

**AFR 372E, Spring 2013**  
**MWF 11-12, MEZ 1.120**

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**Black Women and Dance:  
Creativity, Movement, and Social Justice**

*dance your anger  
and your joys.  
dance the guns  
to silence  
dance, dance, dance...*

--Ken Saro-Wiwa

What does it mean for black women to *dance your anger and your joys*, as activist-artist Ken Saro Wiwa put it: that is, to use our moving, creative, powerful bodies to respond to the violences of racism and sexism, and to envision new ways of being and moving in the world? This course journeys towards answers to this question by exploring women's participation in ritual, concert, and social dance in North America, Haiti, Cuba, and Brazil. We will work through readings, viewings, and stagings, and interweave text, movement, and action to encourage students' artistic as well as academic self-expression. Some of the questions we explore include: How can we view and create artistic work while still keeping social justice issues in mind? How do embodied practices become modes of organizing communities? How can we decipher the fragile histories that we carry and move through in our own bodies?

**Primary Texts**, available at UT Co-op Bookstore

Yvonne Daniel, *Dancing Wisdom: Embodied Knowledge in Haitian Vodou, Cuban Yoruba, and Bahian Candomble*

Brenda Dixon Gottschild, *The Black Dancing Body*

Celeste Fraser Delgado and José Muñoz, eds. *Everynight Life: Culture and Dance in Latino/a America*

Julie Malnig, ed. *Ballroom, Boogie, Shimmy Sham, Shake: A Social and Popular Dance Reader*

*\*\*All other texts on the syllabus, unless otherwise noted, will be available electronically*

## **Respectful Learning**

In this course, students engage texts that deal explicitly with (post)colonialism, slavery, racism, sexism, religious discrimination, poverty, state violence, genocide, sexual violence, same-sex sexuality, and embodiment. While the professor will provide historical contexts and academic frameworks for discussing these issues, many students may be unfamiliar with them and so may initially experience emotional responses as they confront their own privilege and oppression, ignorance and knowledge. The professor asks that students pay attention to such feelings and note where they challenge their ability to approach texts analytically. I also ask that everyone come to class willing to discuss these difficult, complex topics with openness and respect. Expressions of First Worldism, racism, classism, religious intolerance, homophobia, heterosexism, ableism, or sexism will not be tolerated. Instead, I expect students to take seriously the responsibility involved in university education in general, and in reading works that document violence and social injustice in particular. As part of this responsibility, I ask students to consider carefully how social and geopolitical positioning shapes what they do and do not react to, and complicates their relationships to texts in different ways.

## **Appreciated Attributes**

1. Critical thinking—spoken and written statements reflect thoughtful, careful attention to subjects at hand; demonstrate independent, original thought; and include specific, properly documented references to all sources.
2. Inquisitiveness—classroom participation shows willingness to ask questions about aspects of readings/discussions that remain unclear, and to seek additional information.
3. Making connections beyond the classroom—spoken and written statements express when a reading speaks to your particular experiences, interest, or knowledge.
4. Creativity— spoken and written statements express willingness to engage new topics with imagination and flexibility. Imagining differently is the first step in changing the social injustices that we will engage!

## **Requirements**

### ***Class Participation: 35% of final grade***

The goal of this course is to experiment with sharing and creating knowledge of multiple literatures, cultures, histories, identities, and experiences in an intellectual community—our class—that includes as many diverse, creative viewpoints possible. To build such community, the following kinds of class participation will be required of all students (each about 6% of final grade):

Attendance: Please come to every class session on time, and take care of yourself through flu season to make sure this is possible. If you must be absent, notify the instructor and arrange to get notes *beforehand* in order to avoid lowering your attendance grade.

Timely completion of readings: Finish assigned reading before arriving in class so that we can have meaningful discussions.

Share thoughts and questions with the class: Speaking to a group is a skill benefits students not only in other classes, but in almost any career. For this reason, you will be asked to come to class with specific questions, notes, reactions, and analyses to share with the group, and to communicate these and other observations during our discussions. Everyone's input is valued!

In-class writing: From time to time, students will be asked to free write or answer targeted questions in class. Please come ready to be creative.

Small group work: Periodically, students will also be asked to consider questions or topics in small groups and report back to the larger group. Active participation with your colleagues will be a vital part of sharing knowledge and creating community, and you are encouraged to talk freely!

### ***Essays: 45% of final grade (15% each)***

At the conclusion of each unit, students will submit a 3-4 page essay (double-spaced, 11- or 12-point font) in response to class readings and viewings. Prompts will be provided by the instructor.

### ***Dance Journal: 20% of final grade***

Every Friday, students will use class time to explore their own dance practice. This dance practice can take the form of any of the dance genres we will be exploring over the course of the semester: ritual dance, concert dance, or social/popular dance. Students may choose to take an organized dance class; join a dance group; participate in social dance; or engage in any other form of dance undertaken in a group context. (In other words, dancing alone in your room won't suffice for this assignment). To record their dance participation, students will keep a dance journal. Each week, you will write an entry reflecting on your dance experiences that week, and on what you are learning about black women and dance through your embodied experience.

Suggestions for a successful dance journal include:

1. Talk to other participants. In group dance, no individual can accurately reflect the entirety of the experience. You will get more out of what's going on if you talk to your fellow dancers: ask them why they participate, what they find rewarding and challenging, how this fits into the rest of their life. If your practice includes an instructor or leader, take a few minutes to talk to them about their training and/or vision for their dance practice

2. “Talk” to your body. Pay attention to what hurts and what feels good when you dance; to which body parts you are self-conscious of, and which you are proud of. Think about how this might reflect or deflect messages you have received about black women’s beauty, sexuality, spirituality, intelligence, and self-worth.

Please bring your dance journals to class, as you may be asked to share from them.

### **Office Hours**

Office hours are a chance for students to introduce themselves, ask questions, discuss difficulties, explore ideas, and receive support and suggestions. In my experience, students who come to talk outside of class both get more out of the course and produce work (and receive grades) they are happier with. Students are invited to attend as often as they like, and arrangements to meet outside posted hours can be made.

**Course calendar** (subject to change)

**Introduction:**

**Imagining Dance and/as Black Women's Liberation**

January 14: In-class viewing: Janet Jackson, "Rhythm Nation"; Beyonce, "Who Run the World? (Girls)"

**Unit One:**

**The Spirit of Movement: Black Women and Ritual Dance**

- January 16: Black Women and the Ritual Dance Tradition  
Yvonne Daniel, *Dancing Wisdom: Embodied Knowledge in Haitian Vodou, Cuban Yoruba, and Bahian Candomble*  
Reading due: "Deciphering Diaspora Dances," 1-50  
In-class viewing: Maya Deren, *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti*
- January 18: Dance practicum
- January 21: Martin Luther King Day Holiday
- January 23: Black Women and the Ritual Dance Tradition  
Yvonne Daniel, *Dancing Wisdom*  
Reading due: "Body Knowledge at the Crossroads," 51-93
- January 25: Dance practicum
- January 28: Black Women and the Ritual Dance Tradition  
Yvonne Daniel, *Dancing Wisdom*  
Reading Due: "Days of Remembrance" and "Dances of Memory," 94-147
- January 30: Black Women and the Ritual Dance Tradition  
Yvonne Daniel, *Dancing Wisdom*  
Reading Due: "The Dancing Body and Embodied Wisdom," 246-279
- February 1: Dance practicum
- February 4: "Folklore and Fishnets": Innovating Ritual Dance  
Reading due: Adia Whitaker, "The Ghana Blogs" 11/19/08-12/18/08. View at <http://adiawhitaker.blogspot.com>  
In-class viewing: Adia Whitaker, "Drains, Doors, and Lotus Flowers" and "Ezili"
- February 6: "Folklore and Fishnets": Innovating Ritual Dance  
Reading due: Adia Whitaker, The Ghana Blogs 12/23/08-1/6/09.  
View at <http://adiawhitaker.blogspot.com>
- February 8: Dance practicum

- February 11: “Folklore and Fishnets”: Innovating Ritual Dance  
 Reading due: Christina Zanfagna, “The Multi-ringed Cosmos of Krumping” in *Ballroom, Boogie, Shimmy Sham, Shake*  
 In-class viewing: David LaChapelle, *Rize*
- February 13: “Folklore and Fishnets”: Innovating Ritual Dance  
 In-class viewing: David LaChapelle, *Rize*  
**Paper #1 due in class**
- February 15: Dance practicum

## **Unit Two:**

### **Black and Beautiful Under Stage Lights: Black Women and Concert Dance**

- February 18: A Survey of the Black Woman’s Dancing Body  
 Brenda Dixon Gottschild, *The Black Dancing Body*  
 Reading due: Part I, “Topography of Things to Come,” 2-40
- February 20: A Survey of the Black Woman’s Dancing Body  
 Brenda Dixon Gottschild, *The Black Dancing Body*  
 Reading due: Part I, “Topography of Things to Come,” 41-100
- February 22: Dance practicum
- February 25: A Survey of the Black Woman’s Dancing Body  
 Brenda Dixon Gottschild, *The Black Dancing Body*  
 Reading due: Part II, “Mapping the Territories,” 102-144
- February 27: A Survey of the Black Woman’s Dancing Body  
 Brenda Dixon Gottschild, *The Black Dancing Body*  
 Reading due: Part II, “Mapping the Territories,” 145-221
- March 1: Dance practicum
- March 4: Black Women Breaking Ground in Concert Dance  
 Reading due: Anthea Kraut, “Between Primitivism and Diaspora: The Dance Performances of Josephine Baker, Zora Neale Hurston, and Katherine Dunham.” *Theatre Journal* 55:3 (October 2003).  
 In-class viewing: *Josephine Baker: The First Black Superstar*
- March 6: Black Women Breaking Ground in Concert Dance  
 In-class viewing: Josephine Baker, *La revue des revues*
- March 8: Dance practicum
- March 11-15: Spring Break
- March 18: Black Women Breaking Ground in Concert Dance  
 Reading due: Lynne Fauley Emery, “Pioneers of Black Concert Dance” in *Black Dance: From 1610 to Today*
- March 20: No class meeting

- March 22: Dance practicum
- March 25: Black Women Breaking Ground in Concert Dance  
Reading due: Ananya Chatterjea, "Subversive Dancing: The Interventions in Jawole Willa Jo Zollar's *Batty Moves*." *Theatre Journal* 55:3 (October 2003).  
In-class viewing: Urban Bush Women, *Batty Moves*
- March 27: Black Women Breaking Ground in Concert Dance  
In-class viewing: Urban Bush Women, *Walking with Pearl*  
**Paper #2 due in class**
- March 29: Dance practicum

### **Unit Three:**

#### **Where My Girls At: Black Women and Social Dance**

- April 1: Histories of Black Women and Social Dance  
Celeste Fraser Delgado and José Muñoz, *Everynight Life: Culture and Dance in Latino/a America*  
Reading due: Celeste Fraser Delgado and José Muñoz, "Rebellions of Everynight Life"; Jane C. Desmond, "Embodying Difference"
- April 3: Histories of Black Women and Social Dance  
Celeste Fraser Delgado and José Muñoz, *Everynight Life: Culture and Dance in Latino/a America*  
Reading due: Jose Piedra, "Hip Poetics"; Augusto Puleo, "Una verdadera crónica del Norte: Una noche con la India"
- April 5: Dance practicum
- April 8: Histories of Black Women and Social Dance  
Julie Malnig, *Ballroom, Boogie, Shimmy Sham, Shake: A Social and Popular Dance Reader*  
Reading due: Section I, 19-54 and 7-90
- April 10: Histories of Black Women and Social Dance  
Julie Malnig, *Ballroom, Boogie, Shimmy Sham, Shake: A Social and Popular Dance Reader*  
Reading due: Section IV, 285-301 and 323-336
- April 12: Dance practicum
- April 15: Black to the Future: Black Women's Innovations in Social Dance  
Reading due: Carolyn Cooper, "Lady Saw Cuts Loose" from *Sound Clash*; Beth-Sarah White, "Latter-Day Emancipation! Woman, Dance and Healing in Jamaican Dancehall Culture." *Agenda* 58 (2003)  
In-class viewing: Don Letts, *Dancehall Queen*
- April 17: Black to the Future: Black Women's Innovations in Social Dance  
In-class viewing: Don Letts, *Dancehall Queen*

- April 19: Dance practicum
- April 22: Black to the Future: Black Women's Innovations in Social Dance  
Reading due: Marlon M. Bailey, "Gender/Racial Realness:  
Theorizing the Gender System in Ballroom Culture." *Feminist  
Studies* 37:2 (2011)  
In-class viewing: Wolfgang Busch, *How Do I Look?*
- April 24: Black to the Future: Black Women's Innovations in Social Dance  
In-class viewing: Wolfgang Busch, *How Do I Look?*  
**Paper #3 due in class**
- April 26: Dance practicum

**Course conclusion**

- April 29: Course wrap-up
- May 1: Evaluative session  
**Dance journals due in class**