

# 'SCHOOLIN' LIFE'

## CELEBRITY CLASSROOM TAKEOVER

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The power of the celebrity brand has surpassed the shallow paradigm of Hollywood superficiality and subsequently branched out into the nation's education sector. With the underlying ideologies and affirmations of musicians' respective crafts being scrutinized for popular opinion, it seems as the advancement of the world is subsequently taking the public's fascination with "celebrity" along for the ride, and Beyoncé is next on the list.

How exciting would taking an elective on Beyoncé be? As of this year, the students at Rutgers University now have that choice as a course titled "Politicizing Beyoncé" is now offered as an official part of the institution's curriculum. While, on the surface, many may perceive this as another submissive gesture of "bowing down," hence adding to the steadily growing list of the singer's accolades, it is anything but. The course ultimately serves as an assessment of American gender and sexual politics, specifically honing in on the feminist themes employed in Beyoncé's music, and videos, further catalyzed by her latest platinum release, "BEYONCÉ."

Taught by Kevin Allred, a doctoral student and teacher in the Department of Women and Gender Studies, the course seeks to explore the overarching institutions of race, gender, and sexuality in modern America, using the "Partition" singer's musical catalog as a virtual expansion of its syllabus.

"This isn't a course about Beyoncé's political engagement or how many times she performed during President Obama's inauguration weekend," Allred told Rutgers Today. "She certainly pushes boundaries. While other artists are simply releasing music, she's creating a grand narrative around her life, her career, and her persona."

In addition to dissecting her music, the course's outlines include analyzing the extent to which Beyoncé controls her own aesthetic, surveying whether her liberated sexual image is empowering or stereotypically vulgar, and of course, her previous – and arguably equally famous – alter ego, "Sasha Fierce." Furthermore, Allred mentioned that the course includes "texts" ranging from unconventional forms such as lyrics, to more traditional works including those by Alice Walker and Sojourner Truth.

While "Politicizing Beyoncé" is expected to be an unorthodox approach to academic scholarship at Rutgers University, it is not the first transference of pop culture iconicity to higher education. Several institutions of higher learning throughout the United States have added celebrity-focused courses to their academic rosters. Some of them include "Sociology of Hip Hop: Jay Z" at Georgetown University, "Lady Gaga and the Sociology of the Fame" at the University of South Carolina, and "Michael Jackson: The Business of Music" offered just footsteps away at Clark Atlanta University.

So, what does this say about contemporary culture and the education system of the U.S.? In essence, it further continues to knock down the elementary consumeristic mentality of today's customers. It is no longer considered enough to just purchase an album and listen to its contents. Due to the highly advanced and inquisitive minds of modern consumers, the world is curious to know how these celebrity figures have such radical control over much of the world's outcomes.

In a society that is unequivocally obsessed with all things Hollywood, this may ultimately serve as a clever strategy to broaden the interests of a newly exposed generation of students, all while remaining "hip" in the process.