

#BlackGirlMagic101

“The most neglected person is the black woman.”

Malcolm X

The following is a rhetorical analysis of Candice Benbow’s *Lemonade Syllabus*. This compilation of works was inspired by Beyoncé’s sixth solo project entitled *Lemonade* which premiered on HBO as an hour-long visual album.

Candice Benbow wastes no time hiding her intentions to use the *Lemonade Syllabus* as a tool to educate its audience on the past and present contexts of Black Womanhood; a lesson which undoubtedly has been swept under the metaphorical rug for centuries. However, unlike traditional syllabi which tend to be concise in text outlining a single semester or year-long course of study, Benbow’s syllabus provides enough resources to keep any open mind busy for a lifetime. Additionally, the *Lemonade Syllabus* provides space for note-taking and consistently incorporates images of and quotes from Beyoncé’s visual album. Although this particular spin on the syllabus is still rooted in educating others, it defies the boundaries of a class or course in that it is accessible for continuing use at anytime, anywhere by any person.

Benbow’s selection of readings are indeed monumental in number, but this decision has distinct reasoning behind it. Above all else, just from its massive inclusion at a quick glance, readers and observers alike are instantly aware of the depth of the lesson Benbow is proposing. Because there is this much educational information present, and because Benbow makes clear her intent for the syllabus to be somewhat of a starting point for further personal research, we can conclude that the historical and contemporary study of Black Womanhood is deserving of widespread attention. Through incorporating various genres spanning from fiction, poetry, and theatre to non-fiction, feminist theory, and religious/inspirational the *Lemonade Syllabus* brings together a comprehensive analyzation of the history and culture that has impacted and influenced the African American community, and more specifically the African American woman.

Benbow insinuates that Beyoncé’s visual album, at its core, has created a pathway to and an explanation of what Benbow refers to as “Black Girl Magic”. This term may (hopefully) sound familiar as its popularity grew almost overnight after the hashtag #BlackGirlMagic started trending almost two years ago. But what exactly is it? Definitions may vary slightly among those

willing to provide them, but the overall consensus is that the term represents a call to action to ensure that all women of color know and are afforded the ability to appreciate the color of their skin and the rich culture that surrounds it. Black Girl Magic is a celebration of the universal uniqueness of Black Womanhood and the specific recognition of black excellence.

For two and a half centuries woman of color were silenced through the enslavement of their race. For nearly another century they were silenced through the guise of separate but equal. For another ten years they were silenced through their inability to vote, and for another handful of decades up into the present they continued and continue to be respectively silenced by a country that largely still refuses to recognize the white supremacist ideologies that it consumes and regurgitates over and over again. Today this can be witnessed in the unnecessary sexualization and degradation of the black female body and it can be witnessed in perpetual negative stereotypes surrounding woman of color. Beyoncé's *Lemonade* questions both through her bare-all style of performance which opens the curtains for the world to view a whole new side of the infamous artist. As if hearing bits and pieces of Mrs. Carter's diary, her audience is plunged straight into the middle of Beyoncé dealing with her husband's infidelity tearing apart their marriage. This raw reveal of something that has very obviously been plaguing her thoughts becomes even more powerful through her steadfast resilience and refusal to lose confidence in who she is and what she has done. Beyoncé's struggle is a representation of and an invitation to understand the unique struggles of her fellow black women. Against all odds, against daily battles with oppression, and even against heart ache from the men they love women of color find a way to persevere and do so with their heads held high.

Benbow has made several stylistic choices within the *Lemonade Syllabus* which perfectly add to the legitimacy of showcasing her platform. In addition to using warm colors with continuous pops of light to darker tones of yellow specifically, she upgrades the organization one typically attributes to the common syllabus through adding a table of contents and affording the viewer space to take notes as they navigate through readings. Additionally Benbow incorporates several images from Beyoncé's visual album which seem to correspond with the content found on the respective pages. The front cover features one of the most notable shots from *Lemonade*: Beyoncé in a fluffy, tan fur coat leaning with arms extended upwards on a vehicle with only her braids and part of her ear showing from a profile view.

As the audience dives deeper another close up of Beyoncé's face straight on with a brighter yellow background can be seen over each section provided for notes. This trend of using the same particular image above one particular section is continually seen throughout the syllabus and further adds to the textbook-like organization much like Benbow's decision to organize works alphabetically by the authors' last names.

However, much like the personal touch felt in *Lemonade* through Beyoncé's spoken word weaving the scenes together, the *Lemonade Syllabus* adds a similar effect with the inclusion of full-page images spaced evenly throughout the text. These images of Beyoncé from *Lemonade* also feature specific words and lyrics from the album written in unique script style font. It is also interesting to note Benbow's choice of image running along the top of the contributor's pages that conclude the syllabus. This image is another still from *Lemonade*, but from a scene in which Beyoncé is standing (in formation!) with several other women of color, wading in a body of water. All of the women are holding hands and their hands are raised up high into the air. Benbow has very purposefully organized her syllabus in a way to re-awaken the feelings many viewers may have felt while watching or even listening to Beyoncé's visual album. Yet, even if parts of her audience have not experienced the album completely or even at all, it is surely enough to draw one in and peak their interest.