research day for full group trips to the Sarah Lawrence College Archives and the Yonkers Public Library. Beginning in week three, you will meet with your research group on alternating weeks as scheduled below.

Week 1 (Monday, September 4): Archives

- "The Archive' is Not an Archives: Acknowledging the Intellectual Contributions of Archival Studies" by Michelle Caswell (2016)

(Thursday, September 7) Research Day: Sarah Lawrence Library

- **Everyone** meets at Sarah Lawrence Library Archives
- Sign-up: Choose week for curating discussion
- "The Ethics of Archival Research" by Heidi A. McKee and James E. Porter (2012)
- **Choose** of these depending on your interests:
 - a. "The 'Stuff' of Archives: Mess, Migration, and Queer Lives" by Martin, F. Manalansan IV (2014) [Manalansan The Stuff of Archives.pdf](#)
 - b. "The Rhetorical Power of Archival Description: Classifying Images of Gender Transgression" by K.J. Rawson (2018)

Week 2: (Monday, September 11) Genealogies, Histories, Taxonomies, Bibliographies

- "Intersectionality and Its Discontents" by Jennifer Nash (2017)

- “Doing Justice with Objects: Or, the ‘Progress’ of Gender” and “Telling Time: When Feminism and Queer Theory Diverge” from *Object Lessons* by Robyn Wiegman (2012)
- “What’s Queer About Queer Studies Now?” by David L. Eng with Judith Halberstam and José Esteban Muñoz (2005)

Research Day: (Thursday, September 14) Yonkers Public Library

- **Everyone** meets at the Yonkers Public Library (we will start/end 30 minutes after/before our scheduled class time)
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Week 3: (Monday, September 18) *Citizen: An American Lyric* by Claudia Rankine (2014)

- “The Wake” from *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* by Christina Sharpe (2016)
- “Introduction,” “Nina Simone and the Work of Minoritarian Performance,” and “Epilogue” from *After the Party* by Joshua Chambers-Letson (2018)
- “Introduction,” “Gender and Sexuality,” “Politics, Gender, and Race,” and “Back to Me” from *Bad Feminist* by Roxane Gay
- Sign-up: Choose Archival Research Group

Research Day: (Thursday, September 21) Group 1 meets at the Sarah Lawrence College Archives

Week 4: (Monday, September 25) “Venus in Two Acts” by Saidiya Hartman (2008)

- Discussion curation begins.
- “Introduction” and “The Everyday Life of Queer Trauma” from *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* by Anne Cvetkovich (2003)
- “Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic” by Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley (2008)
- “Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter” by Karen Barad (2003)
- “Toward a Decolonial Feminism” by María Lugones (2010)

Research Day: (Thursday, September 28) Group 2 meets at the Yonkers Public Library

Week 5: (Monday, October 2) “Paranoid and Reparative Reading, or, You’re So Paranoid You Probably Think This Essay Is About You” by Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick (1997)

- “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics” by Cathy Cohen (1997)
- *The Vagina Monologues* (play) by Eve Ensler (1996)
- “Diminishing Returns: Can Black Feminism(s) Survive the Academy?” by Barbara Christian (1994)
- “My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage” by Susan Stryker (1994)

Research Day: (Thursday, October 5) Group 1 meets at the Sarah Lawrence College Archives

Week 6: (Monday, October 9) “The Evidence of Experience” by Joan W. Scott (1991)

- “Looking for Trouble” by Kobena Mercer (1991)
- *Paris is Burning* (film) directed by Jennie Livingston 1990

- “Mammies, Matriarchs, and Other Controlling Images” in *Black Feminist Thought* by Patricia Hill Collins (1990)

Research Day: (Thursday, October 12) Group 2 meets at the Yonkers Public Library

Week 7: (Monday, October 16) **October Study Day**

Research Day: (Thursday, October 19) Group 1 meets at the Sarah Lawrence College Archives

Week 8: (Monday, October 23) “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics” by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989)

- “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe” by Hortense Spillers (1987)
- “Can the Subaltern Speak?” by Gayatri Spivak (1988)
- *Tongues Untied* (film) by Marlon Riggs (1989)

Research Day: (Thursday, October 26) Group 2 meets at the Yonkers Public Library

Week 9: (Monday October 30) “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution” by Judith Butler (1988)

- “The Race for Theory” by Barbara Christian (1987)
- “La Conciencia de la Mestiza / Towards a New Consciousness” from *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza* by Gloria Anzaldúa (1987)
- “Notes Toward a Politics of Location” by Adrienne Rich (1984)

Research Day: (Thursday, November 2) Group 1 meets at the Sarah Lawrence College Archives

Week 10: (Monday, November 6) “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of Sexuality” by Gayle Rubin (1984)

- “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence” by Adrienne Rich (1980)
- “A Woman Writer and Pornography” by Andrea Dworkin (1980)
- “Foreward” by Toni Cade, “Preface by Cherríe L. Moraga, “Introduction” by Cherríe L. Moraga and Gloria E. Anzaldúa, and “The Bridge Poem” by Kate Rushin from *This Bridge Called My Back* edited by Cherríe L. Moraga and Gloria E. Anzaldúa (1981)

Research Day: (Thursday, November 9) Group 2 meets at the Yonkers Public Library

Week 11: (Monday, November 13) “Combahee Collective Statement” by Barbara Smith, Demita Frazier and Beverly Smith (1977)

- “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex” by Gayle Rubin (1975)
- “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power” by Audre Lorde (1978)
- “Wages Against Housework” by Silvia Federeci (1975)
- “Toward a Black Feminist Criticism” by Barbara Smith (1975)

Research Day: (Thursday, November 16) Group 1 meets at the Sarah Lawrence College Archives

Week 12: (Monday, November 20) "The Cult of True Womanhood 1820-1860" by Barbara Welter (1966)

- "The Woman-Identified Woman" by Artemis March, Lois Hart, Rita Mae Brown, Ellen Shumsky, Cynthia Funk, and Barbara XX (1970)
- "Equal Rights for Women" by Shirley Chisom (1969)
- "The Redstockings Manifesto" by Ellen Willis, Kathie Sarachild, Irene Peslikis, Patricia Mainardi, and Karen Rappaport
- "Program for Consciousness-Raising" by Kathie Sarachild (1968)

Research Day: (Thursday, November 23) Holiday break

Weeks 13-15: We will build the final two weeks of the semester together based on our joint assessment of gaps/opportunities from our readings so far.

November 30: Group 2 meets at the Yonkers Public Library.

December 7: Group 1 meets at the Sarah Lawrence College Archives.

December 14: Group 2 meets at the Yonkers Public Library.