

8.26.22 draft – subject to change!

Gender, Race, and Class: Freedom Beyond Rights
AAST 375-001/WS 375-001
Department of Gender and Race Studies
The University of Alabama
Fall 2022

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Office: Presidents Hall 314
Office hours: R, 11:00-1:00

Class: T/R 2:00-3:15
Classroom: Lloyd Hall 318

Course description

Feminism understands itself to be fundamentally liberatory - that is, concerned with increasing liberty, particularly (but not exclusively) of women. Feminist political theory often treats freedom within a liberal framework that prioritizes individual rights: for example, the right to control one's reproductive health, the right to equal pay, or the right not to experience harassment. According to this framework, to be free is to enjoy one's rights without interference or limitation.

The aim of this course is to think about freedom beyond rights. Specifically, we will consider 1) what it means to be a free political actor, 2) whether freedom is the highest political good, 3), whether, and how, freedom is compatible with other values, such as equality and justice, and 4) how different kinds of politics, social norms, and modes of living might affect attempts to increase and experience freedom. We will also consider the consequences of a normative commitment to freedom and question, in the words of Saba Mahmood, "the ways in which these liberal presuppositions [of freedom and autonomy] have become naturalized in the scholarship on gender."

We will begin in the first section of the course by familiarizing ourselves with the tenets of liberal individualism. From there we will turn to different modes of life and political practices that explicitly reject the liberal individualist framework of rights. We will focus on communities of resistance, the liberatory potential of art, and indigenous practices of refusal.

Required texts

Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals* (978-0393357622)
Nella Larsen, *Passing* (978-0142437278)
Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance* (978-1517903862) – available as library e-book

Reading schedule

Readings marked with an asterisk (*) require you to complete an annotation set before the class where it will be discussed (details are below in the section titled **Assignments**).

I. Introduction

Thu., Aug. 18 Orlando Patterson, "The Ancient and Medieval Origins of Modern Freedom," in *The Problem of Evil*, eds. Steven Mintz and John Stauffer (2006), pp. 31-66.

Tue., Aug. 23 * Patterson, "Freedom, Slavery, and the Modern Construction of Rights," in *The Cultural Values of Europe*, eds. Hans Joas and Klaus Wiegandt (2008), pp. 115-151.

Practice annotation: after reading *Annotation Tips for Students*, access the Hypothesis assignment for this reading on Blackboard and familiarize yourself with the interface.

- Highlight the title of one of the readings that seems interesting to you.
- Look up one of the authors we'll read and link their faculty page or Wikipedia page to their name in the syllabus.
- Pick one of the section headings (for example, 'IV. Freedom as experiments in living') and annotate it with one or two sentences about what you'd like to get out of this class.

II. Freedom and individual agency

Thu., Aug. 25 * Nancy Hirschmann, "Toward a Feminist Theory of Freedom," *Political Theory* 24.1 (1996): 46-67.

Tue., Aug. 30 Sharon Krause, "Non-sovereign Agency," in *Freedom Beyond Sovereignty: Reconstructing Liberal Individualism* (2015), pp. 21-57.

Thu., Sep. 1 * Krause, "Plural Freedom," in *Freedom Beyond Sovereignty*, pp. 165-184.

Tue., Sep. 6 **Peer review workshop – paper #1 outline due at 2 pm**

III. Freedom as choice

Thu., Sep. 8 * Jennifer Baumgardner, and Amy Richards, "The Number One Question about Feminism," *Feminist Studies* 29.2 (2003): 448-452.

Rachel Thwaites, "Making a Choice or Taking a Stand? Choice Feminism, Political Engagement and the Contemporary Feminist Movement," *Feminist Theory* 18.1 (2017): 55-68.

Tue., Sep. 13 Sheryl Sandberg, *Lean In*, excerpt

Catherine Rottenberg, "The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism," *Cultural Studies* 28.3 (2014): 418-437.

Paper #1 due at 2 pm

Thu., Sep. 15 *No class – Professor Gallagher at APSA*

Tue., Sep. 20 * Uma Narayan, “Minds of Their Own: Choices, Autonomy, Cultural Practices, and Other Women,” in *A Mind of One’s Own: Feminist Essays on Reason and Objectivity*, eds. Louise M. Antony and Charlotte Wise, pp. 418-432.

IV. Freedom as experiments in living

Thu., Sep. 22 * Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women and Queer Radicals* (2019), pp. xiii-xv, 3-42.

Tue., Sep. 27 Hartman, *Wayward Lives*, pp. 45-76.

Thu., Sep. 29 Hartman, *Wayward Lives*, pp. 123-153.

Tue., Oct. 4 Hartman, *Wayward Lives*, pp. 177-202.

Thu., Oct. 6 Hartman, *Wayward Lives*, pp. 297-325.

Tue., Oct. 11 Hartman, *Wayward Lives*, pp. 325-349.

Thu., Oct. 13 * Nella Larsen, *Passing* (1929), part I

Tue., Oct. 18 Larsen, *Passing*, part II

Thu., Oct. 20 Larsen, *Passing*, part III

Tue., Oct. 25 **Peer review workshop – paper #2 outline due at 2 pm**

Thu., Oct. 27 *No class – Professor Gallagher at APT – work on your papers!*

V. Freedom through art

Tue., Nov. 1 Angela Y. Davis, “Blame It on the Blues: Bessie Smith, Gertrude ‘Ma’ Rainey, and the Politics of Blues Protest,” in *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude “Ma” Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday* (1998), pp. 91-119.

Thu., Nov. 3 Davis, “When a Woman Loves a Man: Social Implications of Billie Holiday’s Love Songs,” in *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*, pp. 161-180.

Paper #2 due at 2 pm

Tue., Nov. 8 * Davis, “‘Strange Fruit’: Music and Social Consciousness,” in *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*, pp. 181-198.

VI. Freedom as resistance and resurgence

Thu., Nov. 10 Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, “My Radical Resurgent Present” and “Nishnaabeg Brilliance as Radical Resurgence Theory,” in *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance* (2017), pp. 1-25.

Tue., Nov. 15 * Simpson, “Kwe as Resurgent Method” and “The Attempted Dispossession of Kwe,” in *As We Have Always Done*, pp. 27-54.

Thu., Nov. 17 Simpson, “Nishnaabeg Internationalism” and “Indigenous Queer Normativity,” in *As We Have Always Done*, pp. 55-70 and 119-144.

Peer review workshop – paper #3 outline due at 2 pm

Tue., Nov. 22 Thanksgiving

Thu., Nov. 24 Thanksgiving

Tue., Nov. 29 Dead week

Thu., Dec. 1 Dead week

Exam week **Paper #3 due**

Course objectives

As the instructor, I will:

- introduce students to major texts and debates within the subfield of feminist political theory.
- situate the texts within their historical context.
- connect the course materials to present-day concerns.
- familiarize students with the wide range of academic resources available to them on campus.
- facilitate the development of students’ writing skills by providing frequent written feedback, as well as opportunities for peer review workshops.

Student learning outcomes

By the end of the semester, you will be able to:

- identify and describe the major philosophical approaches to freedom within contemporary feminist political theory.
- distinguish between various schools of feminist thought, such as liberal feminism, radical feminism, queer feminist thought, and Black feminist thought.
- critically evaluate texts. More particularly, you will be able to identify and appraise an essay's central argument and the key evidence used to support it.
- apply general theoretical arguments to specific contemporary issues beyond those discussed within the texts themselves.

Assignments

Annotations (20%): Readings marked with an asterisk (*) require you complete a set of annotations via Blackboard, using an integrated app called Hypothesis. There are eight readings tagged, plus an introduction/trial one; you need to complete five annotation sets over the semester. If you do annotation sets for the other three readings, they will count as extra credit. I will distribute a separate handout with guidance about how to do the annotations. Annotations are due at midnight the night before class.

Preparation and participation (20%): This class will be discussion-based and so regular attendance, preparation, and participation are required. Regular attendance will facilitate the development of our class community, which will in turn improve the quality of our discussions. There will be ample opportunity for participation, both in class discussions and in smaller groups. Other forms of engagement, like asking questions, volunteering to read passages aloud, and meeting during my office hours, also count toward this!

Writing assignments (60% total): There are three writing assignments for the class, worth 15%, 20%, and 25% of the final grade.

- The first paper will explore your own understanding of freedom (750 words/3 pages).
- The second paper will ask you to create a “critical fabulation” in the style of Saidiya Hartman’s *Wayward Lives* (1250 words/5 pages).
- The third paper will require textual analysis of a reading from the second half of the course (2000-2500 words/8-10 pages).
- A one-page outline for each paper will be due in advance for a peer review workshop.

Grading policy

A (100-90): demonstrates careful and thorough reading of the text; answers all parts of the question(s); provides a clearly articulated thesis; outlines the way in which thesis will be explicated; defends and supports thesis in the body of the paper using textual evidence; considers counter-arguments, if appropriate; argues, does not summarize; structurally elegant; writing is clear and straightforward. Excellent work.

B (89-80): demonstrates familiarity with the text, though may rely more on lecture and discussion than on own reading, or may demonstrate a cursory reading; provides a solid thesis but may not explain how it will be defended, support it thoroughly with textual references, or develop arguments as fully as they ought to; may make selective use of text to support claims; structurally, individual points may feel disconnected from one another. Writing is clear but with room for improvement. Good, but not excellent, work.

C (79-70): a weak, if appropriate or topical, thesis that either does not require a strong defense or relate entirely to the original question(s); demonstrates minimal passing acquaintance with the material; evidence may be drawn primarily from lecture; substance of paper may tend toward summary of the text rather than critical engagement; does not attend to counter-arguments; individual paragraphs may be well-crafted but the paper overall lacks a sense of cohesion and attention to detail. Fair, but not good, work.

D (69-60): does not provide a clear thesis; may not respond to the question(s); does not support claims with evidence; emphasizes opinion or summary over analysis; paper lacks structure; does not otherwise demonstrate mastery of the concepts presented and analyzed in class; lack of organization makes paper difficult to follow; neglect of grammar, style, and writing.

F (59-0): does not provide a thesis or respond to the question(s); may be purely opinion or summary of text(s); no attempt to convey an interpretation of the material; lacking structure, coherence; no attention paid to grammar, style, and writing.

Policy on extensions, missed exams, and late coursework

A two-day extension can be requested for any paper, as long as it is done at least 48 hours in advance of the regular due date, via email. No explanation is required.

Late assignments will lose one-third of a letter grade (i.e., an A- becomes a B+) for every day that they are late, including weekends, except in cases of illness or other documented emergencies. It is always better to turn things in late than not turn them in at all!

Assignments not submitted will receive an F. All assignments must be submitted in order to pass the course. I reserve the right to alter any reading or writing assignments during the semester.

Attendance policy

This class will be discussion-based and so regular attendance, preparation, and participation are required. Regular attendance will facilitate the development of our class community, which will in turn improve the quality of our discussions. This holds for Zoom meetings as well as any in-person meetings.

You may miss three classes (excluding peer review workshops) for any reason, no explanation necessary. It is your responsibility to keep track of the number of absences you have remaining. Any more than three absences will detract from your participation grade.

Recording policy

Without prior approval from the instructor of this course, students may not record course content and/or post course content publicly, including on social media sites. Students who record and/or post course content without instructor approval may be referred to the Office of Student Conduct for disciplinary action.

Office hours

I will hold scheduled office hours on Thursdays from 11 to 1. If you're not available then, send me an email with three or four times that you would be available to Zoom over the next few days and I will get back to you with a confirmation.

If you are absent, it is a particularly good idea to make sure you're caught up. Please know that you do not need to be struggling to come to office hours! I am happy to discuss particular readings, written assignments, how our work connects to other classes, or the class in general.

Academic resources

Please feel free to consult with [the UA Writing Center](#). For questions about formatting, grammar, and other more technical aspects of writings, [the Purdue Online Writing Lab](#) is the best online resource.

The Gender and Race Studies Department works with Dr. Sarah Sahn (sfsahn@ua.edu), a Research & Instructional Services Librarian. Dr. Sahn can help with refining a topic and making a research plan, figuring out how best to search for information on a specific topic and identifying the best databases, locating specific resources, and citing them properly. She can also help with citation managers (especially Zotero). Students are welcome to make appointments to meet with her in person or in small groups. She can also meet via video conferencing or answer questions over email.

Academic integrity

Students are expected to be familiar with and adhere to the official [Academic Misconduct Policy](#) provided in the Online Catalog.

Accessibility

I am committed to the full inclusion of all students. Students with disabilities are encouraged to register with the [Office of Disability Services](#) (204.348.4285; TTY 205.348.3081). If you have a diagnosis, ODS can help you document your needs and create an accommodation plan. By making a plan through ODS you can ensure appropriate accommodations without disclosing your condition or

diagnosis to course instructors. Thereafter, you are invited to contact me by e-mail or schedule an appointment to discuss accommodations based on any kind of disability, whether apparent or non-apparent, learning, emotional, physical, or cognitive (if you wish to do so). If, at any point in the semester, you find yourself not able to fully access the space, content, and experience of this course, again, you are welcome (and not required) to contact me to discuss your specific needs.

If you are pregnant and will need accommodations for this class, please see the [University's FAQs](#) on the UAct website.

Content note

Given the nature of the course, some of the materials we read will deal with topics that may have personal resonance, such as misogyny, sexual violence, abuse, and racism. If there are specific materials or topics that you anticipate will be particularly challenging for you, I'd be happy to discuss any concerns you may have beforehand and, if necessary, find alternative materials.

If you ever feel the need to step outside during a class discussion (literally or virtually), you may always do so without academic penalty. You will, however, be responsible for any material you miss. If you do leave the room for a significant time, please make arrangements to get notes from another student or see me individually to discuss the situation.

You will also undoubtedly be exposed to views and beliefs that differ from your own, both in the readings and in discussion. You're neither obliged nor encouraged to agree with, or accept, them; your responsibility is only to engage with them thoughtfully and respectfully.

Personal resources

If you face challenges securing food or housing and believes this may affect your performance in the course, I urge you to contact the Dean of Students - specifically [the Office of Student Care and Wellbeing](#) - for support. Furthermore, if you are comfortable in doing so, feel free to notify me. This will help me to connect you with available resources.

For students dealing with anxiety, depression, distress, or other concerns, the [Counseling Center](#) can offer resources. They can be reached 24 hours a day at 205.348.3863.

[The Women and Gender Resource Center](#) (205.348.5040) provides free, confidential, and voluntary counseling and advocacy services to members of the UA community who are victims/survivors of interpersonal violence. Services are also provided to family and friends who have been impacted by the abuse, to Shelton State students, and to anyone who is victimized on the UA campus.

Resources outside of UA include the [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#) (1.800.799.7233) and [RAINN's National Sexual Assault Telephone Hotline](#) (1.800.656.HOPE); both of these organizations also offer a chat option.

As an instructor, one of my responsibilities is to help sustain a safe learning environment on our campus. I also have a mandatory reporting responsibility and am required to share with the University information regarding sexual misconduct or information about a crime that is related to me. I can, though, help connect you to resources like those above.

Religious observances

Under the Guidelines for Religious Holiday Observances, students should notify the instructor in writing or via email during the first two weeks of the semester of their intention to be absent from class for religious observance. The instructor will work to provide reasonable opportunity to complete academic responsibilities as long as that does not interfere with the academic integrity of the course. See full guidelines at [Religious Holiday Observances Guidelines](#).

Land acknowledgment

The University of Alabama is located within the ancestral homelands of many Indigenous nations: Ma-Chis Lower Creeks, Poarch Band of Creeks, Echota Cherokees, Cherokee Tribe of Northeast Alabama, United Cherokee Ani-Yun-Wiya Nation, Cher-O-Creek Intra Tribal Indians, Southeastern Mvskoke Nation, MOWA Band of Choctaws, Piqua Shawnee Tribe.

Along with these federally and state-recognized tribes, there are many that have been removed, forcefully relocated to other parts of the southern United States: Seminole, Muscogee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Cherokee, Quapaw Osage and Illinois Confederation. Their forced removal from Alabama and surrounding lands by the Trail of Tears and other removals, along with attempts to assimilate and eliminate these tribes have been detrimental to their preservation, culture, and population today.

We are grateful for their generosity and contributions to our communities, state, nation, and around the globe.

The local infrastructure and the larger Tuscaloosa community are built on Choctaw lands, while the surrounding region encompasses Creek territories as well. The histories of many Native nations are deeply rooted in Alabama, while the present and future lives of our neighbors--including the Poarch Creek, Mississippi Choctaws, and other tribal communities--remain closely connected to this land. In recognition of these relationships, Bama Indigenous Students Organization and Network (BISON) is committed to telling stories that reflect and preserve the experiences of all Alabamians, including Alabama's Indigenous people.