

SPECIAL TOPICS IN AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE  
“Sick and Tired of Being Sick and Tired:” Medicine and Ethics in Black Women’s Literature  
English 293/393  
Spring 2016

Instructor: Professor E. Jones ([esjones@clarku.edu](mailto:esjones@clarku.edu))  
Meeting Time: Mondays, 9:00-11:50a.m.  
Location: TBD  
Office Hours: Wednesdays, 10:30-11:30 and by appointment

**Course Description**

Utilizing the framework of the medical humanities, this seminar explores narratives of health, wellness, and ethics in works by black women writers. The medical humanities, or “narrative ethics” as it is more specifically termed, is concerned with the historical practices of traditional scientific medicine and medical research and the various ethical abuses that have occurred throughout history in the name of scientific advancement. Because medicine and its practitioners wield considerable influence in the wellness outcomes of so many, narrative ethics as a discourse seeks to “humanize” medicine through narrative. This course explores how black women, who have so often been instrumentalized in scientific medical research while receiving the least benefit, understand and approach the question of ethics and humane treatment in medicine. It is a discussion format class with minimal lecturing, so students are expected to have read all materials and be prepared to discuss and analyze the text as the bulk of their participatory experience in class.

**LEEP Outcomes**

The course theme and weekly discussion topics on black women, medicine, and ethics, contribute to LEEP outcome 1, Knowledge of the Natural World and Human cultures in its emphasis on black women’s ways of knowing about health and ethics. The research paper component addresses LEEP outcome 2, Intellectual and Practical Skills involving developing a research question and deeply analyzing a particular issue through written and oral means vis-à-vis the research paper and oral presentation on the paper at the end of term. Within the development and writing of the research paper, you will engage the theme of health ethics and bridge what you’ve learned in the class with the broader implications of your own research beyond the classroom, which contributes to LEEP outcomes 3 and 4, Personal and Social Responsibility and the Ability to Integrate Knowledge and Skills.

**Texts**

Lorde, Audre. *The Cancer Journals*  
Skloot, Rebecca. *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*  
Hopkinson, Nalo. *Brown Girl in the Ring*  
Sapphire, *PUSH*  
Nnedi Okorafor, *Who Fears Death*  
Naylor, Gloria. *Mama Day*  
Trethewey, Natasha. *Thrall*.  
Butler, Octavia. *Parable of the Sower*  
Jones, Esther. *Medicine and Ethics in Black Women’s Speculative Fiction* (selected chapters on Moodle)  
Selected Readings on Moodle

## **Assignments & Assessment**

**Discussion Leader (15%):** Discussion leaders are responsible for developing questions for discussion and highlighting key points for further analysis. Relevant supplemental materials (e.g., audio/visual/multimedia aids or supplemental critical materials) may be brought in to help contextualize the discussion. Handouts may be helpful for your fellow classmates to engage with the topics that you may want to cover; you may want to conduct some sort of exercise that engages the class in dialogue about the subject. Your presentation should cover context and pose questions that invite deeper levels of analysis of the material. Prepare for to present for the first hour and ten (1:10) minutes of class.

**Final Paper/Project (25%):** You will select a current medical ethics/justice issue to focus upon for an independent project throughout the course of the semester alongside the readings for the course. Your research may stem from one of our readings or may arise from personal interests. Whatever topic you choose, you will gather news articles, research articles, and so on that will synthesize into a final project that proposes a strategy for resolving the ethical issues you have researched. This can be as creative as you wish for it to be. The components and their assessed value are below:

**Bibliography (15%):** A solid final project is dependent upon solid, quality research. Begin gathering information, articles, and other resources early and throughout the semester to begin developing early a sense of the challenges and issues in the field and to understand the various approaches to resolving the ethical issue that currently exist.

**Proposal (15%):** Students will submit a proposal based on their research that outlines their plan for the final project. Students are recommended to meet with the professor at some point prior to the date that the proposal is due to discuss their research findings to date and their ideas for their proposal.

**Final Presentation (15%):** Students will submit a brief presentation of their project on the last day of class. Guidelines for format and structure of presentations to follow.

**Participation (15%):** Quality discussion is a vitally important part of seminar-style classes. We will cover a range of topics, the complexity of which is only engaged fully through discussion. Make an effort to take notes and share your perspectives in every class.

### **Engaged Academic Time:**

The bulk of your time in this class will be spent reading for understanding of new information and analysis of key concepts crucial to class discussions as well as assisting you with the independent research assignment that will synthesize your command of the concepts and issues explored during the course. Most of your outside time will be spent reading and simultaneously researching, then writing your paper. The various writing assignments are designed to build on one another and therefore the research and writing process is necessarily recursive; that is, once you write the bibliography, it doesn't mean your research is "done;" rather, it serves as a starting point and as you write you will find that you need to return to conduct more research as your writing reveals gaps in your knowledge or new insights that you need to develop further. As such, the many hours researching (and writing) will be spread throughout the semester, so don't be scared by the numbers!

Class Meetings/Discussions:                      (3h x 1day x 15 weeks) =                      45 hours

Required Readings:	(8 novels x 8 hours) + essays (8 hours)=	72hours
Research/Bibliography and Final		30 hours
Proposal Writing		5 hours
Final Paper/Project		20 hours
Final Presentation		5 hours
Special Event: "Towards the Black Interior: Afrofuturism as Resistance"		<u>3 hours</u>
	Total:	180 hours

**Academic integrity** is a basic value for all higher learning. Simply expressed, it requires that work presented must be wholly one's own and unique to that course. All direct quotations must be identified by source. Academic integrity can be violated in many ways: for example, by submitting someone else's paper as one's own; cheating on an exam; submitting one paper to more than one class; copying a computer program; altering data in an experiment; or quoting published material without proper citation of references or sources. Attempts to alter an official academic record will also be treated as violations of academic integrity.

To ensure academic integrity and safeguard students' rights, all suspected violations of academic integrity are reported to the College Board. Such reports must be carefully documented, and students accused of the infraction are notified of the charge. In the case of proven academic dishonesty, the student will receive a sanction, which may range from an F in the assignment or course to suspension or expulsion from the University.

The complete academic integrity policy is available with Academic Advising at <http://www.clarku.edu/offices/aac/integrity.cfm>

### Student Accessibility Services

Clark University is committed to providing students with documented disabilities equal access to all university programs and facilities. If you have or think you have a disability and require academic accommodations, you must register Student Accessibility Services (SAS), which is located in room 430 on the fourth floor of the Goddard Library. If you have questions about the process, please contact The Director of Accessibility Services, Emily Tarconish, at [etarconish@clarku.edu](mailto:etarconish@clarku.edu) or (508)798-4368. If you are registered with SAS, and qualify for accommodations that you would like to utilize in this course, please request those accommodations through SAS in a timely manner.

### Reading Schedule

*\*Subject to revision as deemed necessary.\**

January 25		Course Overview
February 1	Theory of narrative medicine, race, gender, and ethics	Jones, "Eating Salt: Black Women's Health and the Politics of Difference in Medicine" (Moodle) Charon, "Narrative Medicine" (Moodle)
February 8	History of medicine, race, gender, and ethics	Gilman, "The Hottentot and the Prostitute" (Moodle) Washington, "The American Janus of Race and Medicine" (Moodle) <b><i>Begin researching areas of interest.</i></b>
February 15	Law, race, gender, medicine, and ethics	Roberts, "Biological Race in a 'Postracial' America" (Moodle) Hernandez-Ramdwar, "Soma" (Moodle)
February 22	Black women and cancer	Lorde, <i>The Cancer Journals</i>

February 29	Black women and cancer research	Skloot, <i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta lacks</i> Holloway, "Immortality in Cultures"(Moodle) <b>Bibliography Due</b>
March 7	Spring Break	No Class
March 14	Childhood sexual abuse, HIV	Sapphire, <i>PUSH</i> Donaldson, "Handing Back Shame"
WEDNESDAY MARCH 16TH	SPECIAL HIGGINS LECTURE FOR "WHAT'S NEXT?" SYMPOSIUM	Susana Morris, "Towards the Black Interior: Afrofuturism as Resistance" 7:00 p.m., Higgins Lounge
March 21	Militarized Rape and Female Circumcision	Okorafor, <i>Who Fears Death</i> Jones, "The Unbearable Burden of Culture" (Moodle) <b>Proposal Due</b>
March 28	Black women as healers: midwifery	Naylor, <i>Mama Day</i> Lee, <i>Granny Midwives</i> , Intro & Ch. 1 (Moodle)
April 4	Mental health and spirituality	Hopkinson, <i>Brown Girl in the Ring</i>
April 11	Organ donation	Trethewey, <i>Thrall</i> Jones, "Organ Donation, Mythic Medicine, and Madness" (Moodle)
April 18	Disability and Society	Butler, <i>Parable of the Sower</i> Jones, "I Mean to Survive" (Moodle)
April 25		<i>Final Presentations</i>
May 2		<i>Final Presentations/ Last Day of Class</i>
May 6		<i>Final Papers Due</i>