Course description
This offering of Black Women Writers: Text and Context focuses on autobiography and memoir as a political project. Our central question will be: how do black women’s autobiographies and memoirs function as sites of self-determination, as well as agents of nation-building amongst writers concerned with issues including, but not limited to community, individual self-fulfillment, bodily integrity, and political agency?

Topics for discussion may include black women’s lived experience and: sexuality; grassroots activism; mainstream politics; work; post-colonialism; family; health; and popular culture.

GEC Goals
1. Writing and related skills
You will develop skills in writing, reading, critical thinking, and oral expression through analyzing the social, historical, and political forces that shape black women’s narratives.

Accomplished through:
• Carmen submissions for course readings
• Facilitating a class discussion
• In-class writing exercises
• Personal memoir

2. Social diversity in the U.S.
The course will foster an understanding of the pluralistic nature of institutions, society, and culture in the United States by contextualizing black women’s writings on their lived experience in the social, historical, and political conditions shaping their lives.

Accomplished through:
• Active class participation
• Active engagement with the texts
• Oral history interview and essay

The Spring 2011 average grade for this course was a B (83%).

Required Books & Course reader
Books for this course are available from Student Book Exchange (1806 North High St.).

It is your responsibility to acquire the titles in time for our course discussions.

1. Anita Hill, Speaking Truth to Power
2. Harriet Jacobs/Linda Brent, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl
3. Jamaica Kincaid- A Small Place
4. Audre Lorde- Zami: a New Spelling of My Name
5. Jill Nelson- Volunteer Slavery
6. Assata Shakur- Assata: an Autobiography
7. Karrine Steffans- Confessions of a Video Vixen

Other readings are available on Carmen.
Grading Breakdown
The following are the percentages for assignments for the course:

- participation...20%
- bi-weekly talking points...15%
- personal memoir...20%
- oral history...45% total
  - interview subject & profile...5%
  - interview questions...5%
  - essay draft...10%
  - final essay...25%

All assignments must be submitted to the Carmen dropbox. Assignments emailed to me will not be graded.

Participation (15%)
For everyone to get the most out of lectures and discussions, we must all bring something to the table.

If you are passive in the classroom or absent from class, you are unable to contribute to the energy or dynamics of the classroom, therefore, all students are expected to contribute significantly to our seminars.

Thoughtful silent consideration resulting in responses or questions is acceptable; sitting silently is not.

Offering clarifying questions, relevant examples from the reading or other sources, key passages, probing questions, new concepts---these are all ways to interact and participate.

I will call on people directly for responses.

Talking Points (15%; one paragraph)

Purpose: Learning is a dialectical process, or a conversation, amongst all the members of the class. Talking points are meant to facilitate dialogue and get you talking to one another. Your talking points may also prove to be a starting point for ideas you develop for formal written assignments.

Format: Write a brief paragraph response to the day's assigned readings for each class session.

Your responses may be questions, comments, or even graphic representations of a concept. As part of the GEC writing requirement, your talking points must be clearly readable and give a good indication of your engagement with the reading. You must refer to specific page numbers and passages.

Keep in mind that very superficial responses that merely criticize the reading for being difficult or 'boring' will not demonstrate that you've been actively engaged with the course material. Similarly, "I liked/enjoyed this book," is irrelevant and not a critical assessment. Your response should be original and not merely repeating/agreeing with someone else's response.

When are they due?: Talking points are due on Sunday and Tuesday for each day's assigned readings---by 11pm the night before class.

Talking points for films that we watch in class are due by midnight the day before our next class session (i.e if we watch a film on Monday, talking points on the film are due by midnight Tuesday before class).

You'll post your talking points to Carmen (Discussions Forums & Topics/Title of Week's Text). Talking points cannot be made up after
the deadline. I will review them before class, but please also bring a copy of your talking points to class for your reference.

**How will they be graded?** Scoring will be based on evidence of steady and active engagement with the reading throughout the semester.

**Personal Memoir (20%; 3-5 pages)**

Following our discussion in class on the difference between autobiography and memoir, write a memoir featuring a significant event in your life thus far.

What one event has shaped how you think about life?

Who are the people who have shaped your worldview? How did they influence the significant event you’ve described?

This is not a research paper, but you should situate your event or life in the historical and social context of the time. Secondary sources aren’t required, but should you use any, please provide Chicago Manual of Style citations (see Guidelines for Written Work).

You will be asked to share the general theme of your memoir in class, so please keep this in mind when deciding what you would like to write about for this assignment.

**Oral History Profile, Interview Questions, Essay Draft, and Essay (45%)**

The oral history interview is an opportunity to explore topics of interest to you and/or interview someone you’ve always wanted to know more about.

For this assignment conduct an oral history interview with a black woman from any walk of life, any occupation. This can be a relative, friend of the family, speaker visiting campus, someone well-known locally, etc. The only requirement is that the person you interview must be at least ten years older or younger than you, i.e., someone of a different generation.

**The profile (1-page)**

Please submit a page-long description of your interviewee, including her name, age, location, and why you selected this person.

**The interview (10 questions)**

We’ll be using the framework provided by the nonprofit organization StoryCorps, which “is an independent nonprofit whose mission is to provide Americans of all backgrounds and beliefs with the opportunity to record, share, and preserve the stories of our lives.” ([www.storycorp.org](http://www.storycorp.org))

You should plan to interview the person for at least one hour; plan for approximately ten questions, but go where the interview takes you by following interesting leads and stories.

The department of Learning Technologies offers digital recording equipment. If you would like to check out a recorder, please read the ([http://ocio.osu.edu/elearning/services/equipment/](http://ocio.osu.edu/elearning/services/equipment/)) on the LT website and you will need a signed form ([http://ocio.osu.edu/assets/LE/Equipment-Loan-Permission-Form.pdf](http://ocio.osu.edu/assets/LE/Equipment-Loan-Permission-Form.pdf)) from me to authorize equipment check-out.
The final essay (1,250-words)
Your essay can be thematic or an overview of the person's life. You should explain the events and phenomenon you encounter in your interview with research from secondary sources (journal articles, books). How do your subject's life experiences reflect or differ from black women's lives generally? What statistics or other evidence can you provide to support your claims?

For example, if your interviewee mentions experiencing racism in the workplace, what are the statistics about black women's participation in that particular field? What has black women's experience been historically in the field? What societal changes have been made in the field?

Sources
1/ You should have a minimum of three sources.
2/ two of these must be refereed academic journal articles or books (use Thompson and OhioLink!).
3/ Your footnotes and bibliography should follow the Chicago Manual of Style Guide, including names television shows, newspapers, magazine, websites, etc.

Points will be deducted for neglecting to follow these source, citation, and formatting guidelines.

Deadlines
Please submit these assignments to the course dropbox in Carmen!

Personal memoir: Weds, 28 September
Interviewee profile: Weds, 19 October
Interview questions: Weds, 26 October
Rough draft of essay (excluding footnotes and bibliography): Weds, 23 November
Revised, final essay: 9am on Tuesday, 6 December

Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss your specific needs. Please contact the Office for Disability Services at 614-292-3307 in room 150 Pomerene Hall to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities.
Course Schedule

**Week of 19 Sept**
Syllabus overview
Discussion of participation expectations
*Lecture Notes on Where do we find “autobiographical practices?”*

**Week of 26 Sept:**
Session 1
*Lecture Notes on Why study autobiography and gender? and The difference between autobiography and memoir*

Reading
2. Theo Pauline Lestor, “Actually, It Is All About You” [Carmen]

Session 2
*Discussion of Memoir Fraud*
*Personal memoirs due; come prepared to discuss them in class*

**Week of 3 Oct: slavery & emancipation narratives**
Session 1
*Lecture Notes on What is a slave, or emancipation, narrative?*

Reading
1. Timeline for reference [Carmen]
2. Jacobs, I-XXI

Session 2
*Reading*
1. Jacobs, XXII-XLI

**Week of 10 Oct: black women & activism**
Session 1
*What is a political autobiography?*

**Week of 17 Oct: black women & mainstream politics**
Session 1
*Film*
*Chisholm ’72* (director: Shola Lynch, 76 min.)

Session 2
*Discuss Chisholm ’72*

*Wednesday: oral history profile due*

**Week of 24 Oct: black women & work**
Session 1
*Reading*
1. Nelson, p. 3-120 (chapters 1-17)

Session 2
*Reading*
1. Nelson, p. 121-end

*Wednesday: interview questions due*

**Week of 31 Oct: black women & sexualities**
Session 1
*Reading*
1. Lorde Zami, chpts. 1-17

Session 2
*Readings*
1. Lorde, Zami, chpts. 18-end
2. Lorde, “The Uses of the Erotic” [Carmen]
Week of 7 Nov: black women & family
Session 1
Film
*Off and Running* (Nicole Opper, 76 min)

Reading
1. Roberts, “Adoption Myths and Racial Realities in the U.S.” [Carmen]

Session 2
Readings

Week of 14 Nov: black women & violence
Session 1
Reading
1. Kincaid—entire book

Session 2
Readings
1. Chronology of hearing events [Carmen]
2. Hill, *Speaking Truth to Power*

Week of 21 Nov: black women & physical/mental health
Session 1
Film
*Why Did I Get Married?* (Tyler Perry, 118 min)

Readings

Wednesday: rough draft of essay due to Carmen DROPBOX

Week of 28 Nov: black women & popular culture
Session 1
Reading
2. Steffans—entire book

Session 2
Discuss oral history interview and essay drafts, including citations and common grammatical errors
Final oral history essay due by 9am on Tuesday, 6 December
Non-Negotiables
You are expected to bring your readings with you to class. If you do not have the text and/or have not done the reading, do not bother coming to class. You will only waste your time and that of the class.

Your attendance and on time arrival are required in order for you to participate in class. The sign-in sheet will be passed around at the start of class. You are not permitted to sign the attendance sheet if you arrive late.

Should you be required, or choose, to miss class it is your responsibility to ask a classmate to loan you notes for the day’s discussion. “Can I meet with you to go over what was covered in class?,” is an unacceptable request.

Given the number of emails we all receive daily, please do not email with news about your absence. I will assume we will see you, prepared to participate, in class next session. I do not accept doctor’s notes.

There is no eating in class, but drinks are fine.

Periodically, you will be asked to work in small groups to expedite getting through a large amount of material.

Please decide whether these expectations and the course requirements work for your schedule, work habits, and personality.

Deadlines
The ability to plan one’s work and meet deadlines are integral to succeeding academically and in the work world. Assignments for my courses are spaced to maximize students’ comprehension of materials and to allow sufficient time for completion of all assignments.

When signing up for one of my courses, you are entering into a contract to meet the requirements for this course. This includes meeting deadlines. Before committing to the course, you should gather all your syllabi for the term and be sure that the deadlines for this course will fit your class and/or work schedule.

I only grant extensions under the following circumstances with the appropriate accompanying documentation:

1. a death in the family (copy of the funeral program) or
2. illness (doctor’s/physician’s assistant’s note on office stationary).

Requests for extensions without this documentation will be not be approved.

Computer hardware/software and printer failures are not acceptable grounds for extensions. Students should save work frequently, as well as maintain a backup copy.

As part of our contract, I establish my own personal deadlines to grade your work, so that you receive feedback in a timely fashion. Late work impinges on my ability to uphold my end of the contract. For this reason, late penalties are assessed as follows:

1/3rd of a grade is deducted for each day the assignment is late;

late work will be accepted up to 3 days beyond the original deadline with appropriate deductions subtracted from the grade;

work submitted beyond 3 days after the deadline will not be graded and assigned a 0.
Digital Etiquette

Laptops are not permitted in class.

Cellphones must be put on silent and put away for the duration of the class period.

I read and respond to work emails Monday through Friday, from 9am to 5pm.

This means that emails sent after 5pm pertaining to class the next day will not be read and/or responded to until at least 9am the next morning.

Average turnaround time for responses is 24-48 hours. If you ask a question already addressed in the syllabus, I will refer you back to that document.

If I am away at a conference, the auto-reply message will let you know when I will next retrieve and respond to emails.

I do not respond to emails written as text or instant messages. If you’re unsure of the proper form an email should take, please check out Professor Michael Leddy’s concise tips on “How to Email a Professor” (http://mleddy.blogspot.com/2005/01/how-to-e-mail-professor.html).

Guidelines for Written Work

When submitting work electronically please:

submit your work as a .doc, .docx, or .txt file. If you submit your work as a .pdf, I cannot make comments using the “track changes” function and you will receive only a grade, but not comments on your work;

if you are concerned that I may be unable to open your document, send it in more than one format (e.g. .doc and .txt);

use this format for your file name: FirstInitialLastName_homework1.docx (e.g. KSpringer_interviewquestions.docx);

use 12pt typeface, regular font;

use 1.25” left/right margins/1.00” top/bottom (MS Word’s default)


Plagiarism

The official take: As defined by University Rule 3335-31-02, plagiarism is the representation of another’s works or ideas as one’s own; it includes the unacknowledged word for word use and/or paraphrasing of another person’s work, and/or the inappropriate unacknowledged use of another person’s ideas. Plagiarism is one of the most serious offenses that can be committed in an academic community; as such, it is the obligation of this department and its instructors to report all cases of suspected plagiarism to the Committee on Academic Misconduct. After the report is filed, a hearing takes place and if the student is found guilty, the possible punishment ranges from failing the class to suspension or expulsion from the university.