

## **WGSS 391: Black Music, Gender & Sexuality**

**Fumi Okiji**

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**Tu/Th 10-11:15am**

**Hasbrouck Laboratory, Room 130**

**Office hours: Tuesdays, 12-1:30pm, South College, W473**

This course explores how black popular music cultures are shaped by performances and representations of gender and sexuality. The course will touch upon a number of themes including hip hop feminism, sex radicalism and camp, gender performativity and black masculinity. We will read music and film/video by artists such as Meshell Ndegeocello, Prince, Nicki Minaj, Bessie Smith and Beyonce as socio-historical texts that allow us access to an alternative source of knowledge supplementing the more theoretical. Students will be expected to build on their appreciation of black music to develop tools with which to critically engage with the expression, and with which to attend to the social, historical, performative and artistic complexes at play. This course fulfills critical race feminisms for UMass WGSS majors and minors.

### **Offensive language and images**

You will be required to view, listen, think and talk about language, images and sounds that you might find offensive. This may include words and imagery that is sexist, homophobic, racist or obscene. It should go without saying that, I do not share or condone these words and actions. I do, however, believe that our engagement with these expressions is essential to an elucidation of the themes that underpin the course. It is important for each student to understand that by signing up to this course, you are agreeing to view and to listen to all material pertaining to it, regardless of its potentially offensive nature. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns.

### **Sensitivity, respect**

Relatedly, this course consists in large part of discussions about gender, sexuality, race and class. Sensitivity and respect for all participants is vital. I will not tolerate purposeful denigration by any individual. By the same token, we are continually learning, and opening ourselves to that which is unfamiliar. I would appreciate all participants to treat genuinely unintentional lapses as such. Please know you can always come to see me (or email me) if you have any concerns or require guidance.

### **Names, pronouns**

The class should address you by your preferred name and gender pronoun. Please advise on such, and on any pronunciation inaccuracies, early in the semester so that I and the class may take note.

**Atypical abilities, additional needs**

The University of Massachusetts Amherst is committed to making reasonable, effective and appropriate accommodations for students with additional needs and help create a barrier-free campus. If you have additional needs and require accommodations, please register with Disability Services (161 Whitmore Administration building; phone 413-545-0892) to have an accommodation letter sent to your home faculty. Information on services and materials for registering are also available on their website [www.umass.edu/disability](http://www.umass.edu/disability).

**Attendance, participation**

You will be graded on your participation in class discussions (including whole class and small groups discussion). For this reason, among others, it is essential that you attend every class. Poor attendance will significantly lower your grade, regardless of how you perform on other metrics.

In-class discussions are a core component of this course. Participation is not optional. Our discussions will take on a variety of formats—you will, at times, deliberate in pairs and in small groups. We will often discuss as a whole class group.

**Reading, journaling**

It is expected that students come to class prepared to discuss the assigned reading (and expressive works) for the week. You are to keep a journal or blog in which you will record study notes, reflection, responses and questions. Any in-class writing exercises should also be included in this document. These journals/blogs will be submitted mid-term for comment and guidance, and then again at the end of term for grading.

**Final essay**

Students will write an essay to be submitted at the end of term. We will compile a series of questions as a class. Your essay will critically engage with the material you have read, listened to, and watched. I encourage you to come and see me during office hours to discuss your intentions, as early as possible.

**Presentations**

All students are expected to produce a presentation. I encourage collaborative work involving groups of no more than three, although individual presentation is fine. Please feel free to treat this component of your coursework as a chance to experiment with alternative forms of representation. Students are advised to begin planning mid-term, and to seek guidance, particularly if exploring alternative formats.

**EVALUATION**

Attendance and participation: 20%

Journal OR blog: 30%

Presentation: 20%

Essay: 30%

**!!! PLEASE NOTE! THIS SYLLABUS IS A LIVING DOCUMENT.  
I WILL INFORM OF ANY CHANGES, AND PROVIDE AN UPDATED  
VERSION, AS NECESSARY !!!**

Week One

**Introduction**

**Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> September**

Morgan, Joan. “**The F-word**” **AND** “**Hip-hop feminist.**” In *When chickenheads come home to roost: A hip-hop feminist breaks it down*. Simon and Schuster, 2017. – PDF

**Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> September**

Dyson, Michael Eric. “**Chapter 4: ‘Cover your eyes as I describe a scene so violent’: Violence, machismo, sexism, and homophobia.**” In *Know what I mean?: Reflections on hip-hop*. Civitas Books, 2007. – EBOOK

Week Two

**Hip Hop feminism: Beyoncé**

**Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> September**

WATCH: “Are you still a slave?” from about 29:25 to 1:00:00ish. Panel discussion at the New School, New York on May 6<sup>th</sup> 2014. bell hooks, Marci Blackman, Shola Lynch and Janet Mock.

<https://livestream.com/TheNewSchool/Slave/videos/50178872> 29:25 - 1:00:00ish

Cooper, Brittany. “On bell, Beyoncé and bullshit.” [www.crunkfeministcollective.com](http://www.crunkfeministcollective.com), 20<sup>th</sup> May 2014. - PDF

London, Dianca. “Beyoncé’s capitalism, masquerading as radical change.” *Death and taxes magazine* 9 (2016).

<http://coalition.org.mk/kapitalizmot-na-bijonse-maskiran-vo-radikalna-promena/?lang=en>

hooks, bell. “Moving beyond the pain.” bell hooks Institute blog, May 9, 2016

<http://www.bellhooksinstitute.com/blog/2016/5/9/moving-beyond-pain>

LISTEN/WATCH:

Beyonce, “\*\*\*Flawless” and “Formation”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IyuUWOnS9BY>

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WDZJPJV\\_\\_bQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WDZJPJV__bQ)

### Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> September

Pough, Gwendolyn D. “**Bringing wreck: Theorizing race, rap, gender and the public sphere**” **AND** “**My cipher keeps movin’ like a rollin’ stone: Black women’s expressive cultures and black feminist legacies**” in *Check it while I wreck it: Black womanhood, hip-hop culture, and the public sphere*. Northeastern University Press, 2015.  
– PDF TO BE PROVIDED

Week Three

**Blues, sexuality and domesticity: Bessie Smith**

### Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> September

Carby, Hazel. “**It jus be’s that way sometime: The sexual politics of women’s blues.**” *The Jazz cadence of American culture*. Edited by Robert O’Meally. Columbia University Press, 1998. - PDF

Davis, Angela Yvonne. “**I used to be your sweet mama: Ideology, sexuality, and domesticity**” in *Blues legacies and black feminism: Gertrude" Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday*. Vintage Books, 1999. - PDF

### Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> September

WATCH *Bessie* IN CLASS

Davis, Angela Yvonne. “**Mama's got the blues: Rivals, girlfriends, and advisors**” in *Blues legacies and black feminism: Gertrude" Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday*. Vintage Books, 1999. - PDF

Week Four

**Interrupting normativity: Jean Grae and Meshell Ndegeocello**

### Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> September

Goldin-Perschbacher, Shana. “The World has made me the man of my dreams: Meshell Ndegeocello and the ‘problem’ of black female masculinity.” *Popular music* 32.03 (2013): 471-496.- PDF

Clay, Andreaana. (2008). "Like an old soul record: Feminism, queer sexuality and the hip hop generation." *Meridians* 8(1), 53–73. – PDF

LISTEN:

Meshell Nedegeocello, *The World has made me the man of my dreams*

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=OLAK5uy\\_nNYbch8duoTqaL7dPSornzypXi86IvGsY](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=OLAK5uy_nNYbch8duoTqaL7dPSornzypXi86IvGsY)

### **Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> September**

Richardson, Matt. "Make me wanna holler: Meshell Ndegeocello, black queer Aesthetics, and feminist critiques." *Journal of lesbian studies* 18, no. 3 (2014): 237-251. - PDF

Paradigm Smalls, Shanté. "'The rain comes down': Jean Grae and hip hop heteronormativity." *American behavioral scientist* 55, no. 1 (2011): 86-95.-PDF

LISTEN:

Jean Grae, *Attack of the attacking things*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3j7pY1qZXfk&list=PL407C47C3B4944166>

Week Five

### **Pleasure, intimacy and violence: Corregidora**

#### **Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> October**

Jones, Gayl. *Corregidora*. Beacon Press, 1987. – ON RESERVE LIST

Brown, Caroline. "Of blues and the erotic: *Corregidora* as a new world song." *Obsidian III* (2004): 118-138.

#### **Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> October**

Sharpe, Christina. "Introduction: Making monstrous intimacies—Surviving slavery, bearing freedom" **AND** "Chapter one: Gayl Jones's *Corregidora* and reading the "Days that were pages of hysteria." In *Monstrous intimacies: Making post-slavery subjects*. Duke University Press, 2009. - EBOOK

Week Six

**Lil Kim and Nicki Minaj: sex radicalism, camp**

**Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> October**

Thomas, Greg. “Hip-hop’s ‘Queen B@#SH’ lyricism: From *Hard Core* to *The Naked Truth* and beyond” **AND** “Orals... head... genius: The Power, knowledge and pleasure of *Hardcore*.” In *Hip-hop revolution in the flesh: Power, knowledge and pleasure in Lil’ Kim’s lyricism*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. – PDF TO BE PROVIDED

hooks, bell. “Hardcore honey: bell hooks goes on the down low with Lil’ Kim.” *Paper Magazine*, July 11 2014.

<http://www.papermag.com/hardcore-honey-bell-hooks-goes-on-the-down-low-with-lil-kim-1427357106.html>

LISTEN/WATCH:

Lil’ Kim, “Big momma thang” and “Queen bitch”

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0s\\_scRpzrCc&list=PLAkfiKpqZo7TKrxmNVoRCSV7guD4BE\\_1V&index=2](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0s_scRpzrCc&list=PLAkfiKpqZo7TKrxmNVoRCSV7guD4BE_1V&index=2)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oaL8PL9YNck&index=9&list=PLAkfiKpqZo7TKrxmNVoRCSV7guD4BE\\_1V](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oaL8PL9YNck&index=9&list=PLAkfiKpqZo7TKrxmNVoRCSV7guD4BE_1V)

**Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> October**

Hunter, Margaret, and Alhelí Cuenca. “Nicki Minaj and the changing politics of hip-hop: Real blackness, real bodies, real feminism?” *Feminist formations* 29, no. 2 (2017): 26-46.

McMillan, Uri. “Nicki-aesthetics: The camp performance of Nicki Minaj.” *Women and performance: A Journal of feminist theory* 24, no. 1 (2014): 79-87. - PDF

LISTEN/WATCH:

Nicki Minaj, “Stupid hoe” and “Barbie tingz”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T6j4f8cHBIM>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eppa0RXRU-I>

**!!! SUBMIT JOURNALS/BLOGS FOR FEEDBACK THURS 11<sup>TH</sup> !!!**

Week Seven

**Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> October and Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> October**

Midterm! Looking back, looking forward: recaps, feedback, revisits, and prep for end of term assessment.

Week Eight

**Resilience and Melancholia: Beyoncé and Rihanna**

**Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> October**

James, Robin. “**Introduction**” **AND** “**Chapter 1: Hearing resilience.**” In *Resilience and melancholy: Pop music, feminism, neoliberalism*. John Hunt Publishing, 2015. – PDF TO BE PROVIDED

**Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> October**

James, Robin. “**Chapter 3: Look, I overcome!**” In *Resilience and melancholy: Pop music, feminism, neoliberalism*. John Hunt Publishing, 2015. – PDF TO BE PROVIDED

James, Robin. “Melancholic damage.” *The New inquiry* (May 2013)

<http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/melancholic-damage/>

(Please also read the reviews linked in this article.)

LISTEN/WATCH:

Rihanna, “Diamonds”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lWA2pjMjpBs>

Beyoncé, “Video phone” and “Diva”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CGkvXp0vdng>

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rNM5HW13\\_O8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rNM5HW13_O8)

Week Nine

**Gender performativity: Prince, Sylvester and Big Mama Thornton**

**Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> October**

WATCH *Purple rain* IN CLASS

Fuchs, Cynthia J. ““I wanna be your fantasy”: Sex, death, and the artist formerly known as prince.” *Women and performance: A Journal of feminist theory* 8, no. 2 (1996): 137-151. - PDF

**Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> November**

Halberstam, Judith. “Keeping time with lesbians on ecstasy.” *Women and music: A Journal of gender and culture* 11, no. 1 (2007): 51-58. - PDF

Halberstam, Judith. **“Queer voices and musical genders.”** In *Oh boy!: Masculinities and popular music*. Jarman-Ivens, Freya, ed. Routledge, 2013. – PDF TO BE PROVIDED

LISTEN/WATCH:

Prince, “When doves cry”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UG3VcCAIUgE&index=4&list=PL6u0K8q2DitMB1j1Hg6Dcsw0UQYilDWDF>

Sylvester, “You make me feel (mighty real)” and “You are my friend”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VyAHULpMXKQ>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ryPpiuZFtPw>

Big Mama Thornton, “Hound dog” and “Down home shakedown”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wxoGvBQtpjM>

Week Ten

**Hip Hop masculinities: Jay-Z and NWA**

**Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> November**

Neal, Mark Anthony. **“Introduction” AND “Chapter 2 - ‘My passport says Shawn’: Toward a hip-hop cosmopolitanism.”** In *Looking for Leroy: Illegible black masculinities*. NYU Press, 2013. - EBOOK

Collins, Patricia Hill. **“Chapter 5 - Booty call: Sex, violence and images of black masculinity.”** In *Black sexual politics: African Americans, gender, and the new racism*. Routledge, 2004. - PDF

LISTEN/WATCH:

JAY-Z, “Girls, girls, girls”

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g9SxCYU6H\\_Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g9SxCYU6H_Q)

Jay-Z featuring Beyoncé, “03 Bonnie and Clyde”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AJAepILeLi8>

**Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> November**

Barnes, Dee. “Here's what's missing from *Straight Outta Compton*: Me and the other women Dr. Dre beat up.” *Gawker*, 18th August 2015.

<http://gawker.com/heres-whats-missing-from-straight-outta-compton-me-and-1724735910>

WATCH:

Dee Barnes on the assault that was left out of *Straight Outta Compton*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mcaqWIMtso4>

OPTIONAL!!

WATCH: *Straight Outta Compton*

Week Eleven

**Hip Hop aesthetics: White boy shuffle**

**Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> November**

White, Miles. “**Introduction**” **AND** “**Chapter 3: Affective gestures: Hip-hop aesthetics, blackness, and the literacy of performance**” **AND** “**Chapter 4: Real niggas: Black men, hard Men, and the rise of gangsta culture.**” In *From Jim Crow to Jay-Z: Race, rap, and the performance of masculinity*. University of Illinois Press, 2011. – EBOOK

**Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> November**

Beatty, Paul. *The white boy shuffle: A novel*. Picador, 2014. – ON RESERVE

Stallings, L. H. “Punked for life: Paul Beatty's *The White boy shuffle* and radical black masculinities.” *African American review* 43, no. 1 (2009): 99-116. - PDF

**!!! SUBMIT ABSTRACTS FOR PRESENTATION AND FINAL ESSAY !!!**

**Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> and Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> November: NO CLASS**

Week Twelve

**Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> and Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> November**

Revisiting key themes; workshopping for presentations and final essay

Week Thirteen

**Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> and Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> December**

Presentations and student-led discussion

**!!! FINAL ESSAY DUE: TUESDAY 12<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER !!!**