EN201.01 “Versions in Black”: Black Women’s Writing
Fall 2002

REQUIRED TEXTS

Alexander, Elizabeth  “The Venus Hottentot” (handout)
Butler, Octavia    Wild Seed
Jones, Gayl       Corregidora
Kennedy, Adrienne Adrienne Kennedy in One Act
                   The People Who Led to My Plays
BarbaraNeely      Blanche on the Lam
Woodson, Jacqueline Autobiography of a Family Photo

Supplemental Readings:

Alexander, Elizabeth “Can you be BLACK and look at this?: Reading the Rodney King
                    Video(s)”
Boyce Davies, Carole “Hearing Black Women’s Voices: Transgressing Imposed
                    Boundaries”
Carby, Hazel      “Slave and Mistress: Ideologies of Womanhood Under Slavery”
Griffin, Farah    “Textual Healing: Claiming Black Women’s Bodies, the Erotic,
                    and Resistance in Contemporary Novels of Slavery”
hooks, bell       “Writing Autobiography”
                   “Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination”
Lorde, Audre      “The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action”
                   “The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism”
                   “Uses of the Erotic/Erotic as Power”
                   “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House”
Piper, Adrian      “Passing for White, Passing for Black”
Spillers, Hortense “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book”
Staples, Brent    “The Shifting Meanings of ‘Black’ and ‘White’”

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The phrase “Black Women’s Writing” implies that such writing is a fixed, if not
homogeneous, “thing” that can be neatly defined and represented. Our course
constitutes itself against this idea. In other words, rather than experiencing writing by
black North American women as an easily definable body of work, we seek to represent
“Black Women’s Writing” as diverse, complicated, and sometimes contradictory. By so
reading, discussing, and writing about these works we will be encouraged to reexamine
notions of race, gender, sexuality, community, and history. Additionally, we will examine
the varied genres black women writers use to articulate their imaginings. Required
readings come from the fields of science fiction/fantasy (Octavia Butler), detective
(BarbaraNeeley) and prose/experimental novels (Gayl Jones; Jacqueline Woodson),
drama (Adrienne Kennedy), poetry (Elizabeth Alexander), and autobiography/memoir
(Adrienne Kennedy). This diversity will allow us to explore the ways that form informs
meaning and content.