

## HIST 278 bell hooks: Writer and Theorist

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The best way to communicate with me is by email. I usually respond to emails within 1-2 business days.

Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 1:00-2:30pm and by appointment. Please email me if you plan to attend office hours.

### Course Details

Meeting Place & Time: Hyland Building Room 101, Tuesdays and Thursdays 3:25pm-4:40pm

Format: Class will be held in person and will not be recorded.

### Description:

bell hooks published her landmark book *Ain't I a Woman* in 1981, and with it, she became one of the most prominent voices to emerge from the Black feminist movement. hooks challenged intersecting oppressions throughout her versatile canon. She authored more than two dozen books with topics ranging from classism to education, history, movies, literature, and love. hooks gravitated towards popular culture because she wanted to connect with larger audiences while still maintaining her critical voice. Scholars and readers are now starting to assess this prolific writer's legacy after hooks died in 2021. In this course, we will read hooks's work as a lens for examining larger themes within Black women's intellectual history. We will also explore nineteenth- and twentieth-century Black women writers—hooks's peers and foremothers—as we ask questions about hooks's intellectual lineage, revolutionary vision, populist approach, and lasting legacy.

### Required Materials:

bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman*

---, *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics*

---, *Remembered Rapture: The Writer at Work*

---, *Where We Stand*

---, *Salvation: Black People and Love*

---, *Belonging: A Culture of Place*

Prerequisite Courses: N/A

Credit Hours: 4.0

## Course Goals and Learning Outcomes

### Course Goals

The goals of this course are to:

- Provide an overview of bell hooks's canon
- Examine Black women writers who shaped or informed hooks's critical voice
- Introduce Black women's intellectual history as a field

### Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- Identify major works and themes from different stages in hooks' career
- Apply a self-defined "hooks-ian" approach to cultural analysis
- Compare key Black women writers from the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries as cultural theorists in their own right

## Assignments and Deadlines

**Attendance and Participation (10%):** Every class period.

**Weekly Discussion Questions (15%):** Submit two discussion questions every Tuesday morning by 6 am on Blackboard.

**Three-Page Cultural Analysis Essay #1 (10%):** Thursday, September 19<sup>th</sup> – Printed copy at the beginning of class; upload same version to Blackboard by the end of the day

**Book Review Video Essay (20%):** Thursday, October 10 by 11:59 pm on Blackboard

**Three-Page Cultural Analysis Essay #2 (10%):** Thursday, October 31 – Printed copy at the beginning of class; upload same version to Blackboard by the end of the day

**Black Woman Theorist Profile (15%):** Thursday, November 21 – Printed copy at the beginning of class; upload same version to Blackboard by the end of the day

**bell hooks Theorist Essay (20%):** Monday, December 16 by 11:59pm on Blackboard (Final exam day)

## Assignment Descriptions

**Attendance and Participation (10%):** Please see Course Policies below.

**Weekly Discussion Questions (15%):** You will submit two discussion questions each week. A good discussion question moves beyond factual queries (i.e. when or why something occurred) into more complex topics (thematic, stylistic, interpretive, for example). A good discussion question can spark debate – whether about an actor's or author's choices, the time period, the connections between current and previous texts, among other things. The goal is to practice critically engaging a primary source. The goal is to practice critically engaging a primary source. You're asking deeper questions about meaning and evidence and exploring what is being documented on multiple levels (word choice, tone, topic, omissions). I will incorporate your discussion questions (whether verbatim or in combination with your peers' submissions) into my lesson plan. Be sure to include at least one reading citation per discussion question. Please include the page number or chapter, if using a different version, as well as a full sentence quote from the text.

**Book Review Video Essay (20%):** bell hooks authored over two dozen books, and this assignment is our opportunity to learn more about her work. You will select one of bell hooks' books that we did not read this semester and record a review of it. You should relate this book to at least three assigned readings from the first half of class. A more detailed prompt will be given in class.

**Three-Page Cultural Analysis Essays (10% each):** For this assignment, you will choose something in popular culture, history, or the news to analyze in relationship to one of bell hooks's writings. You do not need to have an overarching theory of hooks's approach for this assignment. Instead, this analysis should be a conversation between a particular text and your chosen topic. These essays are designed to build towards your final essay where you will develop your own original argument about a hooks-ian framework of analysis. A more detailed prompt will be given closer to the deadline.

**Black Woman Writer Profile (15%):** This course will introduce you to a range of Black women writers, and for this assignment, you will explore a Black woman writer of your choosing. Your five-page essay should include a brief biography, discussion of her work, and review of scholarly engagements with her canon or story. Your essay should also analyze two pieces of her writing and define her critical or creative voice based on your research. A more detailed prompt will be given in class.

**bell hooks Theorist Essay (20%)** – For your final assignment, write an eight to ten-page argument for a hooks-ian approach to studying a topic of your choosing (Black history, literature, popular culture at large, climate change, etc). Your paper must defend your interpretation using evidence from hooks's writings. You must also clarify the uniqueness of hooks' voice in comparison with other writers or thinkers including at least one Black woman writer. Lastly, you should also apply your hooks-ian analysis to two new contexts than previously explored in your cultural analysis essays (although they can share the same broad theme). I will give a more detailed prompt closer to the deadline.

#### Grades and Related Policies

##### Grading Scale and Standards:

A: 100-93	C: 76-73
A-: 92-90	C-: 72-70
B+: 89-87	D+: 69-67
B: 86-83	D: 66-63
B-: 82-80	D-: 62-60
C+: 79-77	F: 59-0

#### Late/ Make-up Work Policy

Discussion questions cannot be submitted once the assignment closes. However, you can miss two weeks without penalty. Other late assignments (book review presentation, writer profile, hooks' final analysis) that have not been previously approved/ scheduled will automatically be docked a fraction of a grade for every day late (from A to A- to B+, etc) up to one full letter grade decrease. Late work will not be accepted once assignment has been returned to the class.

### Academic Honesty

All work must be completed in accordance with the University of Rochester's Academic Honesty Policy. We will discuss best citation practices during class, but when in doubt, please ask me or err on the side of caution and citation.

### Course Schedule

**Week One: Course Introduction ///**  
**bell hooks, Writer and Theorist**  
**Tuesday, August 27 and Thursday, August 29**

Thursday Reading: bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, "Theory as Liberatory Practice"

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**Week Two: Black Feminism - I**  
**Tuesday, September 3 and Thursday, September 5**

Reading: hooks, *Ain't I a Woman*, pgs. 1-49

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**Week Three: Black Feminism - II**  
**Tuesday, September 10 and Thursday, September 12**

Reading: hooks, *Ain't I a Woman*, pgs. 119-196 \*\*\*Note: Skipping forward to last two chs.\*\*\*

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**Week Four: Black Feminism - III**  
**Tuesday, September 17 and Thursday, September 19**

Reading: hooks, *Ain't I a Woman*, pgs. 51-117 \*\*\*Note: Returning to middle chs.\*\*\*

- **Assignment:** Cultural Analysis #1 due **Thursday, September 19** at the start of class; upload same version to Blackboard by 11:59pm
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**Week Five: Black Women Writers - I**  
**Tuesday, September 24 and Thursday, September 26**

Reading: bell hooks, *Remembered Rapture*, pgs. 1-96;  
 Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, excerpts.

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**Week Six: Black Women Writers - II**  
**Tuesday, October 1 and Tuesday, October 3**

Reading: bell hooks, *Remembered Rapture*, pgs. 97-163;  
 Zora Neale Hurston, "Sweat" short story

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**Week Seven: Black Women Writers - III**  
**Tuesday, October 8 and Thursday, October 10**

Reading: bell hooks, *Remembered Rapture*, pgs. 164-237;  
 Toni Cade Bambara, *The Black Woman*, excerpts.

- **Assignment:** bell hooks Book Review Video Essay due **Thursday, October 10** by 11:59pm on Blackboard
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**Week Eight: Fall Break/ Midterm**  
**Tuesday, October 15 and Thursday, October 17**

Tuesday, October 15 – No class. Enjoy your Fall break.

Thursday, October 17 – No class. Asynchronous lesson will be posted to Blackboard. Begin reading *Art on My Mind*.

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**Week Nine: Cultural Politics - I**  
**Tuesday, October 22 and Thursday, October 24**

Reading: hooks, *Art on My Mind* (we will discuss the entire book this week);  
 Alice Walker, "In Search of Our Mother's Gardens"

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**Week Ten: Cultural Politics - II**  
**Tuesday, October 29 and Thursday, October 31**

Reading: bell hooks, *Belonging*, pgs. 121-230 \*\*\*Note re-ordered pages\*\*\*  
 Alice Walker, "Everyday Use."

- **Assignment:** Cultural Analysis #2 due **Thursday, October 31** at the start of class; upload same version to Blackboard by 11:59pm

**Week Eleven: Cultural Politics - III**  
**Tuesday, November 5 and Thursday, November 7**

Reading: bell hooks, *Belonging*, pgs. 1-120.

**Week Twelve: Cultural Politics - IV**  
**Tuesday, November 12 and Thursday, November 14**

Reading: bell hooks, *Where We Stand*, pgs. vii-79  
 Gwendolyn Brooks, "Maud Martha" excerpts.

**Week Thirteen: Cultural Politics - V**  
**Tuesday, November 19 and Thursday, November 21**

Reading: bell hooks, *Where We Stand*, pgs. 80-164.

- **Assignment:** Black Woman Writer Profile due **Thursday, November 21** at the start of class; upload same version to Blackboard by 11:59pm

**Week Fourteen: Love**  
**Tuesday, November 26 and Thursday, November 28**

Reading: bell hooks, *Salvation*, pgs. xv-70.  
 Ntozake Shange, *For Colored Girls*, excerpts.

Thursday, November 28: No class. Enjoy your break.

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**Week Fifteen: Love**  
**Tuesday, December 3 and Thursday, December 5**

Reading: bell hooks, *Salvation*, pgs. 71-225.

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**Final Exam Day**  
**Monday, December 16**

- **Assignment:** bell hooks Theorist essay due **Monday, Dec. 16** at 11:59pm on Blackboard

#### Course Policies

**Attendance Policy:** You are expected to attend class. There are no excused absences in the course. However, you may miss two classes without penalty. Any additional absence will decrease your attendance and participation grade by a fraction of a letter grade (A to A-, A- to B+ etc). Attendance will be taken during the first few minutes of class. If you miss this window, remember to check in with me at the end of class, and you will be marked late. Accommodations will be made for religious holidays. Please email me prior to your absence.

**Participation Policy:** Participation is expected and encouraged. Please complete assignments to be prepared for class discussion. Your participation grade will be based around your attendance. For example, if you miss three classes, an A- would be the highest attendance and participation grade you could earn, but if you participate regularly, that could be a high A- (like a 92). Or if you never participate in class, the grade could be in the B+ range or lower. In other words, I cannot account for participation in a class you did not attend, so your attendance sets the max for that grade. Please be aware that regularly arriving late, leaving class early, and/or not participating in our discussions will all negatively impact your attendance/ participation grade.

**Disclaimer:** This syllabus is intended to introduce topics that may be covered during the semester and will be followed as closely as possible. However, I reserve the right to modify content and requirements as course needs arise.