Megan Thee Stallion's Southern Black Feminist Poet(ic)s and the #HotGirlSemesterSyllabus

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I offer my sincerest gratitude to my wife, Elena Givens, and friend, Dr. Bettina Love, for reviewing drafts of this article and talking Meganisms with me. I also want to thank Megan Thee Stallion and her team for inviting me to Megan's 2023 Hottieween party. It was a magical evening, and I am grateful to have had the honor of meeting Megan and sharing that her work informs academic spaces.
Megan Thee Stallion’s Southern Black Feminist Poet(ic)s and the 
#HotGirlSemesterSyllabus

Being a Hot Girl is about being unapologetically YOU, having fun, being confident, living YOUR truth, being the life of the party, etc.
-Megan Thee Stallion (2019, via X formerly Twitter)

The #HotGirlSemesterSyllabus (Overby et al., 2023) celebrates Megan Thee Stallion’s (Megan Pete) artistry as critical pedagogy centering and empowering Black women. Covering an eight-week term, the syllabus includes guiding questions, readings, and multimedia resources exploring the Hot Girl through Black feminist (Collins, 1990) and hip hop feminist (Morgan, 1999) lenses and scholarship. I envision using the syllabus in a First Year Experience, Gender Studies, or African American Studies course titled “Southern Black Feminist Poet(ic)s”, where “poet(ic)s” reflects the intersection of artistry, theory, and praxis and underscores the study of the poet as an artist. I center poet(ic)s crafted in the tradition of Black feminist epistemologies and apply the southern lens to honor my identity as a southern Black woman. This centering also honors gifted southern Black feminist poet(ic)s who wro/ite in the southern tradition: poets and novelists Nikki Finney, Nikki Giovanni, Zora Neal Hurston, Gayl Jones, Tayari Jones, Ebony Steward, Natasha Trethewey, Alice Walker and Jesmyn Ward; rappers Chika (Jane Chika Oranika), Gangsta Boo (Lola Mitchell), GloRilla (Gloria Hallelujah Woods), Latto (Alyssa Stephens), Mia X (Mia Young), Missy Elliott (Melissa Elliott), Rapsody (Marlanna Evans), and The Sequence (Gwendolyn “Blondy” Chisolm, Cheryl “The Pearl” Cook, Angie “Angie B” Brown); Alabama’s Poet Laureate Ashley Jones; spoken word artist Sha’Condria “iCon” Sibley; scholar and ancestor, bell hooks; and scholars Robin Boylorn, Regina Bradley, and Imani Perry, to name a few.

I read Megan as a “southern Black feminist poet(ic)” by exploring the artistry, theory and praxis in her work and through her espousing of Black feminist concerns through the embodiment of Black feminist epistemologies. As Megan’s music crosses generational and racial boundaries, other academics might utilize the #HotGirlSemesterSyllabus with students attending Historically Black Colleges or Universities, minority serving institutions, predominantly White institutions, public or private institutions, and with/in after school programs or community organizations. Syllabus adopters should center Black women’s creativity, empowerment, and discourse by fully embracing Black feminist epistemologies, committing to upholding Black feminist analyses, and championing Megan’s work as a site of Black feminist liberation.

Thee Southern Black Feminist Poet(ic)s

Sullivan (2021) described Black feminist poet(ic)s as “a model of poetics that accommodates multiple forms of linguistics and bodily expression” (p. 5) whereby Black feminist poet(ic)s, “write through decades of lethal violence against the discursive erasure of their own deaths, and toward new visions of living” (p. 29). Black feminist poet(ic)s enact “ars spirituality” (Cutts, 2020) and engage space-making to nurture thriving for all people. Southern Black feminist poet(ic)s write to challenge racial, gendered, and geographic oppression. We tell our stories like only we can, using lenses only we have. Black feminist poet(ic)s also exemplify how “Black girls and women experience the connections among language, power, ideology, and social identity” (Ohito & Nyachae, 2019, p. 839). To highlight these connections, the #HotGirlSemesterSyllabus anchors students’ engagement in critical reading, viewing, and analyses of Megan’s work and
engages them in activities that center identity, theory, body anthropology, and mental well/wholeness. The syllabus also centers the creative and could be a foundational component in arts integration, drawing on performance and literary and visual arts. To further develop this concept, I created the #HotGirlSemesterSyllabus Accompaniment: Tracks, Poems, and Art (Cutts, 2023) - an evolving resource that, at the time of this writing, included 32 Megan Thee Stallion Tracks, 109 Supporting Tracks, 29 Guiding Poems, and 31 Guiding Art references organized by theme, date, and artist and representing diverse genres. Each genre is central to southern Black feminist poet(ic)s’ creativity as Black women call for unapologetic and holistic self-love with attentiveness to our physical, emotional, and mental wellbeing; with trusting and believing our knowledge, abilities, and experiences; and with situatedness in Black feminist epistemologies, praxis, and possibilities. Megan Thee Stallion speaks to each of these areas in her liberation-laced lyrics and activism. Both the #HotGirlSemesterSyllabus and the #HotGirlSemesterSyllabus Accompaniment: Tracks, Poems, and Art make these connections apparent.

Megan’s lived experiences in hip hop and beyond represent an unfolding Black feminist project that “enriches the lives of, restores agency, justice, joy, and health to Black Womxn, girls and non-men” (Black Feminist Project, n.d., para. 1). Her southern Black feminist poet(ic)s is rooted not only in “Black Feminisms, but by positionality, and geographic location” (Barlow & Smith, 2019, p. 6). Engaging Megan’s work through a southern Black feminist poet(ic)s lens highlights her identity as a southern girl, born and raised in Houston, Texas, who proudly represents her southernness, not only in interviews and lyrics, but also in action. In 2022, Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner named May 2nd as “Megan Thee Stallion Day” in honor of Megan’s philanthropic contributions to the city, and the Southern Black Girls and Women’s Consortium (SBGWC) announced a partnership with the Pete and Thomas Foundation in support of SBGWC’s inaugural “Joy is Our Journey” bus tour. Undoubtedly, Megan is, according to SBGWC’s founder LaTosha Brown, “the ultimate Southern Black girl” (Genai, 2020, para. 3) who makes “unapologetically Southern” (Gomez, 2019; Graham, 2022) Hot Girl anthems.

Thee Empowering Discourse

Acknowledging women’s rights to pleasure, protection, and bodily autonomy, Megan’s lyricism and poet(ic)s unapologetically encourage Hot Girl empowerment and denounce misogynoir (Bailey, 2023) and individual and structural violence against Black women. In “Girls in the Hood” (2020) and “Eat It” (2021), Megan waxes pleasure as a sexual intimacy requirement. During her 2020 Saturday Night Live (SNL) performance, she fused Malcom X’s (1962) words, “The most disrespected, unprotected, neglected person in America is the Black woman” and called for justice for Breonna Taylor. In “Plan B” (2020), she rapped, “Ladies love yourself / cuz this shit could get ugly” (“Plan B”, 2022), in support of women’s bodily autonomy, rejecting the Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization (2022) decision that overturned Roe v. Wade (1973).

In Megan’s brief tenure in hip hop, shit got ugly. Yet, she leaned into her southern Black feminist poet(ic)s, continuing to engage philanthropic work, ink deals with high-profile brands, secure awards, and be the first Black woman to grace the Forbes “30 Under 30” cover as an honoree. She also presumably practiced what she rapped and promoted about mental health by curating a publicly accessible mental health resource in BadBitchesHaveBadDaysToo and taking a three and a half-month Instagram and Twitter hiatus from November 2022 to March 2023. Returning to Instagram on March 13, 2023, Megan shared stunningly glamorous photos of her Vanity Fair Oscars After-Party look, reminding fans and foes the “bounce back” (“Anxiety”, 2022)
is inevitable for a Hot Girl. Megan’s Hot Girl evolution, victimization and bounce back could be explored via the #HotGirlSemesterSyllabus and the southern Black feminist poet(ic)s’ lens noted in the #HotGirlSemesterSyllabus Accompaniment: Tracks, Poems, and Art. Such an exploration empowers artists and educators to center the creative by incorporating tracks, poetry, and visual art and begin a dialogue about Hot Girls’ complex lived experiences.

Southern Black feminist poet(ic)s powerfully kick down doors, flip tables, and take up space - rightfully so, rightfully ours - and “express forms of creative agency that undermine convergent systems of structural violence” (Christmas-Rouse, 2019, p. 5). Foregrounding the storytelling and poet(ic)s of resistance of southern Black women whose contributions to the Black feminist literary canon are sometimes without exemplified celebration, Megan’s southern Black feminist poet(ic) reminds the world, “We need to protect our Black women and love our Black women. Because at the end of the day, we need our Black women” (2020, “Anxiety Remix” via SNL).

References

Cutts, Q. M. (2023). #Hotgirlsemestersyllabus: Performance, literary, and visual Art. https://docs.google.com/document/d/14mbBHlIiZYxKvA-eVFk0lGwSYhGYJpkqVe9DEUO90_k/edit?usp=sharing


