



*Beyoncé performs at the 2014 MTV Video Music Awards on August 24, 2014.  
Jason LaVeris—FilmMagic/Getty Images*

### **Are You a Feminist?**

First-Year Seminar

T/Th 10:20 - 11:40

285 Court Street

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Office hours: T/Th 1:15-2:15 and by appointment (schedule in person or via email)

### **Course Description**

On December 13, 2013 Beyoncé surprised the world by dropping her fifth studio album, and her first audio-visual album, entitled *Beyoncé*, without warning. Three years later, Beyoncé premiered *Lemonade*, her sixth studio album that, like *Beyoncé*, was accompanied with full visuals. These visual albums brought forth a politically minded and certainly more personally grounded Beyoncé with songs about the female orgasm, quickies in a limo, adultery, gun violence, and black Southern US identities. As the world came to learn every song by heart, they also began to debate the significance of Beyoncé's claims to feminism and her attempts to highlight the black experience in the US. These debates were shaped by Beyoncé's inclusion of the literary arts in her work: On "Flawless" one of the most popular tracks of *Beyoncé*, Nigerian-American author, Chimamanda Adichie's TedTalk "We Should All be Feminists" is sampled; and throughout *Lemonade*'s visual interludes Beyoncé is heard reading the work of Kenyan-born, Somali poet residing in Britain, Warsan Shire.

Taking our cue from Beyoncé and the debates her music has produced, this course investigates the meaning of feminism by considering how writers, artists, activists, academics and public and academic intellectuals discuss the topic. Over the course of the semester students will read feminist scholarship alongside contemporary popular culture, with a focus on the artistic linkages found in Beyoncé's work. We will consider what it means for a US-based artist to rely heavily on the work of diasporic and migrant artists of color as we contemplate the various meanings and practices of feminism they cultivate and employ. Additionally, the course will introduce students to academic writing, and as such, will require students to produce new prose regularly over the course of the semester.

### **Course Goals**

- Gain an introductory understanding of intersectional feminism
- Develop a critical voice and perspective that utilizes skills such as close reading, critical analysis, and historicization to address theory, politics, and cultural texts
- Join an ongoing debate through clear and effective oral and written communication
- Witness how academic discussions are affected and shaped by everyday lives
- Analyze cultural objects with an understanding and a language for how form, theme, and content
- Assemble a writing process that speaks to your personal, professional, and academic learning and communication styles

### **Required Texts**

All required readings are available on Moodle.

### **Grading Scale**

A+	96.6 - 100	C+	76.6 - 79.9	E+	56.6 - 59.9
A	93.3 - 96.5	C	73.3 - 76.5	E	53.3 - 56.5
A-	90 - 93.2	C-	70 - 73.2	E-	50 - 53.2
B+	86.6 - 89.9	D+	66.6 - 69.9	FF	0 - 49.9
B	83.3 - 86.5	D	63.3 - 66.5		
B-	80 - 83.2	D-	60 - 63.2		

### **Classroom Environment**

This class is student-centered and discussion-based. As such, if we want this space to be both educational and engaging we must rely on each other. Our course will only become as stagnant as we let it! The course will be rigorous, and it will be helpful for you to work out a schedule for yourself early on so that you can keep up with the workload. If this is proving difficult, feel free to reach out to me to help you develop a plan that will allow you to get through all the readings *and* actively engage in discussions.

You are expected to respect each other and the discussions we foster. This means arriving to class on time, abstaining from your cell phone, bringing your reading materials, and completing assignments so that you are prepared for class. In order to honor the works we engage with and each other, each and every student should: address each other using our preferred names and pronouns; respond to each other's ideas with respect and attention to detail; ground your comments in the text(s) assigned for that week to keep discussions pertinent and to engage your classmates about a shared cultural artifact.

Additionally, give our course materials, I expect each student to enter into discussions willing to suspend, challenge, or even change some of your taken-for-granted beliefs about gender, sexuality, race, nationality, ability, and so on. We will all be expected to incorporate multiple perspectives when engaging with course materials – this will include sensitive, personal, and controversial topics. For learning to occur, we must remain respectful of each other at all times. When sharing your opinions about a topic that is not directly from the readings, cite as often as possible so we can learn about where your ideas are coming from; when sharing personal opinions be clear about how they are specific to you – your knowledge, experience, belief systems etc. and be prepared to hear about other belief systems, knowledges, and experiences that might come into conflict with your ideas. There is a zero-tolerance policy for harmful behavior or speech. For complete details see the Wesleyan Student Handbook.

### **Office Hours and Email**

Office hours are an excellent opportunity for us to discuss your work further. If you cannot make office hours, please contact me to schedule a time to meet. Please allow up to 24 hours for me to read and respond to emails during the week and at least 48 hours during weekends and holidays.

### **Submitting Work**

Assignments must be submitted on time. Every day the assignment is late, the grade will drop by 1/3 of a letter grade. If you believe you need more time to do your best work, contact me at least 48 hours in advance of the deadline for an extension.

### **Academic Honesty**

This course is about developing yourselves as readers, writers, and thinkers. You will be expected to read materials and integrate others' writing into your own by being clear about attribution through citation practices. In short, the work produced in this course should be from you and for this course specifically. Wesleyan takes its honor code quite seriously. Any form of academic misconduct, including but not limited to cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, or facilitating others' academic dishonesty will be reported to the Honor Board. If you have any questions about the Honor code, please see me and/or consult the discussion in the student handbook at:

<http://www.wesleyan.edu/studentaffairs/studenthandbook/index.html>.

### **Accessibility and Academic Support**

Wesleyan University is committed to ensuring that all qualified students with disabilities are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from its programs and services. To receive accommodations, a student must have a documented disability as defined by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and provide documentation of the disability. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact Accessibility Services.

If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability or are interested in additional academic support, please contact Student Academic Resources, located in North College, rooms 021/022, or call 860-685-5581 to arrange an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. For more please visit: <https://www.wesleyan.edu/sar/>

### **Writing Workshop**

The Writing Workshop offers one-on-one 45-minute sessions with peer tutors Sun-Th from 7-11 in locations across campus. Additionally, the writing workshop can provide a semester-long peer mentor who can assist you as a writer across an entire semester. To learn more about the *free* services set up to support you as a writer, check out <https://www.wesleyan.edu/writing/writingworkshop/index.html>

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

**Regular attendance.** Attendance is **required** in this course. You may miss THREE classes and still pass; please save these absences for illness, travel, and religious holidays. Absences beyond the third, will lead to an automatic  $\frac{1}{3}$  letter grade deduction (A→A-). Notify me in advance by email if you need to miss a class. Three late arrivals will equal one absence. If necessary, you should contact university administration such as an advisor or a Dean to assist you if faced with exceptional circumstances.

**Participation (15%).** This class is discussion-based and student focused. As such, your input is vital to its success. Please come to class prepared and on time. Preparation means doing all of the reading, bringing copies of all assigned material to class, and contributing meaningfully to class discussion. Participation will take many forms in this class as we all communicate differently. Some days, we will begin a conversation through an in-class activity or exercise and you will be expected to continue this thinking outside of class. Other times, you will complete assignments before class to prepare for in-class discussions. Sometimes, you will do both. The key is to stay engaged in class discussions by participating both in class and online. This manifold approach to participation addresses our various learning styles and abilities.

**“Thinking About...” Personal Blogs (10%)**

Every week students will produce a short, personal blog post that only they and the instructor will see. These personal blogs should take roughly 15 minutes to write, and can be on any topic or idea the student is thinking about that week.

**Analysis Papers (30%).** Over the course of the semester, students will submit three 3-5 page analysis papers that look closely at a cultural text (a music video, a short story, a poem, a film) and connect the material (its content, its form, its meter, its lighting, etc.) to our discussions on gender, sexuality, race, class, intersectionality, and feminism. These papers will build on each other and prepare students for the final paper. For more information see assignment sheet on Moodle:

Paper #1: Cultivating a Critical Eye, or Close reading

Paper #2: Talking to Others, or Response paper

Paper #3: Do Your Thing, or Claim-driven essay

See assignment sheets for more details.

**Peer Review and Revision (15%).** To learn more about your individual writing process, each paper written in this course will be peer reviewed and revised. Students will receive credit (P/F) for this labor totalling **5% of your total grade in the course per each paper.** See assignment sheet for details of what to submit for credit.

**Micro-mini- research project (10%).** After students are introduced to the library's resources (in-class), they will complete a short research project where they produce a short research proposal and find and briefly annotate (re: summarize) three texts related to a topic of their choosing.

**Final Paper (20%)** Students will write a final 5-6-page paper at the end of the course that answers the question "Are you a Feminist?" Students will be expected to incorporate ideas and textual evidence from readings encountered during the course, using these materials to produce a clear articulation of both their stance on feminism and how that relates to the larger intellectual conversation they have been engaging in throughout the semester.

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### **Weekly Reading Schedule**

This schedule is subject to change. Check your email and Moodle regularly for updates.

**1/23 Thursday:** Introductions

**1/28 Tuesday:** Ngọc Loan Trần, "Calling IN: A Less Disposable Way of Holding Each Other Accountable" (pdf); The Trans Student Educational Resources' "Trans and Queer Definitions" (online source); Janet Mock on the Colbert Report (video); Janet Mock's Role Reversal with Reporter (video)

### **What is Feminism?**

#### **Power, Oppression, and Intersectionality**

**1/30 Thursday:** bell hooks's "Introduction: Come Closer to Feminism" and Marinashutup "What is the Patriarchy? | Feminist Fridays" (video)

**2/4 Tuesday:** Ula Taylor's "The Historical Evolution of Black Feminist Theory and Praxis"; Andrea Smith's "Native American Feminism, Sovereignty, and Social Change"

**2/6 Thursday:** [The Intersectionality Wars](#); "Making Systems of Privilege Visible" Stephanie Wildman and Adrienne Davis (pdf); Akilah Obviously "On Intersectionality in Feminism and Pizza" (video); "The Unequal Opportunity Race" (video)

### **Politics and Poetics**

**2/11 Tuesday:** Gloria Anzaldua's "How to Tame a Wild Tongue" (pdf); "Speaking in Tongues: Letter to 3rd World Women Writers" (pdf); "Letter to Ma" (pdf); The Combahee River Collective Statement (pdf)

**2/13 Thursday:** Audre Lorde “Poetry is not a luxury” (online); “Power” and “A Litany for Survival”; “We Aren’t Here to Learn What We Already Know” by Kyla Wazana Tompkins

**2/18 Tuesday:** music by Lizzo

**2/20 Thursday: Paper #1 Draft Due, Revision Peer Review #1 in-class**

### **Beyoncé’s Feminisms**

**2/25 Tuesday:** Music videos from Beyoncé: “Partition,” “Pretty Hurts,” “Yoncé,” “Grown Woman,” “Blow” (all online)

**\*\*Paper #1 Due\*\***

**2/27 Thursday:** Music videos from Lemonade: “Hold Up,” “Sorry,” “All Night,” “Freedom,” “Formation” (all online)

**3/3 Tuesday:** Beyoncé’s “Flawless”; Adichie’s tedtalk on feminism (online video); bell hooks on Beyoncé’s Feminism (online article); Janet Mock on Beyoncé’s feminism (online video); Chimamanda Adichie on Beyoncé’s feminism (online article)

**3/5 Thursday:** Class Debate on Beyoncé

### **SPRING BREAK 3/7 - 3/22**

**3/24 Tuesday:** Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie “The American Embassy” and “The Thing Around Your Neck” (pdf)

**3/26 Thursday: Online peer review #2**

**3/31 Tuesday:** Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie “Imitation” (pdf)

**4/2 Thursday:** online lecture about In the Stacks Project/library day

**\*\*Paper 2 Due\*\***

**4/7 Tuesday:** Warsan Shire poetry (pdf and multiple online links)

**4/9 Thursday:** Beyoncé reading Shire’s poetry in Lemonade (online links)

**4/14 Tuesday:** “Thanksgiving” from Master of None (in class showing – available on Netflix)

**\*In the Stacks Due\***

**4/16 Thursday:** talk about “Thanksgiving”

**4/21 Tuesday: Paper #3 Peer Review**

**4/23 Thursday:** Tangerine (shown in class)

**4/28 Tuesday:** Tangerine; Selections from Stryker and Whittle's The Transgender Studies Reader; the Global Network of Sex Work Projects policy on sex work and gender equality (online link)

**\*\*Paper #3 Due\*\***

**4/30 Thursday:** Self Care Day / Working Day / Individual Meetings to discuss final paper

**5/5 Tuesday:** Course Evaluations and Final Reflection