**Beyoncé Feminism:**
**Popular Music and Black Feminist Theory**

“Texas. Texas. Texas.” In her musical film *Lemonade*, Beyoncé—costumed in a spectacularly African-print dress—sings these opening words to “Daddy Lessons” while swaying to a single guitar at Fort Macomb, New Orleans. Departing from the wide-ranging locations of her self-titled album, this shot encapsulates the vision of her current work: an *unapologetically black* feminism that situates itself in the historical and political landscape of the U.S. South in general, and Texas and Louisiana in particular. In this course, we follow Beyoncé’s invitation to consider the U.S. South as a fertile site for black feminist imaginations and projects. Beginning with close readings of *Lemonade* and *Beyoncé*, we enter into conversation with other black feminist texts that engage black women’s aesthetic, spiritual, erotic, and political traditions in Louisiana, Texas, and Alabama. The course provides students with an introduction to media studies methodology as well as black feminist theory, and challenges us to imagine what gender politics look like when black women, and the U.S. South, become central rather than peripheral to our worldviews.

**Required Texts**

As part of its commitment to linking black feminism with popular culture, the course requires students to engage three kinds of texts: black feminist scholarship, on-line blogs and op-eds, and music videos. **All course content will be available electronically**, either on Canvas or through links provided in the syllabus. Students are responsible for accessing all electronic texts and for communicating any difficulties to instructors in a timely fashion.

**Social media**

The course has a Facebook page, [https://www.facebook.com/pages/BeyandRihatUT/1518716405083220](https://www.facebook.com/pages/BeyandRihatUT/1518716405083220) Please visit the page and “Like” it to be updated about posts. You will find links to blogs and videos discussed in class as well as other links relevant to the course. If you wish to share something to the page please contact your instructors.

Starting the fifth week of the semester, students will post to the course Wordpress page, [https://beyandrihatut.wordpress.com](https://beyandrihatut.wordpress.com). You will receive an email from your
TA inviting you to join this private page. Please follow the instructions on how to join the page so that you can post.

The course also has a Twitter account, Bey&RihatUT@beyandrihatUT. Please visit and retweet anything you find of interest!

**Responsible use of electronics**

Use of electronic devices is not allowed during class sessions. **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.

**Flags**

This course carries the flag for Cultural Diversity in the United States. Cultural Diversity courses are designed to increase your familiarity with the variety and richness of the American cultural experience. You should therefore expect a substantial portion of your grade to come from assignments covering the practices, beliefs, and histories of at least one U.S. cultural group that has experienced persistent marginalization.

**Respectful Learning**

In this course, students engage texts that deal explicitly racism, misogyny, poverty, marginalized religions, unconventional sexuality, and racialized and sexual violence. While the professor will provide academic frameworks for discussing these issues, students may 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 everyone come to class willing to discuss difficult, complex topics with openness and respect. Expressions of racism, misogyny, classism, religious intolerance, erotophobia, homophobia, or ableism will not be tolerated. I expect students to take seriously the responsibility involved in university education in general, and in reading works that document social injustice in particular.

In line with this, when writing:
**Use lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, or queer** instead of “homosexual”
**Use woman and man** instead of “female” or “male”
**Use black women, black men** instead of “the black man” or “the black woman”
**Never** use the N word unless quoting (even then, try and avoid it).
**Use black or African American** instead of “Negro” or “Colored.”
Requirements

Examinations

**Midterm: 25% of final grade**
In the eighth week of the semester, students will take a take-home midterm examination that covers the materials assigned in the Introduction and first two units of the course. The exam will consist of identifications, short answer questions, and an essay. A review sheet will be distributed to students during the seventh week of the semester to help them prepare for the exam.

**Final: 30% of final grade**
During the assigned time, students will take the final examination. The examination will cover the entire course but will place emphasis on the last two units. The exam will consist of identifications, short answer questions, and essay questions. A review session will be conducted in class during the last week of the semester to help them prepare for the exam and a review sheet will be distributed at that time.

Electronic writing assignments

**Blog posts: 15% of final grade**
On specified days students will submit 600-800 word blog posts to the course Wordpress page. Posts should offer reflections on the readings and/or lectures for the unit and should contain at least 2 citations from the scholarly texts.

**Op ed article: 15% of final grade**
As the course progresses, social media will become a site through which students move from consumers to producers of knowledge. Taking the op eds read throughout the semester as a model, students will generate a short article (800-100 words) about Beyoncé and/or Rihanna. We highly encourage you to use something you have already written: a blog post, short answer, or essay that you received positive feedback on. Take that work and expand on it! As these articles get picked up by other web sites, the class will provide students with opportunities to engage in public debate in the blogosphere.

**Class participation: 15%**

Students will also be evaluated on their participation in lecture and section discussions. Evaluation will be based on elements including: attendance in lecture and sections; contributions to discussions; and completion of in-class assignments.
Course calendar (subject to change)

Introduction: Locating Texas Bama Feminism

Week 1: What Beyoncé starts in Texas, changes the world
January 17: “Houston’s own Beyoncé”
Music/videos
J Balvin, Willy William, and Beyoncé, “Mi Gente”

Week 2: Making Southern Lemonade
January 22: Where hip hop feminism meets Southern regionalism
Music/videos
Beyoncé, VMA 2016 performance
Reading
Aisha Durham, Brittney Cooper, and Susana Morris, “The Stage that Hip Hop Feminism Built”
Riché Richardson, “Introduction” to Black Masculinity and the U.S. South

January 24: Third Ward feminism
Music/videos
Melissa Harris-Perry, “Beyoncé evokes New Orleans in new video”
Reading
Janell Hobson, “Feminists Debate Beyoncé”

New Millennium Blues: Building on Black Southern Musical Traditions

Week 3: Blues women, Blue(‘)s mama
January 29: In search of love and freedom
Music/videos
Beyoncé, “Don’t Hurt Yourself”
Reading
Angela Davis, Blues Legacies and Black Feminism, “I Used to Be Your Sweet Mama”
January 31: No justice, no love
Music/videos
Beyoncé, “Don’t Hurt Yourself”
Reading
Angela Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*, “Blame It On The Blues”
Shannon Frystak, from *Our Minds on Freedom: Black Women and the Struggle for Black Equality in Louisiana*

Week 4: “Never take the country out me”
*February 5*: Black history of country music
Music/videos
Beyoncé, “Daddy Lessons”
Rhiannon Giddens, “Black Is The Color”
Reading
Diane Pecknold, “Country Music and Racial Formation”
Patrick Huber, “Black Hillbillies: African American Musicians on Old-Time Records”

February 7: Shooting back at bro-country
Music/videos
Beyoncé, “Daddy Lessons”
Reading
Pamela Fox, from *Natural Acts: Gender, Race, and Rusticity in Country Music*
Angela Boswell, “Black Women During Slavery to 1865”

Week 5: Games black girls play
*February 12*: “Turn around, touch the ground, kick your boyfriend out of town”
Music/videos
“Lemonade,” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=75Npwwobdqg
Reading
Kyra Gaunt, from *The Games Black Girls Play*

**February 14: Blog post #1 due by 11:59 a.m.**

**Conjure Women and Black Girl Magic: Honoring Black Southern Spiritual Traditions**

**Week 6: Oshun, an African goddess in the U.S. South**

*February 19: Recognizing the golden goddess*

**Music/videos**

- Beyoncé, “Hold Up”

**Reading**

- Luisah Teish, from *Jambalaya*

*February 21: Honoring black women’s divine anger*

**Music/videos**

- Beyoncé, “Hold Up”

**Reading**


**Week 7: Conjure women and the art of black survival**

*February 26: Conjure, hoodoo, and everyday arts for survival*

**Music/videos**

- Beyoncé, “Love Drought”
- Julie Dash, *Daughters of the Dust*

**Reading**

- Sharla Fett, from *Working Cures*

*February 28: Daughters of the “Love Drought”*

**Music/videos**

- Beyoncé, “Love Drought”
Julie Dash, *Daughters of the Dust*

**Reading**
- Robert Farris Thompson, from *Flash of the Spirit*
- Julia Felsenthal, “Director Julie Dash on *Daughters of the Dust*, Beyoncé, and Why We Need Film More Than Ever.”

**Week 8: Black girl magic, reborn**

*March 5:* Ending the “Love Drought”

**Music/videos**
- Beyoncé, “Love Drought”
- Julie Dash, *Daughters of the Dust*

*March 7:* Midterm review

**March 9: MIDTERM EXAMINATION DUE**

**“Most Bomb P***y”: Sothern Belles, Ratchet Feminism, and Black Pleasure Politics**

**Week 9: Cunnicentrism for beginners**

*March 19:* “The p***y class”

**Music/videos**
- Beyoncé, “Blow”

**Readings**
- Lamonda Stallings, from *Mutha’ is Half A Word*
- Joan Morgan, “Why We Get Off: Moving Towards a Black Feminist Politics of Pleasure”

*March 21:* From respectability politics to pleasure politics

**Music/videos**
- Beyoncé, “Blow”

**Readings**
- Evette Dionne Brown, “BDSM, Gazes, and Wedding Rings: The Centering of Black Female Pleasure and Agency in Beyoncé”

**Week 10: Ratchet love: Rejecting respectability politics**

*March 26:* No more Southern belles

**Music/videos**
Beyoncé, “6 Inch”  
**Reading**  
Aisha Durham, “Check On It: Beyoncé, Southern booty, and Black femininities in music videos”  
Marah Kohlman, “Beyoncé as Intersectional Icon? Interrogating the Politics of Respectability”  
Brittney Cooper, “(Un)Clutching My Mother’s Pearls, or, Ratchetness and the Residue of Respectability,”  

**March 28:** Ratchet feminism and ratchet erotics  
**Music/videos**  
Beyoncé, “6 Inch”  
**Reading**  
Bettina Love, from *Hip Hop’s Li’l Sistas Speak: Negotiating Hip Hop Identities and Politics in the New South*  
Stephanie Camp, “The pleasures of resistance: Enslaved women and body politics in the plantation south, 1830-1861”  
John Ortved, “Ratchet: The Rap Insult That Became a Compliment.”  

**Week 11: Not sorry: Unapologetically black, unapologetically woman-centered erotics**  
**April 2:** When Serena twerks for Beyoncé  
**Music/videos**  
Beyoncé, “Sorry”  
**Reading**  
Janell Hobson, “The Batty Politic”  
Omise’eko Tinsley, “For the Texas Bama Femme”  
Juliet Spies-Gans, “Beyoncé Wanted Serena in ‘Lemonade’ Because She Personifies Strength.”  
[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/serena-williams-Beyonce-lemonade_us_5730b169e4b096e9f091fde8](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/serena-williams-Beyonce-lemonade_us_5730b169e4b096e9f091fde8)

**April 4:** Queering the quadroon ball  
**Music/videos**  
Beyoncé, “Sorry”  
**Reading**  
Emily Landau, from *Spectacular Wickedness: Sex, Race, and Memory in Storyville, New Orleans*  

**April 6: Blog post #2 due by 11:59 a.m.**

**Calling for Freedom: Black Women’s Activism in the U.S. South**

**Week 12: Sing freedom: Black women in the civil rights movement**

*April 9: Rosa Parks’ sisters: black women activists in the 1960s*

**Music/videos**

Beyoncé featuring Kendrick Lamar, “Freedom” (live at the BET awards)

**Reading**

Stephanie Decker, “African American Women in the Civil Rights Era”

Pamela Brooks, from *Boycotts, Buses, and Passes*

“Beyoncé Says Family Ties to the Civil Rights Movement Was Inspiration to Grammys Performance.” http://1580thepraise.com/2015/02/Beyoncé-says-family-ties-to-civil-rights-movement-was-the-inspiration-to-grammys-performance/

*April 11: We shall overcome: music and the civil rights movement*

**Music/videos**

Beyoncé, “Freedom”

**Reading**

Bernice Johnson Reagon, “Let the Church Sing ‘Freedom’”

Ruth Feldstein, “I Don’t Trust You Anymore’: Nina Simone, Culture, and Black Activism in the 1960s”


**Week 13: #SayHerName: Black Lives Matter and justice for black women**

*April 16: Black Lives Matter and gender justice*

**Music/videos**

Beyoncé, “Forward”

**Reading**


Zeba Blay, “One Year After Sandra Bland’s Death, #SayHerName Is As Important As Ever.” [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/one-year-after-sandra-blands-death-sayhername-is-as-important-as-ever_us_57852dcde4b0ed2111d7bcef](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/one-year-after-sandra-blands-death-sayhername-is-as-important-as-ever_us_57852dcde4b0ed2111d7bcef)

**April 18:** Black motherhood and/as resistance  
**Music/videos**  
Beyoncé, “Forward”  

**Reading**  
Christen Smith, “Facing the Dragon: Black Motherhood, Sequelae, and Gendered Necropolitics in the Americas”  
Kali Gross, “This Mourning on Mother’s Day.”  
[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kali-nicole-gross/this-mourning-on-mothers-b_7215114.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kali-nicole-gross/this-mourning-on-mothers-b_7215114.html)

**Week 14:** “I Came to Slay”: #BlackTransLivesMatter in the South  
**April 23:** What happened after New Orleans?: Black trans women in the post-Katrina Gulf Coast  
**Music/videos**  
Beyoncé, “Formation”  

**Reading:**  
Big Freedia, from *Big Freedia: God Save the Queen Diva*  
Katrina Truth, “Queer and Trans People of Color.”  
[http://katrinatruth.org/pages/QPOC.html](http://katrinatruth.org/pages/QPOC.html)  

**April 25:** “By popular demand”: Calling for black trans* futures  
**Music/videos**  
Beyoncé, “Formation”  

**Reading:**  
Alix Chapman, “Coperforming ‘Sissy’ Bounce”  

**April 27: Blog post #3 due by 11:59 p.m.**
Conclusion: Black Girls Are From the Future: Black Feminist Futures in the U.S. South

Week 15: Black girl magic and black feminist futures

April 30: Blue, Amandla, and hope for black girls

Music/videos
Beyoncé, “All Night”

Reading
Briana Barner, from “The creative (and magical) possibilities of digital Black girlhood”
Carly Stern, “I want Blue Ivy to be just like you.”

May 2: Final review