



BEYONCÉ:
RACE, GENDER, AND SEXUALITY

WITH NIKKI LANE, PHD

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY | AMST-330 | WGSS-350 | 2017S

Beyoncé: Race, Gender and Sexuality

Wednesdays, 5:30-8pm

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Digital Office Hours: Mondays 12pm-3pm,
email to make an appointment to visit digitally

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Wednesdays, 3:30pm-5pm

Course Description and Overview

Course Description

Since 1990, singer and performer Beyoncé has worked to cultivate an iconic status within the American popular imagination. This course uses Beyoncé and her body of work--music, lyrics, images, and video--as a set of "texts," challenging students to critically engage with issues that these texts present including racial iconicity, popular feminism, and representations of black womanhood. Students will learn and apply key theories in cultural studies related to race, gender, and sexuality as well as their intersections. Further, students will examine black women's representations since the early 20th century, placing Beyoncé within a broader frame of American popular culture and its expectations of black women.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

1. Utilize an interdisciplinary toolkit in the critical examination of representations of black womanhood in American popular culture.
2. Describe and distinguish between popular and academic definitions of race, gender, and sexuality.
3. Engage in critical discussion about the importance of "racialized gender" and other key concepts in the study of Black women's representation.
4. Analyze pop cultural formations within their unique geographic socio-cultural, historical, and political contexts.
5. Ask substantive questions of experts in Cultural Studies.
6. Analyze the way race and gender are represented in popular media and other cultural formations.
7. Describe how race, gender, sexuality, and class inform the lived experiences of black women in the United States.

Professional Competencies

Below are professional competencies that you will be able to practice and/or develop in this class:

- Oral and written communication skills
- Distilling complex ideas and theories into "everyday" language for non-expert audiences
- Critical thinking
- Advanced problem solving skills
- Teamwork and working collaboratively
- Talking comfortably and competently about complex issues of race, gender, and sexuality, especially those related to Black and African American women.

Course Expectations

Course Format: Active-Learning Lecture

Approximately 25% of the class time will be used for lecture (~30 minutes). The remaining 75% will take the form of class and small-group discussions, small-group activities, “hands-on” critical thinking exercises, and listening and/or viewing media. Instruction time will be divided into two parts with a 10-15 minute break in between.

Class Rules

1. Come to class. **Attendance is required in this course.**
2. You are allowed one *excused* absence during the term.
 - a. In order for the absence to be excused, you must email me prior to missing class and provide **proper** documentation.
 - b. Unexcused absences will result in you receiving a zero for Attendance/Participation (1 point reduction in your overall grade).
3. Be **on time** to class.
 - a. If you are **more** than half an hour late, it will be counted as an unexcused.
 - b. Being late twice (under half an hour) during the term, will constitute a full unexcused absence.
4. Come to class thoroughly prepared with notes, questions, and assigned reading materials.
 - a. **To clarify: Bring all assigned reading material to class each class period.**
5. Open the bag and pop the can before class starts.
6. Put all electronic devices (phones, tablets, and computers) in silent mode.
7. Do not use electronic devices to “zone out.”
 - a. If the professor notices you “zoning out” which includes buying clothes from your favorite shop on the Internet, chatting, Snapping, Instagramming, live Tweeting, or any other manner of using an e-device while not engaging in course activities, you will be asked to turn off the device and leave it at home for the remainder of the semester. You will receive a zero for Attendance/Participation for that day.
8. Follow class rules regarding discussion (to be determined by the class on the first day)
9. Check Blackboard frequently and read/respond to posts/emails from the professor with due diligence.
10. Be courteous to your classmates and to the professor.

Students receive a **zero** for class Attendance/Participation for the week if they fail to follow the Class Rules outlined above. If an issue/crisis arises or persists that prevents you, or might prevent you, from fulfilling any of course expectations, it is necessary that you communicate this to me via email or in person **immediately**.

Academic Integrity

Standards of academic conduct are set forth in the university’s Academic Integrity Code. Located on the university’s website (see address below), the code establishes the following commitments:

By enrolling at American University and then each semester when registering for classes, students acknowledge their commitment to the Code. As members of the academic community, students must become familiar with their rights and their responsibilities. In each course, they are

responsible for knowing the requirements and restrictions regarding research and writing, examinations of whatever kind, collaborative work, the use of study aids, the appropriateness of assistance, and other issues. Students are responsible for learning the conventions of documentation and acknowledgment of sources. American University expects students to complete all examinations, tests, papers, creative projects, and assignments of any kind according to the highest ethical standards, as set forth either explicitly or implicitly in this Code or by the direction of instructors.

Expectations of Academic Integrity **apply to all activities in this course**, written or otherwise. Violations of the code will not be treated lightly, and disciplinary action will be taken should such violation occurs. Please review the [Academic Integrity Code](#) and see me if you have any questions about the academic violations described in the code in general or as they relate to particular requirements for the course.

Citations

Follow the Chicago Manual 16th Style Author-Date citation style guide.

You must properly cite sources used in all written submissions in this class. If something is (1) quoted directly, (2) paraphrased (their idea in your own words), (3) consulted regarding dates, "facts," and figures.

Please note: "Reworking" material from another source without doing any intellectual work to contribute your own thoughts, is also plagiarism. Demonstrate your critical thinking and analytic skills by drawing from other people's work to develop your own ideas and to support your own thesis. If you need help determining whether you're doing this properly, please do not hesitate to ask the professor.

(Segments of this section are paraphrased from Dr. William Leap's 2011 Discourse, Text, and Voice Syllabus.)

I will utilize plagiarism detection software for your written assignments in this class.

Academic Support Services

Office Hours and General Support

If you have any questions, trouble with assigned readings, or need help with written assignments, please see me during office hours, digital office hours via Skype and Google Hangout, or immediately following class when I will make myself available for another 15 minutes. I am committed to you being successful in this course, and am committed to helping you be successful throughout your collegiate experience. If you require any help, please think of me as a resource and call on me accordingly.

Time Management and Productivity

Listed below are useful online resources relating to being a productive and stress-free individual and student:

Time Management Ninja - <http://timemanagementninja.com/>

Scott H. Young - <http://www.scotthyoung.com/blog/>

Study Hack Blog - <http://calnewport.com/blog/>

Student learning needs

Students who are clients of Academic Support and Access Center (ASAC) have the responsibility of requesting services through ASAC at the beginning of each semester. Once documentation is obtained and shared with me, I am committed to making sure that you have the accommodations you require.

For more information about registering with ASAC:

- o Visit <<http://www.american.edu/ocl/asac/index.cfm>>
- o Walk-in Mary Graydon Rm 243
- o Call 202-885-3360

Other services that may be helpful for you throughout the semester include:

- o The Writing Center 202-885-2991, Battelle-Tompkins 228
- o Counseling Center 202-885-3500, Mary Graydon 214
- o Disability Support Center 202-885-3315, Mary Graydon 206

Course Requirements

Course Assignments and Point Value

This course uses a "Point System" to assess student progress. This means that all points are *accrued* throughout the semester. Each assignment/course requirement is worth a certain amount of points toward the student's total grade for the term.

Course Requirements	Points	Due
Attendance/Participation	15 pts	Assessed weekly.
Annotated Bibliography of course materials thru Week 6 (5 sources)	20 pts	3/1 10pm
Black Feminist Critique of a Beyoncé album (4-5 pgs)	30 pts	
Final Draft of paper	25 pts	3/29 10pm
Comments on colleagues' papers	5 pts	4/5 4pm
Black Women in US Pop Culture Presentation (PPT)	35 pts	
Topic Statement	5 pts	2/8 10pm
Final Draft of presentation	25 pts	5/3 5:30pm
Comments on colleagues' presentations	5 pts	5/3 8pm
Extra Credit Opportunities*	Pts Varies	
Regular posts (1-2 per week) on Piazza	5 pts	
Submit a complete drafted annotation Weeks 2-6	1 pt	Weeks 2-6
Reflective Essay Black cultural event in D.C.	3 pts	5/3 8pm
New draft of essay, incorporating comments	5 pts	4/12 10pm
Total*	100 pts	

*I offer other generous opportunities to complete fun, intellectually stimulating exercises outside of class. You may earn up to 10 pts extra credit throughout the semester.

Assessment

Letter Grade	Points required
A (Excellent)	95 pts and above
A-	90-94 pts
B+	86-89 pts
B (Good)	83-85 pts
B-	80-82 pts
C+	76-79 pts
C (Satisfactory)	73-75 pts
C-	70-72 pts
D (Poor)	65-69 pts
F (Academic Fail)	Less than 65 pts

Grading Scale

This scale will be used to calculate your final letter grade in the course.

Grading

All assignments will be returned within 7 days of receipt, unless noted otherwise. Grades will be posted in Blackboard and can be viewed in the tab titled, "Progress."

Late Work Policy

*After checking schedules for travel, work, and other courses, if there are conflicts or potential conflicts, please bring this to the attention of the professor immediately so that alternative arrangements can be made. **If you require more time for any assignment, I am happy to provide you an alternative due date, however, you must make arrangements with me no fewer than 7 days PRIOR to the due date.***

All late assignments will incur an automatic 25% reduction in score. If they are more than 72 hours late, then a 50% reduction in score will be assessed.

Assessment Details

Attendance/Participation (15 pts)

Attendance

You are required to attend all scheduled meetings of this class during the term. One excused absence is permitted.

Class Participation



Students are required to participate in lively, critical discussion of course materials in-class either during class or on the course online discussion board hosted on [Piazza](#). Piazza is an easy to use, Web 2.0 online discussion board that you can access on your mobile devices as well as through the web interface. See Blackboard for instructions on using Piazza.

Assignments

All assignments include a full, detailed assignment sheet that includes a grading rubric used to assess your grade on that assignment. Below are short descriptions of each assignment.

Annotated Bibliography of Course Materials (20 points)

You will select from among course material we've read in class through Week 6 to annotate. You must select at least 5 sources. For each source, you will provide a 200-250 word (~1 page double spaced) annotation of the source. It is **strongly advised** that you choose one reading per week to annotate. If you decide to annotate a source per week and turn it in, I'll be happy to review the annotation and give you feedback (and an extra credit point).

Black Feminist Reading of Beyoncé (or Destiny's Child, Nicki Minaj, Jay-Z) Album (30 pts)

Using the Black feminist theories we've engaged in the course through week 10, you'll prepare a short essay of 1,000-1,250 words (4-5 pages) that critically engages an album of Beyoncé (or Destiny Child, or Nicki Minaj, or Jay-Z). You will share this paper on our class's Blackboard discussion board. You will also prepare a response to at least two of your colleagues' essays.

Black Women in US Pop Culture Presentation (35 pts)

As individuals or in pairs (you are strongly encouraged to work in pairs), you will prepare a short presentation on a topic of interest to you regarding Black Women in U.S. popular culture. The format is a media rich, self-running PowerPoint and should be between 6-8 minutes. Your presentation should be able to run WITHOUT you present. In other words, you must use resources such as audio recording feature in PowerPoint, timings, and effects to make the presentation play on its own.

If you work in a pair, a Self and Peer Evaluation will factor into your final grade for this assignment. Please indicate via email by February 1st your intention to work in a pair.

Topic Statement: A topic statement is required for this assignment (5 pts): One-page (single-spaced) proposal of your intended research and its design.

Rough Draft: You are **strongly encouraged**, though not required, to submit a "Rough Draft" by April 19th.

*Successful completion of the course requires that you complete **all** of the listed activities above. Failure to attend class, or to complete any of the major assignments (Annotated Bibliography, Black Feminist Reading, or Final Presentation) may result in an Academic Failure in the course.*

Required Texts

Music required:

All music available wherever music is sold. Beyoncé's solo albums are also available at the University Library.

- The Writing's on the Wall (1999) – Destiny's Child
- Survivor (2001) – Destiny's Child
- Dangerously in Love (2003)
- I Am... Sasha Fierce (2008)
- Beyoncé (2013)
- Lemonade (2016)

Additional music required:

- American Gangsta – Jay-Z
- The PinkPrint - Nicki Minaj

All other required material will be made available on course's Blackboard site.

Tentative Course Schedule

Readings and topics are subject to change based on our class discussion. Check Blackboard for an up to date list of required readings and assignments.

Week 1 - 1/18 – Beyoncé: Say Her Name, in Context

- Complete: Orientation Survey
- Review: [Syllabus](#)
- Review: [A Guide for Effective and Efficient Reading \(3 pgs\)](#)
- Review: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *We Should All Be Feminists*
- Review: [Collins, Patricia Hill. 2009. "The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought" \(30 pgs\)](#)
- Review: [Destiny Child's *The Writing's on the Wall* \(Spotify Link\)](#)
 - Pay particular attention to (read lyrics):
 - o "Bug a Boo"
 - o "Bills, Bills, Bills"
 - o "Say My Name"
 - o "Sweet Sixteen"

Week 2 – 1/25 – It's Complicated: Blackness and Femininity in U.S. Pop Culture

- Review: E. Patrick Johnson's "The Pot is Brewing" (30 pgs)
 - o Bring reading NOTES for the reading to class (hard copy, print, or digital).
- Review: Selections of Jan Nederveen Pieterse (1992) *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture*. New Haven: Yale University Press (30 pgs)
- Screen: Remainder of "Black Is... Black Ain't"

Week 3 – 2/1 – Colonial Legacies: Black Women in the US and US Visual Media

- Review: ["Ain't I a Woman?" Sojourner Truth](#)
- Review: ["Southern Horrors: Lynching in all its Phases" Ida B. Wells-Barnett](#)
- Review: Davis, Angela Y. 1981. "The Legacy of Slavery: Standards for a New Womanhood," in *Women, Race & Class*.

Week 4 – 2/8 – Listen: Seeing Black Women in their Complexity

➤ Due: Topic Statement for Final Presentation

- Review: Fleetwood, Nicole. "Giving Face: Diana Ross and the Black Celebrity as Icon." *In On Racial Icons: Blackness and the Public Imagination*
- Review: Collins, Patricia Hill "Mammies, Matriarchs, and Other Controlling Images"
- Screen: Remainder of "Carmen Jones"
- Review: *Dangerously in Love* (2003)

Week 5 – 2/15 – Poppin', Twerkin, and Droppin it: Black Women's Bodies in U.S. culture

- Review: Hobson, Janelle. 2003. "The "Batty" Politic: Toward an Aesthetic of the Black Female Body" *Hypatia* 18(4):87-105.
- Review: Mama, Amina. 1997. "Black Femininity." *Beyond the Masks: Race, Gender, and Subjectivity*. Routledge.
- Review: *I am... Sasha Fierce* (2008)

Week 6 – 2/22 – Black Feminism is... Black Feminism Ain't

- Review: Morgan, Joan. 2000. "Introduction." *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost: A Hip-Hop Feminist Breaks It Down*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Review: Nash, Jennifer C. (2008) "Strange Bedfellows." *Social Text* 26(4): 51-76.
- Choose one of the following to review:
 - o Review: McRobbie, Angela. "Post-Feminism and Popular Culture." *Feminist Media Studies* 4.3 (2004): 255-64.
 - o Review: Weidhase, Nathalie. 2015. 'Beyoncé Feminism' and the contestation of the black feminist body. *Celebrity Studies* 6(1): 128-131.

Week 7 – 3/1 – Feeling Myself: Black Women's Sexuality, Homoeroticism, and Nicki Minaj

➤ Due: Annotated Bibliography of 5 sources from course materials

Special Guest Lecture: Adria Haliday (Purdue University)

- Review: Clay, Andreaana. (2008). Like an Old Soul Record: Feminism, Queer Sexuality and the Hip-Hop Generation. *Meridians* 8(1), 53–73.
- Choose one of the following to review:
 - o Review: Richardson, Matt. 2014. Make me Wanna Holler: Meshell Ndegeocello, Black Queer Aesthetics, and Feminist Critiques
 - o Review: Lane, Nikki. 2011. "Black Women Queering the Mic: Missy Elliot Disturbing the Boundaries of Racialized Sexuality and Gender." *Journal of Homosexuality* 58 (6-7):775-792.
- Review: *The Pinkprint* (2014) – Nicki Minaj

Week 8 – 3/8 – I Need a Soldier: Jay-Z, Black Masculinity and Black Sexual Politics

- Review: Gray, Herman. 1995. "Black Masculinity and Visual Culture"
- Review: Rose, Tricia. 2008. "Hip-Hop Demeans Women." *The hip-hop wars: what we talk about when we talk about hip hop--and why it matters*. New York: BasicCivitas.
- Screen: *Tough Guise 2: Violence, Manhood & American Popular Culture* (2013)
- Review: *American Gangsta* (2007) – Jay-Z
Emphasis on the following (read lyrics):
 - o "American Dreamin"
 - o "Ignorant Shit"
 - o "Success"
 - o "Blue Magic"
- Review: *Survivor* (2001) – Destiny's Child
Emphasis on the following (read lyrics & watch the videos):
 - o "Independent Women"
 - o "Survivor"
 - o "Bootylicious"
 - o "Soldier"

Week 9 – 3/15 – Spring Break

Week 10 – 3/22 – The Bey Hive: Cults of Personality and Deification of Black Women

Invited Guest Panel: members of the "Bey Hive"

- Review: Paul Hollander. 2010. "Michael Jackson, the Celebrity Cult, and Popular Culture." *Society* 47 (2): 147-152.

- Review: *Beyoncé* (2013)
- Screen: Beyoncé's 2014 MTV Video Music Awards performance.

Week 11 – 3/29 – Lemonade Pt 1

➤ Due: Black Feminist Critique Essay

- Re-Read: Fleetwood, Nicole. "Giving Face: Diana Ross and the Black Celebrity as Icon." *In* On Racial Icons: Blackness and the Public Imagination
- Screen: *Lemonade* (Visual Album) (2016)
- Review: [bell hooks, "Moving Beyond Pain" May 9, 2016](#)
- Review: [Melissa Harris-Perry, "A Call and Response with Melissa Harris-Perry: The Pain and the Power of 'Lemonade'" April 26, 2016](#)
- Review: [Lori Adelman, "A Black Feminist Roundtable on bell hooks, Beyonce, and 'Moving Beyond Pain'" May 11, 2016](#)
- Review: [@FancyCapitalist "11 References You Missed in Beyoncé's Formation"](#)

Field Trip – Sunday, 4/2 – National Museum of African American History & Culture

- This is not a required activity, but will be a fruitful one if you are able to make it.
- If you would like to go, please email me your intention to come by March 15th. Space is limited.
- Meet at the Constitution Ave entrance at 2:45pm.

Week 12 – 4/5 – The Revolution Will Not Be Televised

➤ Due: Comments on colleagues' critique essays

Invited Guest Lecture: Lydia Kelow-Bennett (Brown University)

- Review: Gil Scott-Heron (1970) *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*
- Review: [Zandria "We Slay, Part I"](#)
- Review: [@EMontNews "Why I'm not on the Beyonce 'LEMONADE' train"](#)

Week 13 – 4/12 – Wiggle Room Day.

- Presently working to organize a trip to the National Museum of African American History and Culture for this class period

Week 14 - 4/19 – Student's Choice.

- Students will choose between one of the following topics for our class to discuss this day:
 - "Mix that negro with that... get that... Tragic Mullata": Skin color, multiracial identity, and Black womanhood
 - "Sistah Vegan": Black women & Veganism

Week 15 - 4/26 - Course Review

Final Exam Period – 5/3/17 – Final Presentations

We will NOT meet physically on the Final Exam date. However, you will turn in your final project on Blackboard Discussion Board.

- Due: In lieu of a final exam, Black Women in U.S. Pop Culture presentation due by 5:30PM.
- Due: Reflections on colleagues' presentations (and responses to comments to you) due by 8PM