What does Beyoncé Feminism look like? The cover for *Beyoncé in Formation* offers clues

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A few years ago, University of Texas professor Omise’eke Natasha Tinsley made headlines by launching the course “Beyoncé Feminism, Rihanna Womanism.” In it, Tinsley taught students “how the lyrics, music videos, and actions of these women express various aspects of black feminism such as violence, economic opportunity, sexuality, standards of beauty, and creative self-expression.”

Now the professor is bringing her expertise to a book: *Beyoncé in Formation: Remixing Black Feminism.*

Slated for publication in the fall, *Beyoncé in Formation* draws cultural analysis from the singer’s iconic *Lemonade*. Woven with candid observations about her life, Tinsley’s “Femme-onade” mixtape explores myriad facets of black women’s sexuality and gender. She analyzes Beyoncé’s “Don’t Hurt Yourself” through the lens of black feminist critiques, “Daddy Lessons” through models of motherhood, and finally “Formation” through its groundbreaking take on gender and sexuality. Activists and artists (including Loretta Lynn) contribute to Tinsley’s book, infusing it with fascinating interpretations of Queen Bey’s provocative, peerless imagery and lyrics.

“Every year, lines of black women and queers approach me on the first day to express excitement that they’re in a class that takes Beyoncé seriously — that someone is reflecting back that the lyrics they sing, the songs they dance to, their shirts that proclaim ‘I Slay’ just might be the meaningful sources of empowerment they always...”
felt them to be,” Tinsley tells EW. “Greeting this receiving line of feminist Beyoncé fans, I see clearly: I’m one of thousands of black people living in the South looking to Beyoncé as a gilded mirror, an artist with the capacity to bounce light off our visions for next-millennium feminism. ... This small offering is made in the hope that what starts in our black woman-loving, lemonade-making, hater-twirling Texas can change the world.”

Tinsley has exclusively shared the vibrant cover for Beyoncé in Formation with EW, as well as a brief excerpt. Read on below, and pre-order the book ahead of its Nov. 1 release here.

**Excerpt from *Beyoncé in Formation*, by Omisc’eke Natasha Tinsley**

Maybe you’re wondering: Mrs. Richardson—just kidding, I mean Omise’eke—as a feminist and an academic, why are you so celebratory of Beyoncé? Is she even a feminist, really? The debates over whether Beyoncé deserves the title “feminist” have, I admit, exasperated and intrigued me. Black feminism isn’t a dogma with tenets every good feminist has to adhere to on pain of expulsion. There are as many ways to be a black feminist as to be a person, and the fact other black feminists disagree with some of Beyoncé’s positions demonstrates how rich black feminism is with differences, contradictions, and productive tensions. As far as I’m concerned, the most important qualification for black feminist status is self-identification—a point made beautifully by journalist Janet Mock the day after Beyoncé branded herself a feminist at the 2014 Video Music Awards. “I applaud Beyoncé and her feminist stance, a declaration of her own independence as a leotard-wearing, butt cheek-baring, Blue Ivy-toting, equal pay advocating, Independent Woman–saluting, imperfect flawless feminist,” she wrote in a post titled “How Beyoncé Pushed Me to Call Myself a Feminist.” “I believe we waste much of our efforts policing one another—one of the many workings of patriarchy is to busy us with policing each other’s choices rather than protecting them. Our duty is not to police feminists, our duty is to use feminism as a tool to check systems that uphold racism and slut shaming and sex worker erasure and anti–trans woman bias and general policing of other people’s choices.”

The night Beyoncé stood up in front of a brightly lit sign that declared her a FEMINIST at the 2014 VMAs was transformational not only for Mock but for millions of black women. You could say Beyoncé’s feminist self-declaration broke the internet—but you could also say the internet was temporarily fixed. Because for twenty years before that performance, the words most often associated with feminist were militant, radical, man-hating. But for two days after, the word most associated with feminist online was Beyoncé. This means a generation of young women are growing up with something we’ve never seen before: an image of feminism that’s overwhelmingly popular and undeniably black. And that’s something all feminists should pay attention to. Janell Hobson rightly asks: “What, specifically, does this moment in popular culture mean for a younger generation of women who have been raised to be suspicious of feminism?” Obviously, Beyoncé’s popularization of the term feminist is in no way, shape, or form a solid enough foundation to build a next generation of black feminism on. Holding out feminism as something accessible for black women—a tool that can serve us, a light that can spark fires—is a beginning.
not an end. Beyoncé has offered this word to a generation of black women and girls to claim, rework, and rethink in ways that work for us. This is the charge I give students on the first day of [my class] Beyoncé Feminism, and this is the charge I take on in this book: to use Beyoncé’s music as a starting point to think through personal and political issues that matter in our lives as twenty-first-century black feminists.