

American Women's Autobiography

American Studies 275.01

Spring 2006

MWF 11:00 to 11:50

ARH 130

Office hours: M 1-2, W 1-4:30 & F 1-2

Or by appointment

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DO NO CALL ME AT HOME

Course Overview:

This course will explore the world of American Women's Autobiography through the lens of interdisciplinary studies. What do we learn from how a woman writes about her life? This seemingly simple question raises issues of audience expectations, pedagogical plots, assumptions about gender, and strategies of representation and truth, which are at the heart of our course of study on autobiographies by American women writers. Each of these writers have to contend with ways in which their identities are marked, marginalized, traced, and transformed through changing constitutions of gender and the American experiences. We will inherently intersect in this study of American women's autobiography the core ideas of American Studies, Area Studies and concepts of culture, contents of meaning and notions of power and privileged.

Course Format:

The course will begin with two weeks of lecture on the theoretical and applied aspect of American Woman's autobiography or context by which is has been defined and what it defies in terms of the male genre of "telling stories of the self." It will proceed to discuss and use the methods of American Studies (interdisciplinary lens and discourses) to make meaning of the five autobiographies we are reading. Finally, we will begin the process of writing our own first chapter of our life story based on what we have learned and what we know about woman's ways of doing knowledge, discourse and intersections of oppression and privilege.

Course Objectives:

- Review the historical origins and perspectives of American women's autobiography
- Define autobiography as a genre and explore its sub-categories
- Become familiar with terms related to women's autobiography (**see syllabus**)
- Explain the relationship between specific autobiographical text and the history and politics that inform them
- Related autobiography to other literary and political forms of discourse in terms of artistic and popular cultural forms of knowledge
- Develop an autobiography of self and analyze it through the American Studies lens

Course Requirements:

A. Exams: There will be two class exams (a mid semester exam and a final exam) that will cover prior lectures and reading materials. The final exam is not comprehensive. Both exams are already scheduled in the course syllabus and students are expected to take the exams during class time on those days.

B. Assignments: In addition to the two exams, there will be two required field assignments. These assignments are aimed at determining if you are able to apply

material learned in class. Each assignment will be relatively short in length (3-4 pages), and instructions will be given at least a week prior to when they are due. Assignments should be typed and reflect thoughtful writing skills. Late assignments, if accepted, will be graded down.

C. Attendance and Participation: Your class participation is encouraged, and regular classroom attendance is expected. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each class. Class participation includes in-class exercises, class discussions, and individual and group assigned homework.

D. Grading:

30% Autobiography (First Chapter of Your Own Story)

10% Class Participation (Homework, class presentations, group and field assignments, etc.)

30% Mid Exam (Objective and take home)

30% Final Exam (Essay)

100%

E. The Writing Lab: Students are strongly encouraged to make appointments with staff at the writing Lab to discuss rough drafts of papers. If you use the Writing Lab, please acknowledge the staff person you worked with on your paper.

F. Academic Honesty: You must abide by the rules on plagiarism, outlined in the Student Handbook (p.53), which require that you “acknowledge explicitly any expressions, ideas, or observations that are not” your own. In the case of cooperatively produced work, you must indicate who produced which part of the data or product. If you are unsure of your obligations, please see me.

G. Instructor’s Email Policy: I believe email is a convenient privilege and a technological wonder for enhancing learning but it is NOT a substitute for face-to-face interactions with your instructor. Use the email for urgent class matters to communication with your classmates about assignments. Otherwise, I expect frequent visits during my office hours.

H. Please Note: There will be no extra credit work, no make-up assignments or late paper accepted.

Course Required Texts:

1. Margaret Mead. *Blackberry Winter* 296 pages
2. Mother Jones. *The Autobiography of Mother Jones* 150 pages
3. Dorothy Allison *Bastard Out of Carolina* 309 pages
4. Cherie Moraga *Living in the War Years* 213 pages
5. Assata Shakur *Assata* 272 pages

Reserve Readings:

- To be given by the professor and made available when possible on Blackboard.
- Each student will bring specific theoretical articles on American women’s autobiography and share with the class.

Course Preparedness for Readings and Discussions:

- Each student is required and must be prepared to discuss the texts, articles and lead the class discussion at any given time in the course.
- Each student can best accomplished by reading the assigned readings, outlining the key points and raising critical questions about the work in relation to previous and present question of American women's autobiographical traditions and conventions.
- Each student will be assigned presentations topics to be make for a specific class period, film or outside activity which may require handouts, outlines, etc. to be prepared in advance, duplicated and made available to class members.

Schedule MWF:

WEEK	MWF DAYS
1	Jan 23, 25, 27
2	Jan 30, Feb 1, 3
3	Feb 6, 8, 10
4	Feb 13, 15, 17
5	Feb 20, 22, 24
6	Feb 27, Mar 1, 3
7	Mar 6, 8, 10
8	Mar 13, 15, 17
BREAK	
9	Apr 3, 5, 7
10	Apr 10, 12, 14
11	Apr 17, 19, 21
12	Apr 24, 26, 28
13	May 1, 3, 5
14	May 8, 10, 12
EXAMS	WEEK of May 15-19

Schedule for Writing Autobiography:

- Life stage and stance of autobiography and why due. April 3rd
- Primal event of the first chapter of you autobiography due. April 10th
- First draft of the first chapter of the autobiography due. April 24th
- Autobiographies returned. May 1st.
- And meetings with the professor on first draft May 1st and May 3rd.
- Re-writes and due May 12th
- In Class Readings May 5th, 8th, 10th and 12th **or campus wide readings?**

Course Schedule:

Week 1:

Introduction to the course goals, objectives and requirements.

In class assignment

Discussion of what is American Studies and its relationship to Autobiography

Lectures

Week 2:

Review of the origins and historical development of American Women's Autobiography
Lectures

Week 3:

Discussion of *Blackberry Winter*

Discussion of the text

Text Assignment

Contrast and Comparisons with Self, Women's Autobiographical traditions and intersections of oppression and privilege

Week 4:

Continuation of our examination of *Blackberry Winter*

What do the critics say about the book?

Film on Margaret Mead

Week 5:

Discussion of *Autobiography of Mother Jones*

Discussion of the text

Text Assignment

Contrast and Comparison with Self, American Women's Autobiographical traditions and intersections of oppression and privilege.

Week 6:

Continuation of our examination of *Autobiography of Mother Jones*

What do the critics say about the book?

Second text assignment

Week 7:

Discussion *Bastard Out of Carolina*

Discussion of the text

Text Assignment

Contrast and Comparison with Self, American Women's Autobiographical traditions and intersections of oppression and privilege.

Week 8:

Continuation of our examination of *Bastard Out of Carolina*

What do the critics say about the book?

See an in class film and do a film assignment

Mid-Exam:

Take Home

Due: March 17th

Week 9:**Discussion of *Loving in the War Years***

Discussion of the text

Text Assignment

Contrast and Comparison with Self, American Women's Autobiographical traditions and intersections of oppression and privilege.

Week 10:

Continuation of our examination of *Loving in the War Years*

Review the Latina Women's Autobiographical tradition

Second Text Assignment

Week 11:**Discussion of *Assata***

Discussion of the text

Text Assignment

Contrast and Comparison with Self, American Women's Autobiographical traditions and intersections of oppression and privilege.

Continuation of our examination of *Assata*

What do the critics say about the book?

Review the African American Women's Autobiographical tradition

Second Text Assignment

Week 12:**Areas Studies and Autobiography**

Defining the fields

Class assignments and discussion

Presentations

Week 13:**Theorizing Autobiography**

Defining the fields

Class assignments and discussion

Presentations

Week 14: Readings or Campus wide reading????

In class readings of our autobiographical first chapters or????

Final Exam: AMS 275.01 Friday, May 19th 9:00am to Noon

Key Terms

- Situating subjectivity
- Autobiographical practices
- Experience and agency

- Autobiographical self
- Confessions
- Narrative self
- Performativity
- Auto-gyno-graphy
- Authenticity
- Themes: mother, displacement, language, discovery, family, men, the body, gender identity, community, fantasy, kinship, siblings, father, sexuality, domesticity, ideology, politics, desire, home, country, love, rebellion, revolution.
- Politics of defining autobiography
- Asymmetry
- Habit of surviving
- Outlaw genres
- Transnational feminist subject
- Historicism
- Memoir
- Journal
- Life history
- Biography
- Diaries and Letters
- “Lived Past”
- Cultural Mirrors of unvoiced narrative
- Non-linear or oral narratives
- Contrasting male and female autobiography
- Literary stance
- Standpoint
- Working-class autobiography
- Native American women’s autobiography
- Latina Autobiography
- History, ethnography and autobiography
- Immigrant autobiography
- The “other” voice
- Aesthetics
- “Forbidden gazes”
- “Speaking in tongues”
- Memory
- Women’s trauma stories
- Autobiographical differences
- Manifesto
- Spiritual autobiography
- Material self
- “Subject/Object”
- Women’s prison writing
- Historical fore- and background