

## Gloria Naylor in the Archives Graduate Seminar Syllabus

Taught by: Professor Suzanne Edwards and Professor Mary Foltz at Lehigh University

### **Course Description:**

Gloria Naylor's visionary writing explores the impact of socio-economic injustice, institutionalized racism, and sexism on Black women in the twentieth-century United States. This seminar considers the novels of Gloria Naylor in the context of her archive, which is on loan to Lehigh University through May 2021. Our guiding question will be: how does the archive inform our understanding of Naylor's novels and, conversely, how do Naylor's novels inform an ethical approach to the archive?

Through a sustained focus on Naylor's novels, seminar participants will reflect broadly on key issues in twentieth-century African-American literature and criticism: Black aesthetic, religious, and philosophical traditions; transnational literary networks; the violence of academic epistemologies; and the enduring legacies of enslavement. In addition to Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place*, *Linden Hills*, *Mama Day*, and *Bailey's Cafe*, we will explore literary influences on her work, Naylor's unpublished manuscripts and correspondence, and critical responses to her novels. Our reading list for the course will be guided, in part, by the materials in the archive, including the extensive historical and literary research Naylor undertook for each of her novels.

Our engagement with the archive will be rooted in a consideration of how archives and records "serve as tools of oppression and liberation," in the words of Michelle Caswell, Ricardo Punzalan, and T-Kay Sangwand. Through discussions of recent scholarly work and existing literary archives as well as hands-on projects, we will engage feminist and anti-racist methodologies in critical archive studies in order to reflect creatively on the archival practices that best serve Naylor's political, intellectual, and aesthetic vision.

### **Course Goals:**

By the end of this course, you should:

- Be able to discuss the aesthetic forms and traditions, historical circumstances, and political and philosophical concerns that Gloria Naylor engages in her novels, plays, essays, and private writing.
- Be able to think critically about the form and content of archives and their relationship to structures of power.
- Be able to engage archival materials to inform literary analysis, using a variety of strategies.

In addition, this course gives you the opportunity to develop skills essential to your professional and intellectual development, including:

- Conducting primary research in an archive.
- Raising interpretive questions and leading/participating in critical discussion.
- Developing a project that advances an original idea and contributes to an ongoing critical conversation.

### **Course Texts:**

Gloria Naylor, *The Women of Brewster Place*

Gloria Naylor, *Linden Hills*

Gloria Naylor, *Mama Day*

Gloria Naylor, *Bailey's Café*

Gloria Naylor, *1996*

### **Assignments:**

#### *Participation* (15% of final grade)

Students are expected to prepare thoroughly to discuss the course reading and to engage with your colleagues in enthusiastic analyses of literary, critical, and archival texts. You will evaluate yourself on this measure, by sending me a note after each seminar indicating whether it counts toward your total. We expect that you will attend every class, but of course we recognize that COVID-19 exposures, illness, and/or family emergencies may come up. Please do let us know if you experience a major health crisis during this semester or other emergency that will require you to miss more than one class period, and we will work with you to find a way forward.

Prepared participation in 13 or more class meetings: A

Prepared participation in 11 or 12 class meetings: A-

Prepared participation in 9 or 10 class meetings: B+

Prepared participation in 7 or 8 class meetings: B

Prepared participation in fewer than 7 class meetings: B-

#### *Short Written Assignments* (30% of final grade)

Ten weeks in the syllabus include an optional short writing assignment that offers you an opportunity to develop an important professional skill: discovering and assessing archival collections, transcribing and editing archival documents, processing and describing archival materials, summarizing secondary criticism, closely reading and analyzing a passage, identifying grant opportunities, etc. These assignments will be contract graded. If you complete seven or more, you will receive an A. If you complete six, you will receive an A-. If you complete five, you will receive a B+. If you complete one or four, you will receive a B, and so on. If you complete none, you

will receive no credit. We reserve the right to return sloppy or incomplete assignments without counting them toward your total.

These assignments are due at the start of our class meeting each week, and we will not be able to accept late assignments. This policy is not designed to be punitive. It is designed to encourage you to work consistently on your writing for the course; it would not serve your learning (or anyone's work-life balance!) to write all of your assignments hastily in the last two weeks of class.

We have structured the course assignments this way so that you can, to some extent, plot your own intellectual path through this class. As you will see, some of the assignments offer you an opportunity to build on work you've done before or to further hone a particular skill. The flexibility in the type and timing of work you submit will allow you to develop the skills and knowledge that are most relevant to your interests and professional ambitions—as well as to balance your various obligations as a student, an instructor, and a human being.

#### *Presentation (25% of final grade)*

Each student will give a 10-minute presentation on an artifact (letter, journal entry, business record, draft, research materials, etc.) from the Gloria Naylor archive. The presentation will: 1) introduce and describe the artifact; 2) reflect on the interpretive questions the artifact raises; 3) explore how that artifact suggests new ways of thinking about one of Naylor's published novels. This assignment is an opportunity to build your skills working in an archive. We will give model presentations in the first three weeks of the semester.

#### *Final Project (30% of final grade)*

To allow students to pursue their own intellectual interests and professional goals, there will be three options for a final project in this course: 1) a 20-minute (8-9pp.) conference paper; 2) a grant proposal (8-9pp. narrative and rationale); 3) an exhibition featuring 10-12 archival documents. Students who wish to propose a different model for a final project are invited to do so. We encourage students to make a plan for which final project option they wish to pursue early in the semester and to select short writing assignments that will support their progress toward that aim.

Students will write a short proposal (2-pages) for a final project and will meet with us to discuss it around the mid-point of the semester. To evaluate these assignments, we will use a collaborative grading process.

## **Course Schedule:**

**Aug 26: *Introduction***

- Introductions to feminist recovery, critical archives
- Michelle Caswell, selections from “The Archive is not An Archives”
- Visit to the Gloria Naylor Archive

## Sept 2: Building Archives

*\*Location of class: EWFM 379*

Literature:

- Walker, Alice. *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*
  - “Saving the Life that Is Your Own: The Importance of Models in the Artist’s Life” (3-14)
  - “But Yet and Still the Cotton Gin Kept on Working ...” (22-32)
  - “A Talk: Convocation 1972” (33-41)
  - “Zora Neale Hurston: A Cautionary Tale and a Partisan View” (83-92)
  - “Looking for Zora” (93-116)
  - “In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens” (231-243)

Archives, Libraries, and Power: Understanding Basic Terms

- Finnegan, Cara. “What is this a Picture of?”
- Berry, Dorothy. [“The House Archives Built.”](#)
- Helton, Laura. “On Decimals, Catalogs, and Racial Imaginaries of Reading”

Archives to Explore:

- [Zora Neale Hurston Digital Archive](#)
- [The Gloria Naylor Archive](#)
- [The Willa Cather Archive](#)
- [Harriet Beecher Stowe Center](#)
- [Keeler Tavern Museum](#)

Guests:

- Dr. Katie Burton, Head of Communications and Grants, Keeler Tavern Museum, Ph.D. Lehigh University
- Dr. Emily Rau, Managing Editor of the Willa Cather Archive, M.A. Lehigh University, Ph.D. University of Nebraska-Lincoln

## Sept 9: Archives – Collections, Places, and Communities

- Achille Mbembe, “The Power of the Archive and Its Limits”
- Marika Cifor and Stacy Wood, “Critical Feminism in the Archives,” *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* (2017): 1-27.
- Cecilia Caballero, “Mothering While Brown in White Spaces,” *Chicana M(other)work*, <https://via.hypothes.is/https://www.chicanamotherwork.com/single-post/2017/08/23/Mothering-While-Brown-in-White-Spaces-Or-When-I-Took-My-Son-to-Octavia-Butler%E2%80%99s-Exhibit>
- Mimi Thi Nguyen, “Minor Threats,” *Radical History Review* (2015): 11-24.
- Jean-Christophe Cloutier, “Black Special Collections and the Midcentury Rise of the Institutional Collector” and “An Interlude Concerning the Vanishing Manuscripts of Ann Petry” from *Shadow Archives* (2019)

Short Writing Assignment: Discovering and Evaluating Archives

### Sept 16: *The Women of Brewster Place*

Literature:

- Naylor, Gloria. *The Women of Brewster Place*(1981)

Literary Criticism:

- Fowler, Virginia C. *Gloria Naylor*. Chapter 1
- Edwards, Suzanne M. [“About Gloria Naylor”](#)
- Jones, Tayari. [“The Women of Brewster Place Nearly 40 Years Later”](#)

Short Writing Assignment: Close Reading a Novel

### Sept 23: *Women of Brewster Place* in the Archive

Naylor’s Essays:

- Gloria Naylor, “A Message to Winston,” *Essence* (November 1982): 78-81.
- Gloria Naylor, “Until Death Do Us Part,” *Essence* (May 1985): 133.

Archival Theory and Praxis:

- Shanna Greene Benjamin, “Intimacy and Ephemera: In Search of Our Mother’s Letters” *MELUS*
- Marlene Kadar, “An Epistolary Constellation: Trotsky, Kahlo, Birney” in *Working in Women’s Archives*, edited by Marlene Kadar. (2003): 103-113.
- Marianne Dever, “Reading Other People’s Mail,” *Archives and Manuscripts* 24 (1996): 116-29.

- Sarah Hodson, “To Reveal or Conceal: Privacy and Confidentiality in the Papers of Contemporary Authors” in *The Boundaries of the Literary Archive: Reclamation and Representation*, edited by Carrie Smith and Lisa Stead. (2013): 157-71.
- Ayanna Woods, [“Letters Between Gloria Naylor and Lucille Clifton”](#)

Student Presentations:

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Short Writing Assignment: Transcribing and Editing for Research

### September 30: *Linden Hills*

Literature:

- Gloria Naylor, *Linden Hills* (1985)

Literary Criticism:

- Christian, Barbara. “Naylor’s Geography: Community, Class, Patriarchy in *The Women of Brewster Place* and *Linden Hills*”

Short Writing Assignment: Summarizing Scholarship

### Oct 7: *Linden Hills* in the Archive

From the Naylor Archive:

- Transcriptions of Naylor’s journals from the *Linden Hills* period
- Research bibliography for *Linden Hills*

Archival Theory and Praxis:

- McKemmish, Sue. “Evidence of Me,” *The Australian Library Journal* 45 (1996): 174-87.
- Hobbs, Catherine. “Personal Ethics: Being an Archivist of Writers,” in *Basements and Attics, Closets and Cyberspace*, edited by Linda M. Morra and Jessica Schagerl (2013): 181-192.

Guest: Mary Foltz, “Naylor’s Research Bibliographies for *Linden Hills*”

- Selections from Bardolph, *The Black Bourgeoisie*
- Selections from Frazier, *The Negro Vanguard*

Archives Presentations:

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- \_\_\_\_\_
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Short Writing Assignment: Connecting Archival Documents and Literature

**October 14: *Mama Day***

Literature:

- Gloria Naylor, *Mama Day* (1988)

Literary Criticism:

- Katherine McKittrick, Introduction and Chapter 5 from *Demonic Grounds*

Short Writing Assignment: Connecting Theory and Literature

**October 21: *Mama Day* in the Archive**

From the Archive:

- Gloria Naylor, screenplay of *Mama Day*.
- *Women of Brewster Place* teleseries (1989), directed by Donna Deitch, teleplay by Karen Hall.

Literary Criticism:

- Jacqueline Bobo and Ellen Seiter, “Black Feminism and Media Criticism: *The Women of Brewster Place*”
- Ann-Derrick Gaillot, “30 Years Ago *The Women of Brewster Place* Cracked Open the Door for Queer TV,” *Vulture*, May 9, 2019.  
<https://www.vulture.com/2019/05/the-women-of-brewster-place-theresa-lorraine.html>

Short Writing Assignment: Finding Grants and Pitching Projects

Archive Presentations:

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- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**October 28: *Bailey's Cafe***

Literature:

- Gloria Naylor, *Bailey's Cafe* (1992)

Short Writing Assignment: *Close Reading a Novel OR Summarizing Criticism*

**Nov 4: No Class. Please plan to attend the Symposium, starting Friday evening, Nov. 5, and through the day on Saturday, Nov. 6. Consult the website for the schedule details.**

Short Writing Assignment (due Nov. 8): Reflecting on the Gloria Naylor Archive Symposium

**November 11: *Parchman***

Guest Speakers: Mellie Katalalos and Kashi Johnson, Department of Theatre

From the Archive:

- "Parchman," a television screenplay from the archive
- David Oshinsky, selections from *Worse Than Slavery* (1944)
- Liner Notes for "Jailhouse Blues"  
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/dukejazzarchive/sets/72157623234176541/>  
 (scroll down for this particular album)

Archive Presentations:

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**November 18: Anthologies and Digital Archives**



Literature:

- Gloria Naylor, selections from *Children of the Night*(1997)
- Selected archival documents

Archival Theory and Praxis:

- Roopika Risam, “Beyond the Margins: Intersectionality and the Digital Humanities”
- Jacqueline Wernimont, “Whence Feminism? Assessing Feminist Interventions in Digital Literary Archives”
- Kim Gallon, “Making a Case for the Black Digital Humanities”

Guest Speakers: Julia Maserjian and Rob Weidman

**Nov 25: THANKSGIVING – No Class**

**Dec 2: *Sapphira Wade***

From the Archive:

- Gloria Naylor, “Sapphira Wade,” unfinished, unpublished manuscript from 2004-6
- Gloria Naylor, Letter to Julia Alvarez
- Research Materials for “Sapphira Wade”

Archival Theory and Praxis:

- Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” *Small Axe* 26 (2008): 1-14.
- Marisa Fuentes, selections from *Dispossessed Lives*

## **Short Writing Assignments**

*September 9: Discovering and Evaluating Archives*

Look up a 20th-century writer you’re interested in and know something about, using the resources suggested in the [“Archive Discovery: How-To Guide.”](#) Does this writer have a “split collection”? Can you locate an online finding aid (or finding aids) for this writer’s papers? Can you find any information about how the collection was accessioned (added to) the repository or how it was processed? Who can access the material and how? What is the intellectual arrangement of the archive—and who arranged it?

In an ~500-word essay, critically evaluate the structure of available finding aids and the history of the collected papers themselves. Nguyen, Caballero, and Cifor and Woods all argue that thinking about archival praxis in terms of

*representation*—increasing the number of records that document groups historically marginalized in archives—is not sufficient for critical archival praxis. How is power structured for the archive you researched? *Who* is foregrounded as an agent/subject of knowledge in the collection and finding aid? *Who and what* is potentially elided and how? What does the arrangement and the history of the collection tell you about its content?

*September 16: Close Reading a Novel*

In a tightly constructed ~500-word essay, close read a key passage from *The Women of Brewster Place*. Your essay should: 1) make a claim about Naylor's thematic, intellectual, and/or aesthetic concerns in *The Women of Brewster Place*; 2) identify a passage that supports your argument; and 3) analyze details from the text (word choice, imagery, syntax, cultural references, literary allusions, rhetorical devices) to show how the passage illustrates your argument. Notice that the structure of your essay, which begins with an argument, might be the inverse of the process of writing it.

*September 23: Transcribing and Editing for Research*

Transcribe and/or edit a letter from the Gloria Naylor Archive. The idea of transcription is to faithfully reproduce a handwritten document, to make it easier to read and/or to make it more discoverable and searchable.

In transcribing, you do not make grammar or spelling corrections. In editing the letter, you will add informative annotations about: who the writers are; the context in which the letters are written; issues, topics, and historical events alluded to or described in the letters. Although you're only transcribing/editing one letter, you may need to search for other letters in the archive that will provide valuable context. Provide an image of the letter you are transcribing/editing as well as a citation that will help me locate the originals in the archive, if necessary. If you refer to other documents in the archive, cite those as well.

What information helps to make sense of these private documents for an audience never anticipated by the writers? In a short reflective paragraph, make a speculative claim for why/how the letters you have transcribed and edited are interesting or important. What possibilities for literary or cultural history do they open up? This paragraph (~250 words) is just a sketch of an idea, to which you might return later—or to which you might not. The purpose of this paragraph is to begin to think (in conversation with us!) about how archival documents might drive and respond to research questions in literary criticism.

*September 30: Summarizing Scholarship*

In ~500 words: 1) summarize Barbara Christian's overarching argument; 2) explain the methodological/theoretical/critical stakes of that argument; and 3) describe the main evidence that Christian adduces in support of her argument. Finally, critically consider Christian's argument—do you observe evidence from the archive or the novel that supports, extends, and/or complicates her claims? What are the strengths of her argument? What new directions does her argument inspire in your thinking about *The Women of Brewster Place* and *Linden Hills*?

Many scholars produce these summaries for any article or book they read that connects to their research or teaching. The summaries become a quick reference for recalling why you were interested in a particular scholarly work. Though they take a few minutes to write after you've read a piece, they can ultimately save you time down the road. We often use language from my summaries in a lit review section. Especially early in graduate school, summaries like these were also a reading tool, part of an analytical practice.

#### *October 7: Connecting Archival Documents and Literature*

In a ~500 word essay, analyze the relationship between Naylor's journal entries and *Linden Hills*. How can reading these texts together open up new ways of interpreting them? Your essay should make a concise claim and assess textual evidence from the journals and the novel that supports it. It can be speculative, and you won't be able to prove your argument in just 2 pages, but you *will* be able to discuss one example that shows how reading the novel and journal entries together illustrates your claim.

#### *October 14: Connecting Theory and Literature*

In a ~500 word essay, consider the geographical imaginary of Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day*. How do McKittrick's insights about the way that geographical imaginaries situate domination in space—and the ways that Black women's articulations of space envision an "interpretive, alterable world"—call your attention to geographies and histories in *Mama Day*? In writing this piece, you may want to take a look at the "Willow Springs" section of the Naylor exhibition in Maginnes Hall or on the Gloria Naylor website.

#### *October 21: Finding Grants and Pitching Projects*

Write a 500-word pitch for a project involving Gloria Naylor and/or archives, directed to a particular grant program. For examples of grant proposals related to the Naylor archive, see the documents that I have shared on Coursesite. Your pitch is not a fully fleshed out proposal (that's what you'd do for your final project), just the main idea (what you plan to do) and the rationale (why doing that matters and who it will matter to).

Every grant program has different requirements and emphases, so you should direct your pitch to a *particular* call for proposals. Share the link to the call you're pitching at the top of your assignment. Part of the challenge here is generating fit between the project you want to do and the grant opportunities that are out there. For a list of grant possibilities, take a look here:

<https://www.wm.edu/offices/sponsoredprograms/funding/humanities/index.php>  
AND <https://www.clir.org/hiddencollections/> AND the Pennsylvania Humanities Council. If you're having trouble linking your idea to a grant program, reach out to me.

*October 28: Reprise – Close Reading a Novel or Summarizing Scholarship*

Revisit *either* the close reading (Sept 16) or summarizing scholarship (Sept 30) assignments above. If you choose the close reading assignment, focus on *Bailey's Café*, and if you're summarizing, select an article of your choice about *Bailey's Café*—written between 2000 and 2021.

*November 8: Reflecting on the Symposium*

Write ~500 words of closing remarks for the symposium. Imagine that you are addressing these remarks to your fellow attendees: What did you learn? What unexpected themes from the symposium would you highlight? What directions for future work on Naylor, on Black feminist approaches to archives, on collaborative multi-disciplinary, multi-institution projects strike you as most interesting and important?

*November 11: Write a Post for the Archive "Highlights" Page (Counts as 2 assignments)*

Write a 1000-1500 word article for the website's "Highlights" page. The audience for your post is scholars, teachers, students, and fans. Your post should call attention to a document or a group of documents in the archive, contextualize those documents in terms of Naylor's life and literary works, and explain why those documents are of interest. For scholars, your piece will reveal the kinds of materials they might expect to find in the archive. For teachers, your post might locate a document that they could use as part of a lesson. For students, it might serve as a secondary source in a research paper. For fans, it might pique interest in writers' archives. All archival materials, passages from novels, and secondary works (though you might not use these) should be cited. Use hyperlinks where possible. Excellent pieces will be considered for publication on the "highlights" page—a decision that rests with the website editorial team, not with me alone. Think about this assignment as a chance to try out and to get feedback on ideas you'll develop more fully in your final project.

**Final Project Assignments for Gloria Naylor in the Archives**

You have two choices for your final project: **EITHER** an 8-10-page conference paper that engages material from the archives to develop a reading of one of Naylor's published or unpublished works **OR** a final curation project that selects, annotates, and introduces a series of artifacts from the archive.

We will ask you to develop your final project in conversation with us. To that end, we ask that you submit a **1-2 page project proposal by November 19th.**

*Option 1: 10-page conference paper.*

This project gives you an opportunity to employ archival research in service of a sustained argument about a literary work. If you choose this project, you will practice:

- Closely reading literary passages as evidence for an analytical argument.
- Analyzing archival materials as evidence for an analytical argument about a novel.
- Developing an analytical argument about a literary work.

In short, this project asks you to bring together the various skills you have practiced throughout the semester—close readings of literary works, identification of relevant archival materials, summaries of secondary criticism—to develop a sustained, coherent, and nuanced argument about Naylor's literary production.

This is a great choice for you if you're hoping that: your final project might be a starting place for a real, live conference paper on one of Gloria Naylor's novels; your final project will give you a chance to develop your skill at writing conference papers; your final project will give you the opportunity to develop your own critical voice and argumentative skill, particularly if you plan to write a traditional MA thesis or dissertation; AND/OR your final project might ultimately serve as the foundation of a writing sample for applications to PhD programs.

*Option 2: A curated exhibition of artifacts from the Gloria Naylor Archive.*

This project gives you an opportunity to focus on your archival research skills and to reflect on the structure of knowledge in archives. For this project, you will select and annotate 10-15 artifacts from the Gloria Naylor Archive that give insight into an aspect of Naylor's life or works. The structure of the exhibition on the Naylor website gives you a model for this assignment (although that exhibition has a larger scope, with more than 30 artifacts). As with the online exhibition, your exhibition will include an introduction that explicates the theme linking your objects (500 words), object captions (a title for the object, a creator, and date), and an explanatory note for each object (150-200 words each). In addition, you will write a critical introduction (~3pp.) that: 1) explains your vision for the exhibition—where would you want to see it installed? What kinds of programming would go along with it? For example, with the online Naylor exhibition, we are bringing in teaching artists who will work with schoolkids from Bethlehem who will draw maps of places they live or would like to live;

2) explains your principles of selection, including what you had to leave out; and 3) reflects critically on the methodologies in critical archive studies that frame the selection and interpretation of texts in your exhibition.

If you choose this project, you will practice:

- Developing a coherent narrative out of fragmentary archival documents.
- Annotating archival documents, a skill that requires recognizing what you (and your intended audience) do not know about references in the document, what you *cannot* know, and what you can figure out by turning to historical records and other authors' archives.
- Articulating your methodological commitments in relation to critical archive studies.

The ultimate form for this project is up to you—you can imagine presenting the artifacts and your introduction as a webpage or you can envision a gallery exhibition or a publication for secondary teachers of Naylor's work. Of course, it is impossible for you to make good on this form in the time available at the end of the semester, but your critical introduction should make clear how the *ultimate form* of your curated project reflects your aspirations and audience for the mock-up at hand.

This project is a great choice for you if you want to focus on developing your archival skills specifically; if you are interested in an MA thesis that will take a non-traditional form, such as a public humanities project, and you want more experience with alternative forms for sharing your developing expertise in literary studies; and if you're planning an alt-ac career and want to develop material for a portfolio that will showcase the flexible skills you have built in your MA/PhD in literature.