

Curr 590
Nurturing Our Future as African American Females
One Hour Graduate Credit

Professor of Record:
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Graduate Credit: 1 hour through Continuing Education
CRN#: 18266

Course Requirements

Recognizing the conference attendees will represent a variety of venues and landscapes, occupations and life's callings, the following questions will offer you many choices as to your responses. They will present you with critical thinking questions that will challenge you to take what you have begun to discuss today, extend that thinking and put it into social action on behalf of women of color and for the benefit of the common good. It is not enough to simply read, to think and to discuss. The time for action is now.

You will write a paper which will consist of three sections. Each section will be approximately 3 pages, i.e. question one below=3 pages; question two=4 pages; and question 3=3 pages. Your bibliography or resources page will probably be quite short.

Your paper should be submitted to me online at pwilliams1@emich.edu by no later than Halloween, October 31, 2008. Should you have any questions, do not hesitate to call me at the phone number listed at the top of this syllabus (my home phone number) prior to the due date for the assignment.

Your emailed paper should be approximately 10 typed pages, using 12 point Times font with 1" margins with one and a half spacing. Please use proper APA style for footnotes, citations and bibliography.

Question 1. Using the book: *Does Your House Have Lions?* by Sonia Sanchez (Required)

As you have engaged in the conference today, examined the facets of policy and practice that impact the hopes and dreams, lives and futures of African American women, you have had an opportunity to critique both the present and the past, in light of what can yet be. It all begins, however, with each person, each committed spirit, each examined life.

Sanchez has written *Does Your House Have Lions?* a “book-length poem that memorializes the life and death of her brother, a young black man who died of AIDS after a brief, furious exploration of the gay subculture in New York City.” For the reader, it is a momentary glimpse into her pain, anguish, anger, and determination as she draws us into the rhythm and cadence and culture of the City, of Black Nationalism, and of the music of the time.

“Sanchez’s poem is written in four parts, “sister’s voice,” “brother’s voice,” “father’s voice,” and “family voices/ancestors’ voices.” The first three sections, and most of the fourth section, use a modified terza rima rhyme scheme; each individual unit poem has a rhyme scheme of ABABBCC. This tight structure suggests the emotional confinement her brother is rebelling against.

The first section “sister’s voice,” presents the most detached, assured poetry, as the sister (a persona representing Sanchez herself) describes her brother’s immersion into the New York gay subculture as “a migration unlike/the 1900s of black men and women/coming north for jobs.” To repay his father’s desertion, he sold his body as a prostitute, auctioning off “his legs, eyes./ heart. In rooms of specific pain.” By contrast, the second section, “brother’s voice,” is written with the emotional directness of pain. He begins by saying, “father. I despise you for abandoning me,” and tells of trying to make a new life on the New York streets, “a country of men/where dollars pump their veins,” “father’s voice” tells poignantly of a father’s neglect and is remarkable alive with the rhythms of the music the father plays professionally; “I come to collapse the past/while bonfires burn up your orphan’s mask,” the father sings about trying to reconcile with a son approaching death.

The last section is the most magisterial. Most of these poems represent the voices of the family, but several represent, “the ancestor,” and have a distinct African folk quality to them. Together, they chart the family’s attempt to heal even as one of them is dying. The cumulative effect is both wrenching and uplifting. This is poetry which demands performance; a reader almost has to imagine the poetry being staged to fully appreciate it.” (MacGill Book Review)

(The title comes from an interview with jazz great Rahsaan Roland Kirk, and in this context speaks of a household's need to face life with courage. Sanchez's poem is a record of how one family found the courage of lions.)

As you read her text, even though your story may not have been set in New York, where did you find yourself? What parts resonated with you? What was familiar to you? Just as she stepped back from her family in the service of better understanding what may well have been a senseless situation, a complex and painful one, step back now from your own family. How have events in your family helped to shape who you are, where do you find yourself at this moment, both personally and professionally? Consider the following in your examination. Your own:

- family values
- family members
- faith
- sense of community
- expectations
- family traditions
- your place in the family—birth order, roles
- culture
- education
- your responsibilities in and to the family

What place does your family hold in your life? What place do you hold in your family?

The format you use to present your responses to these questions is up to you. You may choose to directly answer or write prose, or poetry or even a short play. Respond as it feels right to you, but in such a way that it speaks to everything here. It is not length but depth and sense of self-examination that is of importance.

Question 2. Cultural Stereotypes: Your Choice Section

*You may choose **one** of four groups of ideas listed in this second section. Write at least a two-page response of your findings in a position paper format; i.e. take a position or a stand based on your research in choice A, or B, or C, or D.*

A. Literary Choice

1. Compare and contrast the literary works of Sonia Sanchez, Nikki Giovanni, and Maya Angelou noting the place they hold in the women's movement, initially set against the rich backdrop of the Civil Rights Movement

2. or Examine all three of Sonia Sanchez's :

Homegirls and Handgrenades

Shake Loose my Skin

Does Your House Have Lions

Looking for cultural images, Black Nationalism, images of women

B. Effects of the Media

Examine the influence the popular media has played on female African American women. Begin with

<http://northbyshouth.kenyon.edu/2000/women/mamypage/htm>

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3180940> Journal of Black Studies, Vol 34, No. 3

“Does Race Matter? Effects of Idealized Images on African American Women’s Perceptions of Body Esteem”
and “The Status of African American Women: Shouldering the Third Burden,”
by Julianne Malveaux

C. African -American Women Portrayed in Rap Music—“Continued Slavery?”

1. Examine the lyrics of at least seven pop chart rap songs looking closely for images of AFAM women
2. Likewise watch MTV for their corresponding videos objectifying women and their cultural portrayals. How are women and girls portrayed? What does that say about self-esteem of black women? of how African-American girls and women are viewed?

D. Health and Business

In your chosen profession (health or business) examine the incidence for positive opportunity for women of color. How has this changed in the last forty years? Or has it? Has there been a change in the past 8-10 years? Discuss this.

Historically, how have women of color been negatively affected—socially, politically, personally, morally, religiously and/or economically, and what do you think needs to be done? Consider issues of health care, job discrimination, their perceived ability to lead or be managers and how these perceptions by others influence self perceptions of intelligence and capability, of self-efficacy and place in community.

Question 3. Praxis— Action Plan (Required)

Praxis means marrying theory (what you may have studied or read about or heard about) and practice into social action. This conference’s success lies in all of our willingness to move to action. Let’s now put together everything that you have thought about and read about, heard about and talked about. You may wish to begin here:

- a. What were the main themes of today’s conference that were of importance to you?
- b. How does each of these apply to your particular environment (teacher, health care specialist, administrator, youth worker, member of the faith community, etc.)
- c. Using the conference themes and research online, develop an individual professional action plan that addresses the focus of nurturing African American females.

Remember, mentoring each other as women is as important as guiding the young, for feeding the health of the elders of the community ensures survival of the best of the next generation.

For your plan, be sure to include:

- 1) What you want to do so the reader fully understands exactly what you mean
- 2) Why--Rationale
- 3) How: Goals and objectives
- 4) Who: — who will be involved, how long will it take, what resources will be necessary
- 5) How do you know if it your plan has been successful (assessment)