

Queen Bey and Yale: The Ivy League University Is Set to Offer a Course on Beyoncé and Her Legacy

By Susan Haigh
Associated Press

With a record 99 Grammy nominations and acclaim as one of the most influential artists in music history, pop superstar Beyoncé and her expansive cultural legacy will be the subject of a new course at Yale University next year.

Titled “Beyoncé Makes History: Black Radical Tradition, Culture, Theory & Politics Through Music,” the one-credit class will focus on the period from her 2013 self-titled album through this year’s genre-defying “Cowboy Carter” and how the world-famous singer, songwriter and entrepreneur has generated awareness and engagement in social and political ideologies.

Yale University’s African American Studies Professor Daphne Brooks intends to use the performer’s wide-ranging repertoire, including footage of her live performances, as a “portal” for students to learn about Black intellectuals, from Frederick Douglass to Toni Morrison.

“We’re going to be taking seriously the ways in which the critical work, the intellectual work of some of our greatest thinkers in American culture resonates with Beyoncé’s music and

thinking about the ways in which we can apply their philosophies to her work” and how it has sometimes been at odds with the “Black radical intellectual tradition,” Brooks said.

Beyoncé, whose full name is Beyoncé Giselle Knowles-Carter, is not the first performer to be the subject of a college-level course. There have been courses on singer and songwriter Bob Dylan over the years and several colleges and universities have recently offered classes on singer Taylor

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Swift and her lyrics and pop culture legacy. That includes law professors who hope to engage a new generation of lawyers by using a famous celebrity like Swift to bring context to complicated, real-world concepts.

Professors at other colleges and universities have also incorporated Beyoncé into their courses or offered classes on

the superstar.

Brooks sees Beyoncé in a league of her own, crediting the singer with using her platform to “spectacularly elevate awareness of and engagement with grassroots, social, political ideologies and movements” in her music, including the Black Lives Matter movement and Black feminist commentary.

“Can you think of any other pop musician who’s invited an array of grassroots activists to participate in these long-form multimedia album projects that she’s given us since 2013,” asked Brooks. She noted how Beyoncé has also tried to tell a story through her music about “race and gender and sexuality in the context of the 400-year-plus history of African-American subjugation.”

“She’s a fascinating artist because historical memory, as I often refer to it, and also the kind of impulse to be an archive of that historical memory, it’s just all over her work,” Brooks said. “And you just don’t see that with any other artist.”

Brooks previously taught a well-received class on Black women in popular music culture at Princeton University and discovered her students were most excited about the portion dedicated to Beyoncé. She



Beyoncé, left, accepts the Innovator Award during the iHeartRadio Music Awards, April 1, 2024, at the Dolby Theatre in Los Angeles.

expects her class at Yale will be especially popular, but she’s trying to keep the size of the group relatively small.

For those who manage to snag a seat next semester, they shouldn’t get their hopes up about seeing Queen Bey in person.

“It’s too bad because if she were on tour, I would definitely try to take the class to see her,” Brooks said.

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