

# SUMMER SCHOOL

WITH DR. NIKKI LANE

## From Stripping to Dog-Walking: The Rise of Cardi B and Women Who Rap

### Debut Albums

#### **Salt 'N Pepa, Hot Cool & Viscious (1986)**

- Peaked at #26 on Billboard
- Certified Platinum (1988)

#### **MC Lyte, Lyte as a Rock (1988)**

- Peaked at #50 on Billboard in 1988

#### **Queen Latifah, All Hail the Queen (1989)**

- Peaked at #124 on Billboard in 1990

#### **Lil' Kim, Hard Core (1996)**

- Peaked at #3 on Billboard in 1996-97
- Certified Gold (1997) & 2xPlatinum (2001)

#### **Missy Elliott, Supa Dupa Fly (1997)**

- Peaked at #3 on Billboard in 1997
- Certified Gold (1997) & Platinum (1997)
- 7.6 million total albums sold world-wide
- Best selling female hip-hop artist of all time.

#### **Eve, Let There Be Eve... Ruff Riders' First Lady (1999)**

- Peaked at #1 on Billboard in 1999
- Certified 2xPlatinum (1999)

#### **Trina, Da Baddest...B\*\*\*h (2000)**

- Peaked at #11 on Billboard
- Certified Gold (2000)

#### **Nicki Minaj, Pink Friday (2010)**

- Peaked at #40 on Billboard
- Certified Gold (2010) & 2xPlatinum (2016)
- 5 million total albums sold world-wide

#### **Cardi B, Invasion of Privacy (2018)**

- Debuted and Peaked at #1 on Billboard
- Certified Gold (2018) & 3xPlatinum (April 2019)

#### **Megan Thee Stallion, Fever (2019)**

- Debuted at #10 and Peaked at #6 on Billboard

#### **City Girls, PERIOD (2018)**

- Did not chart on Billboard

#### **City Girls, GIRL CODE (2019)**

- Debuted at #63

#### **From L. H. Stallings' (2007) *Mutha is Half a Word***

"I am advocating for the intellectual moments in cultural performances and narratives about sex, work, and blackness [...] However, because these figures produce sexually explicit narratives, erotica, or pornography, the critiques they offer about art, ethics, and aesthetics have not been taken as seriously in black studies as they should be. How we imagine sexuality can dictate the terms of our be(com)ing and our strategies for defeating antiblackness in the twenty-first century."

#### **From Mireille Miller-Young' (2014) *A Taste For Brown Sugar***

"As a space for labor, consumption, networking, leisure, and sociality, the strip club has also become a particularly significant site of late, and this has been reflected in hip-hop music, cultural production, and music videos (Sharples-Whiting 2007). Nelly's controversial music video for "Tipdrill" represents the fluidity of pornography, strip club, and rap video conventions. [...] The most compelling moment in the video happens as Nelly swipes a credit card through a dancer's butt and then smiles into the camera. Is this a gesture of possession, the black woman as both currency and a device of exchange in the flow of capital and masculinity? And what does the woman in the video get out of this configuration?"

#### **From Jennifer Nash's (2008) *Strange Bedfellows***

First, in mobilizing the Hottentot Venus to critique dominant representations of black women's bodies, black feminism has permitted a pernicious sexual conservatism, wearing the guise of racial progressivism, to seep into its analytic framework. By sexual conservatism, I refer to black feminism's tendency to foreground examinations of black women's sexual exploitation, oppression, and injury at the expense of analyses attentive to black women's sexual heterogeneity, multiplicity, and diversity. In emphasizing black women's continual sexual degradation, rather than the complex interplay between "pleasure and danger" that constitutes black women's sexual subjectivity, black feminism has become steeped in an "epistemological respectability," producing an intellectual formation that tends to avoid questions about black women's sexual desires, black queer subjectivities, and the various forms of black women's pleasures."

#### **From Ibram X. Kendi's (2016) *Stamped From the Beginning***

"Everyone who has witnessed the historic presidency of Barack Obama—and the historic opposition to him—should now know full well that the more Black people uplift themselves, the more they will find themselves on the receiving end of a racist backlash. Uplift suasion, as a strategy for racial progress, has failed. Black individuals must dispose of it as a strategy and stop worrying about what other people may think about the way they act, the way they speak, the way they look, the way they dress, the way they are portrayed in the media, and the way they think and love and laugh. Individual Blacks are not race representatives. They are not responsible for those Americans who hold racist ideas. Black people need to be their imperfect selves around White people, around each other, around all people. Black is beautiful and ugly, intelligent and unintelligent, law-abiding and law-breaking, industrious and lazy—and it is those imperfections that make Black people human, make Black people equal to all other imperfectly human groups."

## Reading List

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McMillan, Uri. 2014. "Nicki-aesthetics: the camp performance of Nicki Minaj." *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory* 24 (1):79-87.

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Nash, Jennifer C. 2008. *Strange Bedfellows: Black Feminism and Antipornography Feminism* *Social Text* 26 (4 (97)): 51-76.

Rose, Tricia. 2008. *The hip hop wars : what we talk about when we talk about hip hop--and why it matters*. New York: BasicCivitas.

Shange, Savannah. 2014. "A king named Nicki: strategic queerness and the black femmecee." *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory* 24 (1):29-45.

Smith, Marquita R. 2013. "'Or a Real, Real Bad Lesbian': Nicki Minaj and the Acknowledgement of Queer Desire in Hip-Hop Culture." *Popular Music and Society* 37 (3):360-370.

Stallings, LaMonda Horton. 2007. *Mutha' is half a word : intersections of folklore, vernacular, myth, and queerness in black female culture, Black performance and cultural criticism*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press.

## Discussion Questions

**Access online: [tinyurl.com/SummerSchoolJune](https://tinyurl.com/SummerSchoolJune)**

1) Few women who rap make it to the Billboard charts. When they do, they are frequently alone or one of few women on the charts. This reinforces the narrative about women who rap: "there can only be one." However, Missy Elliott collaborated throughout her career with many female rappers such as Da Brat, Trina, and Lil' Kim. In fact, Missy and Lil' Kim had a thriving friendship even as their debut albums competed on the charts. Similarly, Queen Latifah and MC Lyte have maintained an amicable public relationship, collaborating on the remix of Brandy's "I Wanna Be Down." Recently, City Girls and Cardi B collaborated for what has been City Girls' highest charting single, "Twerk." Do you believe the "there can only be one" narrative, or might something else be going on in these narratives?

2) Examine the debut album information for the artists we're discussing tonight. Does this information surprise you? Were you surprised to see that Missy Elliott is the best selling female hip-hop artists of all time? What's different about the context of music that might impact album sales today?

3) As Mireille Miller-Young has argued, the strip club has been an important "site," or locale for hip-hop at least since the early 2000s. Some of the most successful women who rap—Eve, Trina, and Cardi B—were strippers in their late teens and early 20s. Based on how we've discussed the roles often relegated to women in hip-hop, does their rise to fame as rappers surprise you? What about their time as strippers might have contributed to their success?

4) I've argued that what Black women look like often inhibits people from actually hearing what they say. Their appearance, in other words, frequently makes it difficult for people to see the similarities in their approach, content, and language use. Do some Googling. What similarities and differences do you see among the lyrics and content of the songs from artists such as Megan thee Stallion ("Money Good"), Missy Elliott ("Pussy Cat"), Da Brat ("Whatchu Like"), Nicki Minaj ("Super Bass")? Cross-reference their lyrics with images of these women you find on Google.

5) L. H. Stallings argues that talking about sexuality and particularly representations of Black women's sexuality can often involve tense conversations inside and outside the academy. Why? And why are these conversations important to have? Why might examining representations of Black sexuality in ways that suspends our knee-jerk reaction to condemn help us think more critically about what aspects of social and cultural life those representations critique?