

MIT Music and Theater Arts
Hip Hop
21M.775
Thomas DeFrantz
Associate Professor, Music and Theater Arts
10-272 3-6957
T-R 3-4:30 PM 4-270
defrantz@mit.edu

Course Description

This course explores the political and aesthetic foundations of hip hop. We will trace the musical, corporeal, visual, spoken word, and literary manifestations of hip hop over its thirty-five year presence in the American cultural imaginary. We will also investigate specific black cultural practices that have given rise to its various idioms. Hip hop has invigorated the academy, inspiring scholarship rooted in black musical and literary traditions. We will also assess these sharp breaks and flamboyant versionings of hip hop style that have occurred within the academy.

Because "hip hop" is an ever-expanding area in formation, we will be concerned with the process of research circumscription. How are areas of popular culture to be explored? What research methodologies are useful in the study of popular culture? What are the discursive boundaries of something we can call "hip hop?" To pursue these questions, each student will work with groups responsible for leading the weekly discussion sessions with a presentation. The presentation should be conceived to interrogate the readings and viewings; to raise questions and issues around the material and its presentation; and to critique the relationship of the weekly theme, hip hop, and the popular culture we share at MIT and in Cambridge, MA. If you decide to include music in your presentation, you must provide lyrics for the entire class. Two fairly reliable lyric resources are www.ohhla.com and www.anysonglyrics.com.

Requirements for this course will comprise four components: free-write exercise, performance review, group oral presentations, and final paper, as detailed below.

Course Materials

Required Texts

Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America, by Tricia Rose. Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1994
Droppin' Science: Critical Essays on Rap Music and Hip Hop Culture edited by William Eric Perkins. Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1996

Other readings, listening, and music videos to be distributed via Athena course locker.

Tickets to one hip hop concert performances, to be determined.

Recommended Texts

Black Studies, Rap, and the Academy by Houston Baker, Jr. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993.
More Brilliant Than The Sun by Kodwo Eshun London, Quartet Books Limited, 1998.
Yes, Yes Y'All: Oral History of Hip-Hop's First Decade by Jim Fricke and Charlie Ahearn New York: Da Capo Press, 2002.
The 'Hood Comes First: Race, Space, and Place in Rap and Hip-Hop by Murray Forman, Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2002.
Hip Hop America by Nelson George. New York: Penguin, 1998.
Rap Music and Street Consciousness by Cheryl Keyes, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002.

Spectacular Vernaculars : Hip-Hop and the Politics of Postmodernism by Russell Potter, New York, SUNY Press, 1995.
Microphone Fiends edited by Tricia Rose and Andrew Ross, New York: Routledge, 1994.

Class Requirements:

1. Approximately 50 pages of reading and 2 hours of music/video listening/viewing weekly.
2. An initial "free write" assignment of 3-5 pages length. 10% of the final grade.
3. Attend and write about at least one "hip hop" performance in the Boston area. 20% of the final grade. Your assessment of the performance should consider at least two of the analytical paradigms explored in class. A detailed assignment will be posted on the web page.
4. Two Oral Presentations developed with different research groups. Each group will assemble an hour-long presentation on the topic at hand for that week's session. The presentation should reflect an understanding of key concepts proposed by the readings. It should also build on those concepts, either in consent or dissent, with additional musical and visual materials. Each student will create **individual** research notes for the presentation that develops on the MetaMedia website. 30% of the final grade (15% each).
5. A final paper, of 7-10 pages length, on a topic other than the Oral Presentation topic. The paper should synthesize material covered throughout the semester. The final paper shall account for 40% of the final grade. Proposals for final paper topics are due by email Thursday October 21. The final paper will be due during class time on the last day of classes, Tuesday December 9. **No extensions will be granted for the final paper.**

Sessions:

Unit 1 - Introduction and Overview - 3 Sessions September 9, 14, 16

READ "The Rap Attacks: An Introduction" by William Eric Perkins in Droppin' Science pp. 1-45
READ Black Noise Chapters 1 and 2, pp. 1-61
READ "What is this 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?" by Stuart Hall in Black Popular Culture edited by Michele Dent, Seattle, Bay Press, 1992, pp. 21-33

INITIAL FREE-WRITING ASSIGNMENT DUE Tuesday, September 14

Write a position paper of three to five pages length that outlines your take on "hip hop." Questions you might consider include: What's important about hip hop? Which elements among its users are most important? What are hip hop's "problems?" How has hip hop changed for the better or worse? Use thick description of at least one sequence, song, or "artifact" to underscore your point of view. Also include first-person narrative that details your experiential relationship to hip hop as you describe it.

VIEW Wild Style September 13

Supplementary

READ "Introduction" in Spectacular Vernaculars, pp. 1-23
READ "Music Analysis and Rap Music" in Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity by Adam Krims
Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000, 17-45

Special Event: World Peace Concert, Saturday, September 11, Kresge Main, 9pm Includes Several Hip Hop/Slam poetry Artists

GROUP PRESENTATION DETAILS

The oral presentation should be a group project, developed in collaboration with all the members of each group. The group will assemble an hour-long presentation on the topic at hand for that week's session. The

presentation should reflect an understanding of key concepts proposed by the readings; in fact, it **MUST** refer to at least some part of the readings. The presentation should also build on those concepts, either in consent or dissent, with additional musical and visual materials. Performance is welcome! The most successful presentations will include critical analysis, supporting materials, media examples drawn from beyond the course syllabus, **as well as** a performance of some sort.

The presentation should last no more than an hour, so that there is time for discussion and response.

Before the presentation, the group must post conversation and discussion notes on the MetaMedia site. In addition, each student must email the instructor **individual** research notes for the presentation. These notes should detail the individual contribution to the group presentation; they should also provide documentation of the point of view pursued by the individual in the presentation. Your notes should document what you chose to present, and more importantly, **why**. You should account for the choices in the presentation and offer some context for the presentation from your point of view as one of the discussion leaders. Each presentation will account for 15% of the final grade.

Performance Analysis Details. Attend at least one "hip hop" performance in the Boston area. Considering at least two of the analytical paradigms proposed in class, write a 3-5 page analysis of the performance. **Note:** You should approach two **different** paradigms than the ones for your group presentation or your final project. Your analysis might offer a close reading of performance and its context, or it might suggest future avenues for research. Your analysis should offer a close reading of the performance and its context in terms of your chosen lens. For example, if you decide to write about anarchy/activism and dance, you might offer an interpretation of specific lyrics that suggest an activist impulse, and how those lyrics relate to beats. You might continue your analysis to question the implications of dances that the artists and audience do in response to these lyrics/beats. Does the dance allay the potential impact of an activist message? Does the dance suggest a sort of physical anarchy? How do you know, or why do you think that?

Your analysis should refer with direct quotation to course materials, either media or literary. **Please submit your performance analysis electronically to defrantz@mit.edu**. The performance analysis is due before December 2, and will account for 20% of the final grade.

Unit 2 - Dance 2 Sessions September 21, 23

Group Presentation September 23

How is dance "central" to hip hop culture? How is it marginalized? What kinds of dances do hedz do? How have hip hop dances changed over time? Where are the sources of dance in hip hop? A consideration of capoeira and early African American dance forms.

VIEW	<u>Everybody Dance Now</u> PBS Documentary, 1991 On website.
VIEW	<u>The Freshest Kids: A History of the B-Boy</u> (2002)
READ	DeFrantz "The Black Beat Made Visible: Body Power in Hip Hop Dance" in <u>Of the Presence of the Body: Essays on Dance and Performance Theory</u> , Andre Lepecki, editor, Wesleyan University Press, 2004, pp. 64-81
READ	"Dance in Hip Hop Culture" by Katrina Hazzard-Donald in <u>Droppin' Science</u> , pp. 220-235
READ	"Hip Hop 101" by Robert F. Thompson in <u>Droppin' Science</u> , pp. 211-219

Supplementary

READ	"Exer(or)cising Power; Black Bodies in the Black Public Sphere" by Paul Gilroy in <u>Dance In The City</u> , edited by Helen Thomas, New York, St. Martin's Press 1997, pp. 21 - 34.
READ	"Breaking" by Sally Banes in <u>Fresh: Hip Hop Don't Stop</u> , pp 79-112.

Guest Artist Visits September 28, 30

VIEW Rhyme and Reason (David Spierer, dir. 1997)

September 28 - Visiting Guest Artist Hanifah Walida

September 30 - Guest Artist Mark Graham

Special Event! Attend Hanifah Walida Performance at Theatre Offensive, October 1 at 8pm.

Unit 3 - Sex and Sexuality - 2 Sessions October 5, 7

Group Presentation October 7

Is hip hop obsessed with depictions of sex and sexuality? What kinds of depictions are most prevalent? What depictions are resisted by hedz, and why? How do sex and sexuality feed hip hop into world markets?

LISTEN	<u>Hard Core</u> Lil Kim (1996)
LISTEN	<u>Cookie</u> (2002) Meshell Ndegeocello
READ	"Daughters of the Blues: Women, Race, and Class Representation in Rap Music Performance" by Cheryl Keyes in <u>Rap Music and Street Consciousness</u> Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002, pp. 186-209.
READ	"Confessions of a Hip Hop Critic" by dream hampton in <u>Rock She Wrote: Women Write About Rock, Pop, and Rap</u> edited by Evelyn McDonnell and Ann Powers, New York: Cooper Square Pres, 1999, pp. 455-458.
READ	"Butta Pecan Mamis" by Raquel Z. Rivera in <u>New York Ricans from the Hip Hop Zone</u> New York: Palgrave, 2003), pp 127-149.

"One Queen, One Tribe, One Destiny" by Tricia Rose in Rock She Wrote: Women Write About Rock, Pop, and Rap edited by Evelyn McDonnell and Ann Powers, New York: Cooper Square Pres, 1999, pp. 312-317

Unit 4 - Misogyny and Feminism- 2 Sessions October 12, 14

Group Presentation October 14

Why does misogyny occupy such a large part of the hip hop imaginary? How might sexual role-playing be healthy or hurtful to young people in various contexts? Is misogyny inevitable in the construction of popular culture? Is misogyny inseparable from hip hop? Alternately, how can hip hop be enabled to empower women? What kinds of hip hop combats misogyny, and how is it produced? What sorts of rhymes and beats support feminist concerns?

VIEW	<u>Nobody Knows My Name</u> (Rachel Raimist, 1999)
LISTEN	<u>The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill</u> Lauryn Hill (1998)
LISTEN	<u>Ready to Die</u> Notorious B.I.G. (1994)
READ	"A Small Introduction to the 'G' Funk era: Gangsta Rap and Black Masculinity in Contemporary Los Angeles" by Todd Boyd in <u>Am I Black Enough For You? Popular Culture from the 'Hood and Beyond</u> (Bloomington, IN, Indiana University Press, 1997) pp. 60-81
READ	"Women Writin' Rappin' Breakin'" by Nancy Guevara in <u>Droppin' Science</u> , pp. 49-62
READ	<u>Black Noise</u> Chapter 5 pp. 146-182

Supplementary

READ Gangsta: Merchandising the Rhymes of Violence by Ronin Ro

October 21 - Final Paper Proposals Due

FINAL PAPER INSTRUCTIONS

Working in consultation with the instructor, choose a topic for your final 7-10 page research paper that addresses a topic **other than those of your Oral Presentations**. While your paper may be on any topic related to course materials; it must synthesize material addressed throughout the semester. For example, if you decide to write about visual culture of hip hop, you should probably refer to Tricia Rose's arguments about "preferred transcripts" suggested by music videos and Todd Boyd's conception of "hyperreal" cinematic imagery.

Your paper should also incorporate research that extends beyond the boundaries of materials on our syllabus. You should also be sure to construct an argument and offer a critique of assumptions surrounding your argument. The most successful papers will allow the "messiness" of researching popular culture to foreground contradictions implicit in your arguments. For example, if you want to argue that misogyny is less of a concern in 2004 than it was in 1995 because many of the gangsta rap groups responsible for "bitch-ho" rhetoric have disbanded, you would probably want to underscore the pervasive lack of feminist female representation in any hip hop idiom in 2004. In other words, less gangsta rap has not meant more positive heterosocial conditions for the production of hip hop.

This is a research paper, and it will be graded according to standards of college-level humanities writing. Your paper must be typewritten, double-spaced, and thoroughly edited for spelling and grammar. Composition counts! For compositional guidelines, you might consult a guide for writing research papers in MLA style at <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Oracle/4184/>. For citation style, see <http://www.northern.wvnet.edu/~tcraig/wc.html>.

The final paper shall account for 40% of the final grade. The final paper shall be due **no later than** during class time on Tuesday December 10; early submissions are welcome. **No extensions will be granted for the final paper.** If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the course instructor.

Unit 5 - Graffiti, Fashion, and Visual Culture 2 - Sessions October 19, 21

Group Presentation October 21

How have fashion and graffiti been important to hip hop style? How did graffiti grow up? How did baggy pants and dookie chains become popular? Has flossing always been a part of hip hop? Are there boundaries to gender representations in hip hop fashion or visual culture?

VIEW	<u>Style Wars</u> (Tony Silver and Harry Chalfant, 1983)
READ	"Taking The Trains: The Formation and Structure of 'Writing Culture' in the Early 1970s" and "The Walls and the World: Writing Culture, 1982-1990" in <u>Taking the Train: How Graffiti Art Became an Urban Crisis in New York City</u> by Joe Austin (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), pp. 38-74, 227-267.
READ	"Suckers Don't Last a Minute: Good Rhyme, Bad Theory" and "Hip-Hop is Supposed to Eliminate Itself" by William Upski Wimsatt in <u>Bomb the Suburbs</u> New York: Soft Skull Press, 1994, pp 145-155
READ	"I Am Fashion: Puff Daddy Packages His World" by Michael Specter in <u>The New Yorker</u> September 9, 2002, pp 116-127.
Supplementary READ	<u>Crimes of Style : Urban Graffiti and the Politics of Criminality</u> by Jeff Ferrell and Eugene Stewart-Huidobro (Boston, Northeastern University Press, 1996). Chapters Two and Four, pp. 21-56; 159-207.
READ	"Graffiti" by Patti Romanowski and Susan Flinker and "Fashion" by Susan Flinker in <u>Fresh: Hip Hop Don't Stop</u> by Nelson George, with Sally Banes, Susan Flinker, Patty Romanowski (New York: Random House, 1984), pp 29-54 and 55-78.

Unit 6 - Anarchy and Activism - 2 Sessions October 26, 28

Group Presentation October 28

Hip Hop has long been figured as the “CNN of the Streets,” able to incite action and progressive change. But gangsta strains of hip hop seem to incite anarchy as much as activism. Are activism and anarchy two sides of the same coin? Can they be successfully combined in popular music for progressive social action?

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| VIEW | <u>Freestyle</u> (2004) |
| LISTEN | <u>Steal This Album</u> by The Coup (1998) |
| LISTEN | Dead Prez <u>Let's Get Free</u> (2000) |
| READ | "Making the Strong Survive: The Contours and Contradictions of "Message Rap" by Ernest Allen, Jr, in <u>Droppin' Science</u> pp. 159-191 |
| READ | "Kickin' Reality, Kickin' Ballistics: The Politics of "Gangsta Rap" in Postindustrial Los Angeles" by Robin D. G. Kelley in <u>Droppin' Science</u> pp. 117-158 |
| READ | <u>Hip Hop America</u> "Black Owned" pp 56-75, "Where my eyes can see" pp 97-113, "Capitalist Tool" pp 154-175, "Too Live" pp 178-192, "Da Joint" pp 208-210 |

Supplementary

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| READ | Chuck D with Yusef Jah <u>Fight the Power</u> (New York, Delacorte Press, 1997) "Prelude to Public Enemy" pp. 57-94, and "Gangs" pp 241-262 |
| READ | <u>Black Noise</u> Chapter 4 pp. 99-145 |
| READ | "The Hip Hop Hearings: Censorship, Social Memory, and Intergenerational Tensions Among African Americans" by George Lipsitz, in <u>Generations of Youth: Youth Cultures and History in Twentieth Century America</u> edited by Joe Austin and Michael Nevin Willard, (New York, NYU Press, 1998) pp. 395-411 |

Unit 7 - DJ'ing, Musicality, Live Performance - 2 Sessions November 2, 4

Group Presentation November 4

If hip hop music is mostly mediated, how does live performance figure into its aesthetic imperatives? What sorts of "liveness" are valued in hip hop music? How is musicality measured by djs? What are the relationships between composing and turntablism?

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| VIEW | <u>Scratch</u> (2002) |
| LISTEN | <u>The Roots Come Alive</u> by The Roots (1999)
<u>College Dropout</u> by Kanye West (2004) |
| READ | <u>More Brilliant than the Sun</u> "Transmaterializing the Breakbeat" pp. 013-025; "Virtualizing the Breakbeat" pp., 67-77 |
| EXPLORE | battlesounds.com on the web |

Unit 8 - Whiteness and Hip Hop -2 Sessions - November 9, 16

Within an American context, what are some of the ways that white youth respond to hip hop? How is “whiteness” embedded in the construction of hip hop? What are the particularly American wages of racial segregation in terms of popular culture, and especially hip hop?

- LISTEN The Slim Shady LP by Eminem (1999)
 To The Five Boroughs by Beastie Boys (2004)
- READ "Hip, and the Long Front of Color" by Andrew Ross in No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture New York, Routledge, 1989: 65-101

Supplementary

- READ "Mighty, Mighty Spade and Whitey: Black Lyrics and Soul's Interaction with White Culture" by Ian Hoare in The Soul Book Edited by Ian Hoare, London, Methuen, 1975, pp. 117-168
- VIEW Black and White (2000)
- VIEW Bullworth (1998)

Unit 9 - Consumerism, Commodity Fetishism, Globalization - 2 Sessions November 18, 23

Group Presentation TUESDAY November 23

Guest Lecture by Ian Condry, November 18

Condry is Assistant Professor of Foreign Language and Literatures and CMS. He is at work on a book about Hip Hop in Japan.

How important is consumption to hip hop culture? How is the global reach of hip hop related to commodities and exchange? How has hip hop changed as it has attracted a global audience and inspired a global marketplace?

- LISTEN Black Album by Jay-Z (2004)
- LISTEN Grey Album by DJ Dangermouse (2004)
- READ "Diasporic Noise: History, Hip Hop, and the Post-colonial Politics of Sound" by George Lipsitz in Dangerous Crossroads, George Lipsitz, New York, Verso, 1994, pp. 23-48.
- READ "A Nation of Thieves': Consumption, Commerce, and the Black Public Sphere" by Regina Austin, in The Black Public Sphere edited by the Black Public Sphere Collective, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 229 - 252
- READ "A History of Japanese Hip Hop: Street Dance, Club Scene, Pop Market"" by Ian Condry in Global Noise edited by Tony Mitchell (Middlebury: University Press of New England, 2001) pp. 222-247.

Supplementary

- READ "The Funkification of Rio" by George Yúdice in Microphone Fiends pp 193-217
- "Puerto Rocks: Rap, Roots, and Amnesia" by Juan Flores in From Bomba to Hip-Hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), pp. 115-139.

Unit 10 - Electronica, Technology, Mediated Performance - 2 Sessions November 30, December 2

Group Presentation December 2

What are the implications of mediated artifacts on the musical world of hip hop? What genres of electronic

music does hip hop embrace? How does science fiction figure into the hip hop "real?" What effects do technology inspire in hip hop? A consideration of Afro-futurism.

LISTEN Da Real World Missy Elliot (1999)

READ Black Noise Chapter 3, 62-98

READ More Brilliant Than the Sun "Motion Capture" pp. 175-193

Supplementary

READ Interview with Kodwo Eshun - On Website

Unit 11 - Space and Place - 1 Session December 7

How is hip hop grounded in particular locations? How is hip hop different in different regions of the United States? What are the terms of regionalism that seem to define certain genres of hip hop?

READ "Space Matters: Hip-Hop and the Spatial Perspective" and "Boyz N Girlz in the 'Hood: From Space to Place" in The 'Hood Comes First: Race, Space, and Place in Rap and Hip-Hop by Murray Forman (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2002), pp. 1-34 and 173-212.

Supplementary

READ "The Midwest as Musical Mecca and the Rise of Rhythm and Blues" in One Nation Under A Groove: Motown and American Culture by Gerald Early. Ecco Press, Hopewell, NJ, 1995: pp. 67-105

The "Real" - For Further Study - Wrap Up and Review - 1 Session December 9

Compile Annotated Bibliographic Snapshot - Suggestions for [Academic] Interventions