GWS 933: Feminist Political Theory
Before and Beyond “Man”: Otherwise Worlds
Fall 2020
Tuesday 2:30-5 pm

PROVISIONALLY FINAL COLLABORATIVE SYLLABUS

INSTRUCTOR
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We come together in this moment against a backdrop of multiple planetary devastations: ecological, political, economic. At the same time, longstanding patterns in the “distribution of vulnerability to premature death” (Ruth Wilson Gilmore) and the interlinked violences of patriarchy, capitalism, extractivism, anti-Blackness, militarization, imperialism, and colonization means that “crisis” is nothing new. This includes right here where our campus stands, in Teejop (Four Lakes), Ho-Chunk land whose current face as Madison relies on ongoing genocide, dispossession, and theft of Indigenous lands, and whose (white) prosperity as a city is also rooted in the ongoing legacies of slavery and border imperialism.

Yet the devastations rooted in capitalist modernity’s regimes of enslavement and colonization, and their attendant forms of gender-based violence, have never been total. As Kim TallBear has argued, Indigenous peoples have long been “post-apocalyptic.” In this class, we will engage with thinkers of otherwise worlds before and beyond what Sylvia Wynter terms “Man,” or the Eurocentric notion of the normative human. These thinkers—beginning with Wynter—track life-sustaining refusals, resilience, and resistance, and figure and enact more livable political futures. I invite you to read these, together with me and each other, as guides to some of the most central themes of contemporary feminist political thought: the historical and ongoing relationship of gender and sexuality with colonization, slavery and its legacies; “the human” and more-than-human worlds; racial capitalism...
and dispossession; whiteness and property; bodies and ecologies; kinship; freedom, unfreedom, and abolition.

**Learning in relation to the place we are in**

I am a white woman whose European family lines arrived as “ordinary settlers” ([Alexis Shotwell](https://www.indians.org/learn/indigenous-land-acknowledgment)) in the 1880s and 1890s, loggers and sawmill operators on my mom’s side and Lutheran pastors on my paternal side, who entered into the structures of anti-Blackness, white supremacy, Indigenous genocide and dispossession through their everyday activities of work, rent and property ownership, education, family, consumption, etc., both cementing and materially benefitting from dispossession, segregation, ecological poisoning, and value extraction from Black communities, Indigenous lands and nations, and abjected immigrant communities.

This “ordinary” violence of colonization, white supremacy, and anti-Blackness also transformed Teejop/Madison over the last 170 years. As Omar Poler, American Indian Curriculum Services Consultant at the UW School of Education, writes:

*Humans have lived along the shores of Waaksikhomik (Where The Man Lies, known today as Lake Mendota) in Teejop (Four Lakes, known today as Madison) for at least 12,000 years. Since 1848, or the last 1.5% of the human story of Teejop, the demography of Teejop changed from a 99% Ho-Chunk world to a 99% non-Native American population. Similarly, during the last 1.5% of the human story of Teejop, the ecology of Teejop rapidly and radically changed from oak savanna and wetlands into a largely non-indigenous urban forest built upon landfill of the former wetlands of Teejop.*

By living and learning here, each of us has a relationship to this place, and to the Ho-Chunk people who have stewarded it from time immemorial and are still here. I am only beginning to try to understand how to be in respectful relationship with this land and its people. Some of you likely bring more skill, knowledge, and experience in this than I have, and I know that I will learn from all of you. As we read about colonization and decolonization, the histories and legacies of enslavement, and the gendered dispossessions of capitalism, let us approach these processes not as abstract and “out there,” but as urgent and living questions right where we are (knowing that we may also be geographically dispersed in this pandemic times).

The University offers this land acknowledgment:
The University of Wisconsin-Madison occupies ancestral Ho-Chunk land, a place their nation has called Teejop since time immemorial. In an 1832 treaty, the Ho-Chunk were forced to cede this territory. Decades of ethnic cleansing followed when both the federal and state government repeatedly, but unsuccessfully, sought to forcibly remove the Ho-Chunk from Wisconsin. This history of colonization informs our shared future of collaboration and innovation. Today, UW-Madison respects the inherent sovereignty of the Ho-Chunk Nation, along with the eleven other First Nations of Wisconsin.

As part of the Teejop Community History Project, Madison Ho-Chunk community members have generated these themes:

- Our ancestors defied repeated removals and endured unimaginable hardships to ensure that we are still living in our homeland.
- Our values of love and respect are interwoven in every aspect of our culture.
- Like our ancestors, we cherish and respect the springs, lakes and rivers as living beings.
- This land is sacred. Its energy and abundance have sustained Waqkšikra from time immemorial. It sings to our community and transforms all who listen.
- Teejop was once home to a flourishing community that created thousands of mounds, and we are the caretakers of those that remain.

Teejop Community History Project has also created learning intentions that we will look to for guidance in this process, which include:

- Encourage listening to the land and being sensitive to land as a living being
- Provide awareness regarding changes in the physical landscape and lakeshores
- Grow and explore personal connections and feelings towards the land and region
- Create new perspectives for seeing and relating to the land
- Engage neighborhoods with history of place and continued significance
• Allow contemporary Native perspectives and experiences to be encountered and heard
• Representation of the established Ho-Chunk presence in the region
• Fostering personal connections for a responsibility to the land and community
• Encourage ongoing reflection

For those of us in Teejop/Madison, we will work to connect the themes, concepts, and intentions with one location in Teejop, now called Tenney Park. The Teejop Community History Project has identified Tenney Park with the second theme above, “Our values of love and respect are interwoven in every aspect of our culture.” Insofar as you are able, I will ask you to visit this site with specific instructions. Together, we will decide if it feels best to go in a socially distant large group, in socially distant dyads or triads, or alone. We will read the specific instructions together in our first course meeting, and generate our plan together.

For those who are not in Teejop/Madison, and are not part of the Indigenous nation on whose land you are, I invite you to think about and share ways that you can connect with and learn about the land where you are and the people who steward it. Perhaps you bring a great deal of knowledge and experience with these connections. If you are (like me) closer to the beginning of this process, this Native Lands map is one place to start; from there, exploring the websites of the nations whose land you are on can be another good opening.

If you are a Ho-Chunk tribal member or an Indigenous person from another nation, I invite you to reflect on and share any aspect of your relationship with land and place, and also honor your refusal to do so, in accordance with the First People’s Principle of Learning that not all knowledge is to be shared, and also learning from Audra Simpson’s theorization of refusal.

I warmly invite discussion, critique, and revision of this approach.

COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students who successfully complete this course will be able to:

• Understand feminist political theoretical, Black feminist, decolonial, Indigenous feminist, abolitionist, and queer theoretical frameworks, and the analytical power that they bring to bear on contemporary life and politics
• Explicate and deploy concepts and themes central to recent feminist political thinking, broadly construed, including but not
limited to: gender, kinship, racism, colonialism, decolonization, “the human,” crisis, the body, care, labor, power, ecology, sovereignty.

- Fruitfully connect course themes to their own courses of study
- Carry out an independent analysis that links course texts to their own scholarly concerns, producing an article-length research paper or equivalent project

ASSIGMENTS AND EVALUATION
There will be four requirements for this course:

1) **A major course project** that substantially engages one or more course texts (40%)

Options:

- **Standard assignment**: Analytical paper of approximately 15-20 pages, putting two or more course texts in conversation around a particular theme, and situating them within relevant literature.

- **Progress toward degree/professional engagement project**: A written analysis that supports your progress in your program/engagement with your field, while also substantially engaging course theme(s) and one or more course texts—a thesis or dissertation chapter, a conference paper, a policy paper

- **Creative project with accompanying essay** that frames the project in terms of course text(s) and themes: creative nonfiction, artwork, performance, short story, short film, zine, etc

A 1-page abstract for this project and a working bibliography of will be due on November 20. I would love to meet with you to discuss paper topics and additional related readings.

2) **Three short essay responses** (15% each, 45% total) corresponding to any three of the readings, of approximately 5 pages each. The response should: (1) briefly describe the key argument(s); (2) connect the argument(s) to each other (if more than one) and to past readings and discussions; (3) raise questions and critical points (positive or negative) about the reading(s). You may coordinate essay responses with your discussion guide dates if you wish. These are due 30 minutes before class start time on the Tuesday for which the text is assigned.

Format:
• ~5 pages, double-spaced, in 12-point font, with page numbers
• Properly labeled: header: your name and the date, title indicating the primary text (can be a creative title or simply the author and title of the work)
• Appropriate citations: Consistent use of any standard citation style (APA, Chicago, MLA, etc). Provide in-text citations, footnotes, or end notes. Please include a works cited list at the end of the document.

Grading criteria (out of 15 points):
• Good structure (introduction, thesis statement, supporting evidence, smooth transition sentences between paragraphs. Conclusion is optional)
• Skillful synthesis of the readings
• Well-supported with cited evidence from the texts.
• Fully addresses all three components (argument summarization, connections, critical discussion)
• Fulfills all formatting expectations

3) Class participation (15%).

Components:
Presence. Regular attendance, thoughtful contributions to class discussions, and engaged listening are all vital to the success of the seminar.

Discussion guides. Twice this semester, starting on September 22, each student will commit to preparing a brief discussion guide for a particular text, and drawing on that guide to co-facilitate the class. In the case of longer texts, two students may sign up and divide it (e.g. a long Wynter article, a Caliban and the Witch selection). We will finalize signups by September 15. Specific instructions will follow.

[HOW WE WANT THIS VIRTUAL SPACE TO BE]

I invite you to join me in “interrupt[ing] oppressive behavior, defined as any conduct that demeans, marginalizes, rejects, threatens or harms anyone on the basis of ability, age, cultural background, education, ethnicity, gender, immigration status, language, nationality, physical appearance, race, religion, or sexual orientation” (from Soul Fire Farm, Safer Space)
Discussion participation, style, and non-participation often manifest structural power differentials. The historical and contemporary forms of oppression, violence, and resistance that shape racial, class, gender, ability, citizenship, and sexuality differentials in opportunities and life chances also shape this campus.

Under these conditions, no classroom can claim to be a “safe space.” My hope is that it can be a space where people can show up with their full selves, a space of learning, mutual support, and growth, and that we will collectively envision and practice what we want that to look like.

THE SYLLABUS AS A CO-CREATED DOCUMENT

The following are texts that I look to as guides to creating a livable present and future. We are making this class together; I bring some skill and experience to reading and thinking about these literatures, and you bring your own skills and experiences.

I thus propose that we begin with this schedule of readings; in week 2, I ask that those with energy and desire to do so bring suggestions and additional resources—especially webinars, virtual panels and presentations, music, art, and other media, as well as other texts—and that we finalize the syllabus together by Week 3.

DRAFT SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND MEDIA—TO BE FINALIZED TOGETHER

September 8: First Meeting

Class introductions

Talk about contemplative practices, and maybe do one

Share: what is a feminist/liberatory text that has been important to you?

How do we, as a collective, materially bring ourselves into relation with this occupied land and its history that is much longer than colonization’s five centuries? What are people’s experiences with being in relation to land and place?

Look together at Ho Chunk History resources

As recommended by Teejop Community History Project, look together at the First Peoples’ Principles of Learning
Look together at Tenney Park visit instructions

**September 10, 6:30 pm**
Recommended Event: *Aaron BirdBear, Hidden in Plain Sight: The Native American Cultural Landscape* (REGISTER HERE—REGISTRATION REQUIRED).

**“Man” and the human: Sylvia Wynter and company**

**September 15**

Share: resources and suggestions for the syllabus
Plan Tenney Park visit(s) and alternatives

**September 22**
- Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), Chapters 1 and 4.

Recommended: Always Already Podcast on Wynter’s “Unsettling the Coloniality”

Syllabus finalized (?)

**September 29**
- Shakespeare, *The Tempest,* brief selections


Share Tenney Park visits

October 6
• J. T. Roane (2018) Plotting the Black Commons, Souls, 20:3, 239-266,

Recommended: Always Already Podcast with J.T. Roane

Further reading:
Greg Thomas: Sex/Sexuality and Sylvia Wynter’s “Beyond”
J. Kameron Carter, “Black Malpractice”
Katherine McKittrick, “Plantation Futures”

Share: Tenney Park experiences

October 13
PAUSE
Watch/listen and discuss together, in relation with Wynter readings:
• Sylvia Wynter, Institute of Jamaica Induction of Fellows Audio Response
• Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism: “Alexis Pauline Gumbs and the Future of Praxis” (Gumbs on Wynter)

2) Gendered disposessions, colonization, and racial capitalism: Silvia Federici and company
October 20

- Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch* (2004), New York: Autonomedia, 7-131

Recommended:
*Always Already Podcast on Caliban and the Witch*
Nick Estes interview, *The Dig*.

October 27

- Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, 133-239
- Sarah Deer, *Safety for Our Sisters: Ending Violence Against Native Women* (video)

November 3

- Jodi A. Byrd, Alyosha Goldstein, Jodi Melamed, Chandan Reddy; Predatory Value: Economies of Dispossession and Disturbed Relationalities. *Social Text* 1 June 2018; 36 (2 (135)): 1–18
- Claudia Jones, “An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman!” (1949), *Political Affairs* (June).

Recommended:
- Cheryl Harris, Whiteness as Property

November 10
PAUSE.
Watch and discuss together:
Abolitionist feminist roundtable with Ruth Wilson Gilmore...with Mariame Kaba...
Alexis Pauline Gumbs, Fannie Lou Hamer Immersion Module?

3) Sexuality, kinship, and the (m)other: Kim TallBear, Hortense Spillers, Joy James, Alexis Pauline Gumbs, and friends

November 17

• Kim TallBear, “Making Love and Relations Beyond Settler Sex and Family” in Making Kin Not Population
• Kim TallBear, “Caretaking Relations, Not American Dreaming” (2019)
• All My Relations Podcast with Kim TallBear: Decolonizing Sex

1-PAGE ABSTRACT OF FINAL PROJECT + WORKING BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 20

November 24

December 1

- Elva Orozco Mendoza, “Theorizing the Maternal Contract: Violence and Dispossession in Latin America” (Article draft in progress)
- Joanne Barker, “Water as an Indigenous Feminist Analytic”

4) Politics/poetics of relation

December 8

- Tiffany Lethabo King, The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies
  Everyone read intro, those who wish read further