

Topic: ***Critical Race Feminism: Reconfiguring feminist theory through the critical lens of colonialism, racism, and slavery***

Tuesday and Thursday 14:35-15:55

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Office hours: Thursdays 17:00-19:00 (on phone or Skype)

The land on which this class takes place is traditional and unceded territory of the Kanien'keha:ka (Mohawk), a place which has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst nations.

Format of Remote Delivery

This class will take place live on Zoom as much as possible. This means you should set aside Tuesdays and Thursdays 14:35—15:55 (EST) every week. However, from time to time, a Thursday session may be replaced by an audio podcast, recorded by the instructor. How often this happens, and whether continuing to hold live sessions twice a week is viable or desirable for all of us, will be something we discuss at the end of drop/add period. You should plan on twice weekly Zoom classes being the default format of the class, with adjustments based on our experience as a group.

I teach this course as a *seminar*. This means that each class begins with your ideas/feedback/questions about that week's reading. I then weave my explication of the text around our discussion. There are no preset lectures. Antiracist and decolonial learning cannot happen without such robust discussion.

For students in different time zones, I will try to record our live Zoom classes; however, please note that this depends on consent from *all* students involved in that discussion, ahead of time. Recordings will be restricted to students registered in the class, available only on *MyCourses*, and are under copyright. Recordings will be deleted at the end of the academic year from the *MyCourses* server.

While you are strongly encouraged to attend all the live Zoom classes, your attendance/participation grade will be contingent on your attending *at least one class per week*.

Note that I will begin Zoom sessions five minutes before class time and stay afterwards for anything you wish to chat about.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The exclusion and dismissal of the voices of racialized subjects from philosophy is, by now, well documented. The assumption has been that “women of colour” can find a better home within the feminist movement. Our marginalization from feminist theorizing and practice has been a contentious topic both within “mainstream” feminism and in racialized and colonized struggles. It often leads either to a silencing of our voices within “mainstream” feminism, or to a rejection of the feminist label in favour of the struggle for racial justice. (Please note that the term “women of colour” has its problems, but I use it in a broad understanding that takes neither “woman” nor “colour” to be fixed or biologically defined.)

This either/or is one that critical race feminists seek to deconstruct—neither giving up our positionality as gendered, nor as racialized. Critical race feminists thus argue that gender cannot be understood as a universal or baseline category, nor can it simply be complicated by adding other layers or intersections of identity. Rather, a different mode of feminist theorizing and practice is made possible when colonized/racialized women's voices, in their differences and complex experiences, are centred in the analysis.

This will be the approach adopted in this course. It means that you will likely encounter thinkers not included in the canonical philosophical curriculum (though that is changing in contemporary feminist philosophy). We will begin by considering several methodological questions, with the aim of introducing concepts that will be useful to us in the rest of the course: white or colonial ignorance; the affective weight of colonial durations; intersectionality; ungendering.

The rest of the course will focus on a number of thinkers in the Black feminist tradition: Hortense Spillers, Saidiya Hartman, Toni Morrison, Angela Davis, bell hooks. (Note that this course cannot offer a survey of all critical race feminism, nor is such a survey desirable. Our aim will be to read Black feminist thinkers carefully and deeply, so as to allow their texts to reconfigure our received understandings of racism, slavery, colonialism.)

Please note that this is a course in formation, so we will be creating the content together. Your active engagement in class is essential. Some of the material will be difficult to read. It evokes affective subaltern experiences, of violence and oppression, that have been suppressed and actively disregarded in the colonial formations that structure our present. Some of the authors we are reading re-imagine, or as Toni Morrison says *re-member*, these experiences in ways that make reading them affectively complicated. These works deserve attentive, engaged, and critically generous reading.

Prerequisites: *PHIL 242 and one intermediate course in philosophy, or instructor permission.*

TEXTS

There are three books available at *Paragraphe Bookstore*, which can be purchased in-person or online at <https://paragraphebooks.com/collections/textbooks/PHIL-442>. (If you want to search for the books yourself, please make sure you get the editions listed.)

1. Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford University Press, 1997). ISBN: 978-0-19-508984-4 Paperback
2. Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A journey along the Atlantic slave route* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007). ISBN: 978-0-374-531157 Paperback
3. Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (Vintage International, 2004). ISBN: 978-1-4000-3341-6 Paperback

All other readings will be posted to MyCourses.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADES:

You are required to write two papers: the first paper is worth 40% and the second paper is a term paper worth 50%. The remaining 10% depends on your attendance and participation in discussion.

- (1) The **first paper, worth 40%**, should be **5 pages** in length, double-spaced. This paper should deal with a concept, problem or question, drawing on texts discussed in the first half of the course. The paper must involve a *critical* discussion of the topic chosen.

There are two possible formats:

- A. An analysis of *one thinker* and critical evaluation of her version of critical race feminist theory. Your analysis should include the positive contributions of the theory, as well its limitations, and should take a considered position with respect to the theory.
- B. A critical comparison of *two thinkers* of your choosing. You should show connections as well as differences. The comparison is not meant to be exhaustive, but should concentrate on specific concepts and/or consequences of their theories (i.e., you are responsible for defining the parameters of the comparison). The comparison should not be merely expository, rather it should lead you to take a position with respect to the two thinkers.

(2) The **second paper is a term paper, worth 50%**, and should be approximately **7 pages** in length, double-spaced. The topic of this paper is to be designed by you. It must be a critical paper, along one of the two possible formats described above.

(3) **Participation and attendance, worth 10%.**

- Please come to class sessions prepared to discuss the reading. At the beginning of each class, I will ask you to suggest concepts, ideas, and questions that spoke to you from that week's reading in a brain-storming session.
(I will write your ideas on a virtual blackboard, but also ask that you to add them to the Zoom chat so that we have a running list. Note that the Chat cannot be used for questions other than those contributed orally in class, since I will not be able to monitor it while teaching.)
- Contingent on your attendance at least once per week, subject to usual accommodations.
- Optional *note-taking and review*: Your participation grade can be bolstered by volunteering to be a *note-taker*, and to review these notes. I will ask for volunteers, to begin after drop/add period. (Notes will be posted on *MyCourses*, but will not be reviewed by me.)
- Post a self-presentation video/audio file to *MyCourses* during the first two weeks of class. *1-2 minutes*. The aim is for us to get to know each other, since we won't have the physical space of the classroom/hallway that allows for informal discussion before class. (Not graded but required.)

If you require accommodation for any of these assignments, please let me know.

Policy on Email Communications: Before sending an email, please read: <https://emailcharter.wordpress.com/>. Make sure you are not asking a question whose response can be found in this syllabus. If you have a question that requires a long response, please schedule an appointment for my phone office hours. Short and to-the-point emails will be responded to more quickly. Please allow at least 72 hours for a response.

McGILL UNIVERSITY VALUES ACADEMIC INTEGRITY. THEREFORE ALL STUDENTS MUST UNDERSTAND THE MEANING AND CONSEQUENCES OF CHEATING, PLAGIARISM AND OTHER ACADEMIC OFFENCES UNDER THE CODE OF STUDENT CONDUCT AND DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information).

In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.
