

The University of Texas at Austin
Beyoncé Feminism, Rihanna Womanism: Popular Music and Black Feminist Theory

AFR 330, WGS 335

Flags: Cultural Diversity in the US, Global Cultures

Spring 2020

Prof: Dr. Traci-Ann Wint

Course Description

Beyoncé's fifth live album *Homecoming* chronicled her performance as the first black woman to headline the Coachella festival. As with *Lemonade*, the film and performance put Beyoncé's music in conversation with luminaries such as Toni Morrison and W.E.B. DuBois. Beyoncé's contemporaries Rihanna and Lizzo similarly center black culture in their music and are unapologetic about their work's engagement with issues specific to black womanhood. By engaging the music and videos of these and other Black femme recording artists as popular, accessible expressions of African American and Caribbean feminisms, this course explores their contribution to black feminist thought and their impact on global audiences. Beginning with close analysis of these artists' songs and videos, we read their work in conversation with black feminist theoretical works that engage issues of race, location, violence, economic opportunity, sexuality, standards of beauty, and creative self-expression. The course aims to provide students with an introduction to media studies methodology as well as black feminist theory, and to challenge us to close the gap between popular and academic expressions of black women's concerns.

Course Goals

The course aims to provide students with an introduction to Black feminism, Black feminist thought and womanism through an examination of popular culture. At the end of the course students should have a firm grasp on Black Feminist and Womanist theory, techniques in pop culture and media analysis and should be comfortable with the production of scholarly work for a popular audience.

Required Texts

At the core of Black feminism is a commitment to public thought. As such this course is dedicated to highlighting the connections between Black feminism and Black popular culture. We will engage Black feminist work and work on black feminism in multiple forms including but not limited to academic articles and books, black feminist scholarship, blogs, vlogs and op-eds, movies and music videos.

Listed below are full-length academic texts required for the course. These are divided into two groups: those available for sale at the University Coop and those available as electronic resources at lib.utexas.edu. The books on second list will also be available for purchase at the

UT Coop but will be listed as optional since you have the option to either purchase a hard copy of the book or to access it electronically through the library. You are required to access all texts listed below in some form.

Available for purchase at the University Coop Bookstore

Angela Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Bille Holiday*

Available as electronic resources at lib.utexas.edu

Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*

Omise'ke Tinsley: *Beyoncé in Formation: Remixing Black Feminism*

Joseph M. Murphy and Mei-Mei Sanford, eds. *Osun Across the Waters: A Yoruba Goddess in Africa and the Americas*.

All other texts will be available electronically unless otherwise noted.

Social Media.

The course has a Facebook page

https://www.facebook.com/blackfemmusicUT/?modal=admin_todo_tour

On this page you will find links to blogs, videos and op-eds discussed in class as well as links to other articles and media relevant to the course. Please visit the page often and "like" it to be updated about posts. If you wish to share something please contact the teaching team so that we can facilitate your engagement with the class community in this way.

We will often use **hypothes.is** in class for joint examination of articles, op-eds and lyrics. You will receive an email from the instructor with details for set up.

The course also has a **twitter account** – @blackfemmusic. Please visit, reply and retweet!

Course Requirements:

Class Attendance and Participation (15%)

Students are expected to attend every class session having completed all readings and assignments and prepared to engage in discussion. This is a discussion-oriented class and student participation is essential. Students should come to class with a copy of the reading assignment (whether hard copy or electronic), as well as their notes and questions about the material to add to the class discussion. In addition to class discussion we will often engage in in-class activities. Students will be evaluated on elements including their attendance to and participation in discussion and activities in lecture and in discussion group sessions.

Reflections / Blog Posts (15%)

Students will complete three 600-800 word blog posts throughout the course of the semester. Posts should reflect on the readings and/or lectures for the unit and should contain references to

at least 2 of the scholarly texts assigned. Students also have the option of presenting their reflections as a twitter thread containing no less than 12 tweets (of the full 240 characters). Posts should be submitted to Canvas and threads should be unrolled and submitted to Canvas by **12pm (noon)** on each due date – **Feb 14, Mar 6, April 3.**

Op-Ed article (15%)

In this course students are encouraged to be producers – not just consumers – of knowledge. Using the op-ed pieces we read as a model, students will write a short article (800-1000 words) about Beyoncé, Rihanna, Lizzo or any other Black popular musician whose work is discussed in this class. You are encouraged to build on your blog posts or tweets to complete the article. Op-eds can be submitted at **any point up until noon on Friday April 24.** I encourage to submit your op-ed long before this final date.

Midterm (25%)

Students will complete a take-home midterm examination that will evaluate understanding of concepts covered during the first half of the semester. The exam will consist of 2 essay questions. Responses should be 3-4 pages each. Midterm essays are **Due by 12 noon on Friday March 13.**

Final Paper/Project 30%

The final for this class will be a research paper or creative project testing students accumulated knowledge throughout the semester. Students will develop their final paper/project in consultation with the professor and TAs. Papers and projects can focus on a particular Black woman popular music artist (Beyoncé, Rihanna, Cardi B, etc) or on an issue of relevance to the course. Final papers should be 8-10 pages long, and creative projects should be accompanied by a 3-5 page explanatory document. Students **MUST** submit a project proposal by **March 27.** Guidelines for both the paper and proposal will be posted on canvas. Students who do not submit the proposal will automatically lose 5 points off their final paper/project grade. Papers and projects are due **IN CLASS** on the last class day – **Friday May 8.**

Graded Assignments:

Final	30
Midterm	25
Op-Ed	15
Reflection/Blog Posts	15
Attendance and Participation	15
TOTAL	100 pts.

Points to letter grades for final grade:

	A = 94-100 pts.	A- = 90-93 pts.
B+ = 87-89	B = 84-86 pts.	B- = 80-83 pts.
C+ = 77-79 pts.	C = 74-76 pts.	C- = 70-73 pts.

D+ = 67-69 pts. D = 64-66 pts. D- = 60-63 pts.
F = 0-59 pts.

Course Outline

All instructions, assignments, rubrics, digitally available readings and videos and other essential information will be on the Canvas website <https://utexas.instructure.com/courses/1269976>. Announcements about any changes will also be posted to Canvas. Please check the site regularly and ensure that your email address is correctly set up to connect to Canvas.

Schedule of Topics, Readings and Assignments

Schedule and readings may be adjusted by Professor Wint at any time

Week 1: Introductions

Wed Jan 22 Introductions and logistics (no reading assignment)
Fri Jan 24 NO Discussion section meeting

Week 2: Black Women and Feminism

Mon Jan 27 Feminista Jones – Reclaiming our Space #Blackfeminism 101 (canvas)
Jamilah Lemieux “black feminism goes viral” (canvas)
Music/Videos:
Beyoncé - *Flawless*

Wed Jan 29 Patricia Hill Collins *Black Feminist Thought* “The Politics of Black Feminist Thought”: and “Distinguishing Features of Black Feminist Thought”
Music/Videos:
Beyoncé – *Run the World*

Fri Jan 31 Discussion section breakout

Week 3: Feminism is to Womanism as Beyoncé is to Rihanna?

Mon Feb 3 Layli Phillips and Barbara McCaskill “Who’s Schooling Who? Black Women and And the Bringing of the Everyday into Academe” (canvas)
Paula Rogo “Adichie: “Beyoncé’s feminism is not my feminism” Essence (link)
Tamara Winfrey Harris “All Hail the Queen?” What do our perceptions of Beyoncé’s Feminism say about us?” (link)

Wed Feb 5 Alice Walker, “Womanist” (canvas link)
Excerpts from the Combahee River Collective Statement (canvas)
Mia McKenzie “This is What Rihanna’s BBHM video says about Black Women, White Women, and Feminism” (link)
Lesli-Ann Lewis “Why we can’t have black feminist pop icons” (link)
Music: Rihanna - BBHMM

Fri Feb 7 Discussion Sections breakout

Week 4: Hip Hop, Black Popular Culture and the “F” Word

- Mon Feb 10 Aisha Durham, Brittany Cooper and Susansa Morris “The Stage that Hip hop Feminism Built” (canvas)
Omise’eke Tinsley *Beyonce in Formation: Introduction*
Guest Lecture – Dr. Daniela Gomes Da Silva
- Wed Feb 12 Patricia Hill Collins *Black Feminist Thought: Black Feminist Epistemology*
Janet Mock “My Feminist Awakening & the Influence of Beyoncé’s Pop Culture Declaration”
- Fri Feb 14 Discussion Sections breakout

First conversation/blog post due

Week 5: Blame it on the Blues – Black Women’s Traditions of Music and Commentary

- Mon Feb 17 Angela Davis – *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism* “introduction and I used to be Your sweet mama”
Maureen Mahon – *How Bessie Smith Influenced a Century of Popular Music* (NPR All things considered – (read and listen)
<https://www.npr.org/2019/08/05/747738120/how-bessie-smith-influenced-a-century-of-popular-music>
- Wed Feb 19 Angela Davis – *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism* “Mamas Got the Blues and Blame it on the Blues” (book)
Noah Berlatsky – “Beyonce isn’t an AntiFeminist Terrorist” (link)
- Fri Feb 21 Discussion Section Breakout

Week 6: Homecoming: Caribbean and Southern US Feminisms

- Mon Feb 24 Melissa Harris Perry “Beyonce evokes New Orleans in New Video” (link)
Terry Hall “Beyonce, Badu, and Southern Black Womanhood” (link)
Tinsley *Beyoncé in Formation - Family Album: Making Lemonade out of Marriage, Motherhood and Southern Tradition* (book)
La’Kayla Williams – *Road to Mirrorland* (link)
- Wed Feb 26 Candice Benbow – *Beyonce Comes home to remind us that her greatness lives within us too*
TBD
Music:
Beyoncé – homecoming (excerpt)
Megan thee Stallion - Realer

Week 7: Homecoming :Southern and Caribbean Feminisms cont’d

- Mon Mar 2 Carolyn Cooper – *Noises in the Blood* excerpt (canvas)
Erin McLeod *Anti Everything: The Culture of resistance*
- Wed Mar 4 Joan Morgan – *Pleasure Activism* (canvas)
Luci Wilden - *Can Dancehall be considered a feminist movement?* (link)
- Fri Mar 6 Discussion Section Breakout

Second conversation/blog post due

Week 8: Black Women, the Erotic and Body Aesthetics

- Mon Mar 9 Audre Lorde – *Uses of the Erotic* (canvas)
Jennifer Armstrong – *Rihanna: Taking sexy feminism to the extreme* (link)
- Wed Mar 11 Jessica Bennett – *Lizzo defends her booty baring look, calls Rihanna her inspiration*
Aria Halliday: *Twerk Sumn! Theorizing Black Girl Epistemology in the Body*
Brittany Cooper “*Ratchet Feminism*” (link)
- Fri Mar 13 Discussion Section Breakout

MID-TERM DUE at NOON

Week 9: SPRING BREAK MAR 16-20 NO CLASS

Week 10: Sex and Pleasure Politics: Queering Beyoncé lecturer Candice Lyons

- Mon Mar 23 Dinah Holtzman – *Ass you lick it: Bey and Jay Eat Cake*
Constantine Chatzipapatheodoridis – *Beyoncé’s Slay Trick: The Performance of Black Camp and Its Intersectional Politics*
- Wed Mar 25 Omise’eke Tinsley – *Outro I know Beyonce Loves Black Femmes & Unapologetically Femme from Beyoncé in Formation*
Irene Monroe (LGBTQ Nation) – *Beyoncé’s Formation is unabashedly queer*
Videos: Yoncé, Check up on it, upgrade you
- Fri Mar 27 Discussion Section Breakout

Week 11: Respectability Politics and Expectations of Black Motherhood

- Mon Mar 30 Omise'eke Tinsley *For The Party Girls (From Ezili's Mirrors)* (canvas)
Brittany Cooper “*(Un)Clutching My Mother’s Pearls*” (link)
- Wed April 1 Louisa Balhous – *Cardi B on Social Media Backlash and motherhood* (link)
Dorothy Roberts – *Killing the Black Body* (excerpt) (canvas)
- Fri April 3 Discussion Section Breakout

Third conversation/blog post due

Week 12: “Bad Bitches” Black Women and Anger

- Mon Apr 6 Audre Lorde – *the Uses of Anger*
Rachel Griffin “*I AM an Angry Black Woman: Black Feminist Autoethnography, Voice and resistance*”
- Wed Apr 8 Rebecca Carroll – *Rihanna’s video puts a black woman in control, no wonder there’s backlash* (link)
Melissa Brown - *Rihanna, “needed me” and the angry black (Caribbean) woman* (link)
Rihanna and Representations of Black women -the oxford comment (listening) (link)
- Fri Apr 10 Discussion Section Breakout

Week 13 Black Feminist Celebrity Activism

Mon Apr 13 Daphne Brooks *How #blacklivesmatterstarted a musical revolution* (link)
Joshua Ostroff *Beyoncé and Why Celebrity Activists Matter* (link)
Stuart Hall *representation (excerpt)* (canvas)

Wed April 15 Joan Morgan *When Chickenheads Come home to roost excerpt* (canvas)
Viewing: Queen and Slim excerpt
Guest Lecture

Fri Apr 17 **Discussion Section Breakout**

Week 14 Black Girl Magic – Black Women and Spirituality

Mon April 20 Katrina Hazzard Donald - "*Prescript*" from *Mojo Workin'*:
The Old African American Hoodoo System (canvas)
Osun Across the Waters (excerpt)

Wed Apr 22 Herbert C. Covey - *Slave Folk Practitioners*" and *"Conjuring and Hoodoo"*
from African American Slave Medicine (canvas)

Fri April 24 *Discussion Section Breakout*
Final Day to Submit Op-Ed

Week 15: Dreams of Freedom

Mon Apr 27 Omise'eke Tinsley *Calling For Freedom in Beyoncé in Formation*

Wed Apr Audre Lorde: *The Master's Tools will never Dismantle the Master's House*(canvas)

Fri May 1. *Discussion Section Breakout*

Week 16 Femme Futures

Mon May 4 Lauren Jackson "*The Past and the Future Merge to Meet us here*" (link)

Wed May 6 Apho Ko "*Why Afrofuturism is a Black Feminist Praxis* (canvas)

Fri May 8 *Discussion Section Breakout* (last class day)
Final Paper/Project Due

Classroom Expectations and Guidelines

Active and Respectful Learning Environment.

This is a discussion-based course. While we will do some lecturing, the expectation is that all students will come to class having completed the reading assignments and equipped with notes and questions ready for discussion. Students are required to bring all necessary materials to actively engage in discussion with them each day. These include, but are not limited to, a hard or electronic copy of the article/book(s) assigned for the day. In this course we will engage material that deal explicitly with issues of race, sex, gender, and sexuality. If you agree to take this class, you have agreed to respect our classroom space as a safe one. Racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, classism, and ableism will not be tolerated. As this is a discussion-oriented class an open environment of respect is essential. It is our hope that students will feel

free to be candid and direct in sharing their informed and grounded opinions, but we also expect that students will treat each other with kindness, sensitivity, consideration and respect. My teaching philosophy is one of active and engaged learning and democratized knowledge, this means that I acknowledge that we all have something to learn from each other and trust that we will give each other safe space to think, speak, and learn.

Course Communication

We will use Canvas announcements and email to be in touch regarding updates to assignments and readings. Please note that it is the students' responsibility to ensure that your email address is up to date in the system.

Code of Academic Conduct

Academic integrity is central to the mission of the university. Each student is expected to turn in work completed independently, except when assignments specifically authorize collaborative effort. It is not acceptable to use the words or ideas of another person without proper acknowledgement of that source. This means that you must use footnotes and quotation marks to indicate the source of any phrases, sentences, paragraphs, or ideas found in published volumes, on the Internet, or created by another student. For more information about the university's expectations for academic integrity, see:

http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acint_student.php.

Responsible use of electronics

While this course encourages students to call on their facility with electronic media, use of electronic devices will only be allowed for particular class activities which I will announce. Outside of these **Computers, tablets, and phones** are to remain off and/or unopened during lectures and discussions. Students who do not comply will be given one warning and then will be asked to leave the lecture hall for the remainder of the class period.

Accommodations

Lemonade Policy aka Late Work accommodation policy

Sometimes life throws us lemons, or we just have off days or weeks – s*** happens! In acknowledgement of this and in an effort to accommodate any unexpected personal crisis or issue I have built “lemonade days” into the course. Lemonade days, which can be used up to **2 times**, over the course of the semester allows students a 2 two-day no-penalty, no-questions asked extension on an assignment. Usage of these days is entirely optional but if you find yourself struggling at any point in the semester, I encourage you to email me and your TA ASAP and let us know you are invoking the lemonade policy.

Students with Disabilities: Upon request, the University of Texas at Austin provides appropriate academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. For more information, contact the Office of the Dean of Students at 512-471-6259 or 512-410-6644 (video phone) as soon as possible to request an official letter outlining authorized accommodations.

Religious Holidays: If you observe a recognized religious holiday that is in conflict with the university schedule please speak with me about possible accommodations.

Other Resources

University Writing Center: I strongly encourage the use of the University Writing Center in the PCL. The UWC offers free, individualized, cross-disciplinary assistance with writing for any UT undergraduate student, by appointment or drop-in - (512) 471-6222

Senate Bill 212 and Title IX Reporting Requirements. Under Senate Bill 212 (SB 212), the professor and TAs for this course are required to report for further investigation any information concerning incidents of sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking committed by or against a UT student or employee. Federal law and university policy also requires reporting incidents of sex- and gender-based discrimination and sexual misconduct (collectively known as Title IX incidents). This means we cannot keep confidential information about any such incidents that you share with us. If you need to talk with someone who can maintain confidentiality, please contact University Health Services (512-471-4955 or 512-475-6877) or the UT Counseling and Mental Health Center (512-471-3515 or 512-471-2255). We strongly urge you make use of these services for any needed support and that you report any Title IX incidents to the [Title IX Office](#).

Other UT Austin Resources and Contact Information

- Counseling and Mental Health Center (and VAV) (512)-471-3515
https://cmhc.utexas.edu/vav/vav_contact.html
- Services for Students with Disabilities (512)-471-6259
Email: ssd@austin.utexas.edu
- BCAL (Behavioral Concerns Advice Line)
(512)-232-5050
Submit concerns here: https://utexas-advocate.symplicity.com/care_report/index.php/pid471457?
- Ombuds Office
(512)-471-3825
Call to schedule an appointment
- Student Emergency Services (512)-471-5017
Email: studentemergency@austin.utexas.edu

General Course Protocols:

- Rules for respectful discussion will be followed. These rules will be established and agreed upon by everyone early in the semester. If a student violates these rules, that student will be counted as absent for the day.

- Written assignments are due as indicated on the syllabus unless otherwise specified. Late assignments will not be accepted unless an acceptable excuse is provided before the due date.
- The University of Texas rules and regulations regarding plagiarism and intellectual honesty will be enforced. For details please see: <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/conduct/>
- Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, 512-471-6259, <http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/>