

**AFR 356E, Fall 2014**  
**MWF 1-2, JES A207A**

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**Office hours: MF 12-1, BEL 243C**

**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*

Thomas DeFrantz, ed. *Dancing Many Drums: Excavations in African American Dance*

Katrina Hazzard-Gordon, *Jookin': The Rise of Social Dance Formations in African-American Culture*

*\*\*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***

Throughout the semester, students will 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 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.

## **Introduction:**

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

- August 27: Black Women's Right to Dance  
In-class viewing: "Damas do Samba"; "50 years after civil rights protests, Birmingham class finally has prom"
- August 29: The Problem of the Black Woman's Body: Combatting Stereotypes  
Reading due: Patricia Hill Collins, "Mammies, Matriarchs, and Other Controlling Images" and "The Power of Self-Definition" from *Black Feminist Thought*. Available as e-book from lib.utexas.edu.
- September 1: Labor Day Holiday
- September 3: The Problem of the Black Woman's Body: Combatting Stereotypes  
Reading due: Kariamuwelsh Asante, "Images of Women in African Dance: Sexuality and Sensuality as Dual Unity" and "Commonalities in African Dance"
- September 5: The Problem of the Black Woman's Body: Combatting Stereotypes  
Guest Speaker: TaShia Asanti
- September 8: The Problem of the Black Woman's Body: Combatting Stereotypes  
Reading due: Michèle Alexandre, "Dance Halls, Masquerades, Body Protest and the Law: The Female Body as Redemptive Tool Against Trinidad's Gender-Biased Laws"

## **Unit One:**

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

- September 10: Black Women and the Ritual Dance Tradition  
Reading due: Yvonne Daniel, *Dancing Wisdom*, 1-50  
In-class viewing: Maya Deren, *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti*
- September 12: Black Women and the Ritual Dance Tradition  
Reading due: Yvonne Daniel, *Dancing Wisdom*, 51-93
- September 15: Black Women and the Ritual Dance Tradition  
Reading Due: Yvonne Daniel, *Dancing Wisdom*, 246-279
- September 17: Black Women and the Ritual Dance Tradition  
Reading Due: Brenda Dixon Gottschild, *The Black Dancing Body*, 226-280; Thomas DeFrantz, *Dancing Many Drums*, 39-57
- September 19: "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, "Ezili"

- September 22: “Folklore and Fishnets”: Innovating Ritual Dance  
 Reading due: Christina Zanfagna, “The Multi-ringed Cosmos of Krumping”  
 In-class viewing: David LaChapelle, *Rize*
- September 24: “Folklore and Fishnets”: Innovating Ritual Dance  
 In-class viewing: David LaChapelle, *Rize*
- September 26: “Folklore and Fishnets”: Innovating Ritual Dance  
 In-class viewing: David LaChapelle, *Rize*
- September 29: **Paper #1 due by 1:00 p.m.**

## **UNIT TWO:**

### **Dark Beauty Under the Lights: Black Women and Concert Dance**

- October 1: Black Women Breaking Ground in Concert Dance  
 Reading due: Zita Allen, “A Tale of Two Pioneers,”  
[http://www.pbs.org/wnet/freetodance/behind/behind\\_blackdance.html](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/freetodance/behind/behind_blackdance.html); Thomas DeFrantz, *Dancing Many Drums*, 105-133  
 In-class viewing: *Free to Dance*
- October 3: Black Women Breaking Ground in Concert Dance  
 Reading due: Thomas DeFrantz, *Dancing Many Drums*, 233-266, 289-316  
 In-class viewing: “Free to Dance”
- October 6: Black Women Breaking Ground in Concert Dance  
 Reading due: Thomas DeFrantz, “Theorizing Connectivities: African American Women in Concert Dance”
- October 8: A Survey of the Black Woman’s Dancing Body  
 Reading due: Brenda Dixon Gottschild, *The Black Dancing Body*, 2-40
- October 10: A Survey of the Black Woman’s Dancing Body  
 Reading due: Brenda Dixon Gottschild, *The Black Dancing Body*, 41-100
- October 13: Columbus Day Holiday
- October 15: A Survey of the Black Woman’s Dancing Body  
 Reading due: Brenda Dixon Gottschild, *The Black Dancing Body*, 102-144
- October 17: A Survey of the Black Woman’s Dancing Body  
 Reading due: Brenda Dixon Gottschild, *The Black Dancing Body*, 145-221

- October 20: Staging Change  
Reading due: Meida McNeal, *Choreographing Citizenship in the "gayelle": Performing Trinidadian cultural nationalisms*
- October 22: Staging Change  
Reading Due: Emma Carson Coates, "Engagement Feminin: L'Equilibre and Contemporary Dance in West Africa"
- October 24: **Paper #2 due by 1:00 p.m.**

### **UNIT THREE:**

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

- October 27: Histories of Black Women and Social Dance  
Reading due: Celeste Delgado and Jose Munoz, "Rebellions of Everynight Life"
- October 29: Histories of Black Women and Social Dance  
Reading due: Katrina Hazzard-Gordon, *Jookin'*, 13-62
- October 31: Histories of Black Women and Social Dance  
Reading due: Katrina Hazzard-Gordon, *Jookin'*, 63-120
- November 3: Histories of Black Women and Social Dance  
Reading due: Katrina Hazzard-Gordon, *Jookin'*, 121-161
- November 5: Histories of Black Women and Social Dance  
Reading due: Yvonne Daniel, "Rhumba Then and Now"; Melissa Blanco Borelli, "Y ahora que vas a hacer, mulata? Hip Choreographies in the Mexican cabaratera film *Mulata* (1954)"
- November 7: 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"
- November 10: Black to the Future: Black Women's Innovations in Social Dance  
In-class viewing: Don Letts, *Dancehall Queen*
- November 12: Black to the Future: Black Women's Innovations in Social Dance  
In-class viewing: Don Letts, *Dancehall Queen*
- November 14: Black to the Future: Black Women's Innovations in Social Dance  
In-class viewing: Don Letts, *Dancehall Queen*
- November 17: Black to the Future: Black Women's Innovations in Social Dance  
Reading due: Elizabeth C. Fine, "Stepping, Saluting, Cracking, and Freaking: The Cultural Politics of African American Sorority Step Shows"; Jaqui Malone, "Stepping: Regeneration Through Dance in

African American Fraternities and Sororities”; Carol D. Branch,  
“Variegated Roots: The Foundations of Stepping”

In-class viewing: Ian Iqbal Rashid, *How She Move*

November 19: Black to the Future: Black Women’s Innovations in Social Dance

In-class viewing: Ian Iqbal Rashid, *How She Move*

November 21: Black to the Future: Black Women’s Innovations in Social Dance

In-class viewing: Ian Iqbal Rashid, *How She Move*

November 24: Black to the Future: Black Women’s Innovations in Social Dance

Reading due: Daphne Brooks, “All that You Can’t Leave Behind:  
Black Female Soul Singing and the Politics of Surrogation in the  
Age of Catastrophe”

November 26: Thanksgiving Holiday

November 28: Thanksgiving Holiday

December 1: Thanksgiving Holiday

December 3: Black to the Future: Black Women’s Innovations in Social Dance

Reading due: Xavier Livermon, “Si Ghetto Fabulous”: Kwaito  
Musical Performance and Consumption in Post-Apartheid South  
Africa”

December 5: Course conclusion

**Paper #3 due by 1:00 p.m.**