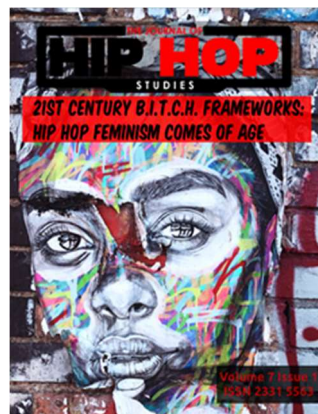


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## Hip Hop Feminism Starter Kit

M. Nicole Horsley

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The term Hip Hop Feminist first appears in *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost: A Hip Hop Feminist Breaks It Down* (1999).<sup>1</sup> The unlikely pairing of Hip Hop and Black feminist consciousness, Hip Hop Feminism initially emerged to address the everyday failures of representations of Black women in Hip Hop, evidenced by the misogynistic lyrics and the general exclusion of Black women Hip Hop artists and producers. Morgan writes Black women within Hip Hop culture “need a feminist consciousness that allows us to examine how representations and images can simultaneously empowering and problematic.”<sup>2</sup>

So, what is Hip Hop Feminism? It has been called a movement and worldview at the intersection of Black feminist with Womanist consciousness and Hip Hop sensibilities. Morgan has called it “a feminism brave enough to fuck with the grays.”<sup>3</sup> Emerging as a critical response to provide Black girls and women with an alternative perspective and ways of engaging the culture, music, lyrics, knowledge and representation. In its emphasis on the personal as political, Hip Hop Feminism ruptures ideologies of universal womanhood, bodies, class and gender construction to center the Black identity as paramount to our experience. Seeking to develop a radical self-politic of love, empowerment, gendered perspective and social consciousness for the historically underrepresented, hyper visualized, erased, and marginalized. Demanding that we cultivate a Black woman and women of color-centered politics to navigate Hip Hop culture and rap music.

Twenty-one years later, the *Journal of Hip Hop Studies* returns to Hip Hop Feminism through a special issue to introduce for some and remind others of the potential (fullest), pleasure, and consciousness of self-identifying as a Hip Hop Feminist. You may still be wondering: What is Hip Hop Feminism? How does it

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<sup>1</sup> Joan Morgan, *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost: A Hip Hop Feminist Breaks It Down* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> Shani Jamila, “Can I Get a Witness? Testimony from a Hip-Hop Feminist,” in *Colonize This! Young Women of Color on Today’s Feminism*, ed. Daisy Hernández and Bushra Rehman (New York: Seal Press, 2002), 392.

<sup>3</sup> Morgan, *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost*, 59.

operate? For whom does it provide a method and means for engaging with the contemporary Hip Hop culture and generation? This starter kit is for you. It is meant to introduce you to the understandings, promise, hopes, stakes, jeopardies, and possibilities of Hip Hop and Hip Hop Feminism.

This workbook is a companion to the issue as it introduces or reintroduces readers to the concept and essentially the work of Hip Hop Feminism even while there continues to be an ongoing debate if Hip Hop Feminism is a Black feminist perspective on Hip Hop or a feminism of its own sensibilities that originates from a bit of ladies first and the search for a real love. Hip Hop feminism allows the *Miseducation of Lauryn Hill* to hit differently. So, who can be a Hip Hop Feminist?

Arguably, contemporary Hip Hop Feminism is of the new grays that exist in earlier understandings to disrupt boundaries of gender, sexuality, and contradictions of respectability politics. The return to the concept is instructive in providing a lens from which to look and listen to the culture, music, videos, and lyrics, to consider gender, sexuality, class, bodies, and inclusivity in Hip Hop. It, however, should provide a safe space and a voice for poor and working-class Black girls and women, centering their everyday struggles – at home, in school, working (including those engaged in sex work), and in need of love.

The inspiration to develop a Hip Hop Feminist workbook developed from a college course I teach: Hip Hop Feminism: Queen B\*tch. An Introduction to the (im)Possibilities of Hip Hop Feminism. Using the syllabus, I have developed lessons and talks on college campuses that I have also delivered to community spaces with Black girls and women, secondary educators, parents, and student organizations. I teach resistance and anti-establishment readings of our bodies, lyrics, and live and mediated performances of Hoes With An Attitude (H.W.A.) Lil' Kim, Missy 'Misdemeanor' Elliott, Cardi B, The City Girls; as well as topics related to Hip Hop culture and sexual hygiene and wellness. I hope that you're inspired to see the fullness of your magic, humanity, and beauty while gaining a sense of consciousness and intersectional thinking that happens when listening, dancing, lip syncing, or simply feeling a song. I encourage each of you to explore the healing and transformative power and pleasure experienced throughout Hip Hop culture.

Similar to you, I am sitting at home practicing social distancing in response to Covid-19, while mourning the most recent vigilante and police killings of unarmed Black men and women: Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, and George Floyd. The protesting, acts of resistance, and folx speaking truth to power are happening globally. About the second month, when the world shut down in an effort to slow the transmission of coronavirus, live performances in the form of house (rent) parties with DJ sets, MC rap battles, cyphers, and community discussions returned to

the original elements of Hip Hop. A culture born from the creation of love and rebellion, the Hip Hop feminist archive draws from cultural knowledge production to construct a site of inclusion, resistance, transformative possibilities, pleasure, and healing.

The creation of this workbook aimed at community centers and the children in the hood who wake up daily to dreaming about getting and being free. This workbook should inspire, inform, empower, and assist you with creating a vision to imagine our collective liberation.

### **Guide**

This workbook can be used in and outside of the classroom setting, ranging from middle school to college. I encourage parents, teachers, and community centers to use this workbook as a model to develop activities, discussions, teach-ins, and more, based on concepts and ideas related to Hip Hop Feminism. It provides a space to articulate and center the political and personal relationship of Hip Hop for the images, representations, and constructions of Black girlhood, messy femmes, transgender, non-binary and all types of Black womanhood throughout the African diaspora; addressing the impact and relationship of antiblackness; and the intersections of blackness, sexuality, economics, geography, age, and other identities.

### **Outline**

**Section I. Pre-Reflection: Leading Discussion**

**Section II. Concepts/Terms**

**Section III. Lessons**

**Section IV. Case Studies**

**Section V. Exercises**

**Section VI. Black Women in Hip Hop**

### **Hip Hop Feminism Starter Kit**

**Section I. Pre-Reflection: Leading Discussion**

Take a moment to reflect on the purpose of creating programming based on Hip Hop Feminism. Let's talk about why, and about how the two connect. Take a few moments to answer the following questions.

1. Describe the students/people who will foster the discussion. How will you facilitate programming or lessons? Why you will present the values and beliefs of Hip Hop Feminism this way.

2. What is most important to you in teaching/facilitating a discussion on Hip Hop Feminism?
3. How do you believe your students/people will respond?
4. How do your values and beliefs align with your approach?
5. Return to Hip Hop Feminism and the Combahee River statements. Refine your core beliefs and values to develop topics and themes related.
6. List possible learning objectives/outcomes--what will they know after the lesson or program, i.e.--They will know the definition of key terms and concepts.

## Section II. Concepts/Terms

**Define the following terms and concepts, what do they mean to you?**

Black girlhood:

Black Girl Magic:

Ratchet:

## Readings

Most readings are accessible online, others are available through your local library or may be purchased. Develop a relationship with your local libraries and cultural centers.

*When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost: A Hip Hop Feminist Breaks It Down*, Joan Morgan (available through the local library or purchase). Start with Morgan's book to develop a foundation on the history, meaning and intentions of Hip Hop feminism and how she defines Hip Hop feminist.

Accompanying articles:

\*Assignment readings used are all available online for non-academic or institutional affiliated users.

“20 Years Joan Morgan Revisits ‘When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost: A Hip Hop Feminist Breaks It Down,’” by Simone Ameila Jordan, March 8, 2019 Vibe.com  
<https://www.vibe.com/2019/03/joan-morgan-interview-when-chickenheads-come-home-to-roost>

“Joan Morgan, Hip-Hop Feminism, and The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill,” by Danielle A. Jackson, August 8, 2018 in the Paris Review  
<https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2018/08/08/joan-morgan-hip-hop-feminism-and-the-twenty-year-legacy-of-the-miseducation-of-lauryn-hill/>

“Interview: Feminists We Love: Joan Morgan, 2013 (video)” by Tamura Lomax:  
<https://thefeministwire.com/2013/03/feminists-we-love-joan-morgan/>

Joan Morgan’s articles: <https://muckrack.com/joan-morgan/articles>

Joan Morgan on *The Breakfast Club*: “Joan Morgan Talks Hip-Hop Feminism and The MisEducation of Lauryn Hill” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?=zeYRRzt2ikQ>

Joan Morgan – “Hip Hop and Feminism”  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k2R8NmNaEuk>

### Section III. Lessons

Have everyone read “A Black Feminist Statement.” Develop appropriate activities and questions to discuss Black Feminism and other themes. For example, list key terms and concepts from the statement such as politics, coalition, movements, oppression, women of color (woc), etc. Create an activity based on Black women activists, activism, and revolutionaries and organizations. Plan a lesson on Black feminism and feminist, Black Liberation, Black Girlhood, stereotypes, and so on. Discuss the importance of the Combahee River Collective’s statement. Use the work of artists such as Janelle Monae to construct and discuss interlocking systems of oppression, later introduce intersectionality and Hip Hop feminism.

**A Black Feminist Statement** by The Combahee River Collective (1977) appeared as a movement document in April 1977, the final version was published in Zillah Eisenstein, ed., *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism* (Monthly Review, 1979), 362-72:

[https://americanstudies.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/Keyword%20Coalition\\_Readings.pdf](https://americanstudies.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/Keyword%20Coalition_Readings.pdf)

Read the first chapter of *The Coldest Winter Ever* by Sister Souljah (1999). Develop discussion questions based on chapter 1. Discuss Sister Souljah 360 Degrees, begin with album cover. Relate to police killings, Black parents of slain victims. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=abozq\\_aaBek&list=RDEMdCqgD8ASnTG3wAI-jQuQCg&start\\_radio=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=abozq_aaBek&list=RDEMdCqgD8ASnTG3wAI-jQuQCg&start_radio=1)

***The Coldest Winter Ever (Chapter 1)*** by Sister Souljah (1999):

<https://medium.com/@atriabooks/chapter-one-from-the-coldest-winter-ever-c02a05074ad0>

**Discussion guide:** [https://durhamcountylibrary.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/coldest\\_winter\\_ever\\_DISCUSSION.pdf](https://durhamcountylibrary.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/coldest_winter_ever_DISCUSSION.pdf)

**Lauryn Hill’s first solo album, *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*** (1998), Full album on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/eU0B49AjXE>

Released in 1998, Lauryn Hill’s first solo album, *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*, is considered by Hip Hop and Black feminism scholars as an intervention. It immediately

went to number one on the Billboard 200 and nearly went gold in its first week of sales. The song “Doo Wop (That Thing)” became the first number one single by a female Hip Hop artist. It was the first rap project to win the Grammy Award for Album of the Year.

*Article (locate magazine articles and interviews):*

What Lauryn Hill’s ‘Miseducation’ Iconic Album Means to Black Women, August 2018, *Vibe*, Candance McDuffie <https://www.vibe.com/2018/08/miseducation-of-lauryn-hill-black-women-importance>

### **Ratchet(ness)**

#### **Readings on Ratchet(ness):**

“I Been On (Ratchet): Conceptualizing a Sonic Ratchet Aesthetic in Beyonce's ‘Bow Down,’” by Regina Bradley (March 19, 2013):  
<http://redclayscholar.blogspot.com/2013/03/i-been-on-ratchet-conceptualizing-sonic.html>

“Exhuming the Ratchet before it’s Buried,” by Heidi R. Lewis (January 7, 2013):  
<https://thefeministwire.com/2013/01/exhuming-the-ratchet-before-its-buried/>

#### **Lessons on Ratchet(ness):**

1. How do Bradley and Lewis describe and discuss the meaning and importance of ratchetness?
2. View the music video for “Party by Beyoncé” ft. J. Cole:  
[https://youtu.be/XWCwc1\\_sYMY](https://youtu.be/XWCwc1_sYMY)
3. Look at the sculptures of New York-based artist LaKela Brown: <http://lakelabrown.com/> How does she reference Hip Hop culture throughout her sculptures? Describe elements of LL Cool J’s “Around the Way Girl” that can be found in her work. How does she feature chickenheads in her work? Name a few of your 1990s Hip Hop artist inspirations.

#### **Writing and Journaling, finding Audre Lorde, “the personal is political”:**

Divya Victor created, “The Audre Lorde Questionnaire To Oneself,” (<https://divyavictor.com/the-audre-lorde-questionnaire-to-oneself/>) from an entry in Audre Lorde’s *Cancer Journals* (1980).



The Cancer Journals are comprised with entries in the personal diary, reflective commentary, a speech, and an essay of Black activist, writer, lesbian, warrior mother, and poet Audre Lorde documenting her battle against and myriad of fear and experiences of pain after a diagnosis and later mastectomy in 1978. Victor developed questions based on “The Transformation into Language and Action,” a speech delivered in 1977 at the Modern Language Association’s Lesbian and Literature panel in Chicago.

### Readings:

“Transformation into Language and Action”: <https://electricliterature.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/silenceintoaction.pdf>

or

<https://wgs10016.commons.gc.cuny.edu/lorde-poetry-is-not-a-luxury/>

- 1) When Lorde writes, “Some of what I experienced during that time has helped elucidate for me much of what I feel concerning the transformation of silence into language and action,” what do you think she means?
- 2) Think about a time when you have been silent about experiencing pain (bodily, emotional, stress, loss, hopelessness). Describe the pain.
- 3) Write a short story or poem about-facing your fears.
- 4) How does Lorde describe silence? Why is it important for women not to be silent about hurt and pain?
- 5) List three rap songs that tell someone something about you such as your personality. How are girls or women represented in each rap song? Explain how the song captures what you feel when you listen to it.

*Possible quotes to use in developing additional exercises based on Audre Lorde's work:*

- "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence. It is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare," Lorde wrote in "A Burst of Light" and Other Essays.
  
- "The love expressed between women is particular and powerful because we have had to love in order to live; love has been our survival," Lorde wrote in Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches.
  
- "When I dare to be powerful—to use my strength in the service of my vision—then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid," Lorde wrote in The Transformation of Silence into Language & Action.
  
- "I have a duty to speak the truth as I see it and share not just my triumphs, not just the things that felt good, but the pain. The intense, often unmitigated pain. It is important to share how I know survival is survival and not just a walk through the rain," Lorde wrote in The Transformation of Silence into Language & Action.
  
- "If I didn't define myself, I would be crunched into other people's fantasies for me and eaten alive," Lorde said during a speech at Harvard University in 1982.
  
- "Your silence will not protect you," Lorde wrote in The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action.
  
- "I am deliberate and afraid of nothing," Lorde wrote in The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde.

## Section IV. Case Studies

### Dee Barnes

Interview with Dee Barnes, Dr. Dre:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XpkcjzUm3os>

Dr. Dre finally apologizes for abusing Dee Barnes and says "I was out of my mind"

<https://youtu.be/4j4I07fOD8Y>

<https://rollingout.com/2019/04/19/did-dr-dre-sexually-assault-dee-barnes-during-vicious-attack/>

<https://www.vibe.com/2019/04/dee-barnes-silent-on-dr-dre-sexual-assault-question>

### Karrine Steffans

"Confessions of a Video Vixen" (2005) (local library or purchase)

The importance of Hip Hop journalist, intersectionality, and grassroots activism. A case study of #MuteRKelly movement: <https://www.muterkelly.org/>

### Hip Hop Journalists

Discuss the importance of pioneer Hip Hop journalism.

How have activists, journalists and cultural critics such as Michaela Angela Davis, Akiba Solomon, and Lynee Denise, Lala Anthony, and Tarana Burke (#metoomovement).

Dream Hampton: <https://www.dreamhampton.com/blog>

Kierna Mayo: <https://muckrack.com/kierna-mayo/articles>

## Section V. Exercises

Describe Hip Hop Feminism:

List the ways in which Hip Hop has impacted you.

- Personally
- Educationally
- Relationships

After reading the special issue and selected articles, read the lyrics, listen to songs, and watch music videos listed throughout the issue.

- Discuss
- Listen
- List
- Now that you have read about Hip Hop feminism as a point of view to consider the role of gender and sexuality.

Listen to a song and watch a video by:

Cardi B & Bruno Mars - Please Me

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hGNmQwTvS2Y>

The City Girls - Take Yo Man--<https://youtu.be/P-ggA4V5WTo>

Salt-N-Pepa - I'll Take Your Man -- <https://youtu.be/dvoZ9KRJqfs>

Janelle Monae - Hell You Talmbout ft. Jidenna, Wonderland Records

<https://youtu.be/fumaCsQ9wKw>

Sammus - Weirdo (feat. Homeboy Sandman)

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

Erykah Badu ft. Common - Love Of My Life (An Ode To Hip Hop)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dNk3R23Tgw>

Queen Latifah - Ladies First (feat. Monie Love)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Qimg\\_q7LbQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Qimg_q7LbQ)

Write a review of the songs and music videos from a Hip Hop feminist perspective.

## Section VI. Black Women in Hip Hop

Here are some examples of Black women who may not call themselves feminist but are thriving in Hip Hop. These Black women show what is possible and reveal that you can still be Hip Hop, even if you aren't a rapper.

### Graffiti:

Soraya Marquez <https://www.indie184.com/>

Dieynaba Sidibe - <https://www.one.org/international/blog/meet-dieynaba-senegals-first-female-graffiti-artist/>

### Films:

*YouTube*

"Ladies of Hip-Hop from 1979 to 2000: Female Emcee 101," video by kristikrisislives

*Movies*

*The Players Club*

*Pimps Up, Hoes Down*

*Video Vixens*

*Shante--Netflix film*

*Blood and Water (Netflix)*

*Just Another Girl From the IRT*

*Documentaries*

DuVernay, A. (2010). *My Mic Sounds Nice: A Truth About Women and Hip Hop*. BET Docs.

Raimist, R., O. Asia, et al. (1999). *Nobody Knows My Name*. New York, NY, Women Make Movies distributor.

**B-girls:**

“15 Black Female Dancers & Choreographers Who Are Killing the Game” -

<https://www.essence.com/lifestyle/black-girl-magic/15-black-female-dancers-who-are-killing-game/#91128>

Tara Anomolies - <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=10155021265653657>

Bgirl Macca - <https://www.instagram.com/p/CAamAbFhaQQ/>

Bgirl Angel - [https://www.instagram.com/p/B\\_i1AmujKg-/](https://www.instagram.com/p/B_i1AmujKg-/)

Maku Gold || Triple Bond Crew -

<https://www.instagram.com/p/B3CNjyPjLRQ/>

B-Girl Terra B-Girl Eddie - [https://www.instagram.com/p/B\\_sFfgPDI5f/](https://www.instagram.com/p/B_sFfgPDI5f/)

**Deejays:**

Tiff McFierce - [ESPN interviews Tiff McFierce 1st woman resident DJ at Madison Square Garden-NY Knicks/Liberty](#)

[10 Fierce Black Female DJs You Need to Know About](#)

[When These 5 Black Women Spin on The Beat, The Beat Gets Sicker Every Time](#)

Fox 2 9am Female DJ's I Am Hip Hop -

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BmJNa\\_GrJaY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BmJNa_GrJaY)

Latosha Duffey - [How French Montana's DJ, Duffey, Went from Car Rentals to Owning Homes & Blowing Checks | Blew A Bag](#)

**A&Rs**

Andrea Castleberry “M\$. Blendz” - <https://twitter.com/blendzville?lang=en>,  
<https://www.facebook.com/Blendzville-Global-585531974875365/>

Amina Diop - <https://www.instagram.com/aminathediop/?hl=en>,  
<https://variety.com/2018/biz/news/republic-records-names-amina-diop-senior-vp-of-ar-1202839902/>

Latosha Duffey - [How French Montana's DJ, Duffey, Went from Car Rentals to Owning Homes & Blowing Checks | Blew A Bag](#)

Latoya Lee - <https://www.atlasmusicgroup.com/news/post/MjY0MjQtOTNkND>