

MIT Music and Theater Arts
Hip Hop
21M.775
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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

HipHop Matters: Politics, Pop Culture, and the Struggle for the Soul of a Movement by S. Craig Watkins.
Boston: Beacon Press, 2005.
That's the joint! : the Hip-Hop Studies Reader edited by Murray Forman & Mark Anthony Neal. New York: Routledge, 2004

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 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
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. 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 26. The final paper will be due during class time on the last day of classes, Tuesday, December 12. **No extensions will be granted for the final paper.**

Sessions:

Unit 1 - Introduction and Overview - 3 Sessions September 7, 12, 14

VIEW Wild Style September 11

READ Hip Hop Matters Prologue, Introduction, Chapter One, Nine, Epilogue . Pp1 -55; 229-259

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 12

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.

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

READ "The Rap Attacks: An Introduction" by William Eric Perkins in Droppin' Science pp. 1-45

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 should meet often to create a pathway through the material. On the day of the presentation, 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 6, and will account for 20% of the final grade.

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

Group Presentation September 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 3 - Sex and Sexuality - 2 Sessions September 26, 28

Group Presentation September 28

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?

VIEW	<u>Beyond Beats and Rhymes: A Hip Hop Head Weighs In On Mahood in Hip-Hop Culture</u> by Byron Hurt (2005)
LISTEN	<u>Hard Core</u> Lil Kim (1996)
LISTEN	<u>Cookie</u> (2002) Meshell Ndegeocello
READ	"Hip Hop Sexualities" by DeFrantz, in <u>Handbook of the New Sexuality Studies</u> , Steven Seidman, Chet Meeks, Nancy Fischer, editors, New York: Routledge Press, 2006.
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.
Supplementary	
READ	"One Queen, One Tribe, One Destiny" by Tricia Rose 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. 312-317

Unit 4 - Dance - 3 Sessions October 3, 5, 12

Group Presentation October 12

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>The Freshest Kids: A History of the B-Boy</u> (2002) October 2
VIEW	<u>Everybody Dance Now</u> PBS Documentary, 1991 On website.
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>That's The Joint</u> pp. 505-517
READ	"Breaking" by Sally Banes in <u>That's The Joint</u> pp 13-20
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	"Hip Hop 101" by Robert F. Thompson in <u>Droppin' Science</u> , pp. 211-219
VIEW	<u>Rhyme and Reason</u> (David Spiner, dir. 1997)

October 3 - Visiting GUEST ARTIST VISIT Frank 2 Louise in class October 3

October 4 - SPECIAL EVENT! Attend Talk and Performance at Kresge Little Theater time TBA

Unit 5 - Misogyny and Feminism- 2 Sessions October 17, 19

Group Presentation October 19

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)
VIEW	<u>Freestyle: The Art of Rhyme</u> (2000)
LISTEN	<u>The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill</u> Lauryn Hill (1998)
LISTEN	<u>Ready to Die</u> Notorious B.I.G. (1994)
READ	<u>Hip Hop Matters</u> Chapter 8 pp 207-227
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	"Hip Hop Feminist" by Joan Morgan in <u>That's The Joint</u> , pp 277-282

Supplementary

READ	<u>Black Noise</u> Chapter 5 pp. 146-182
READ	"Never Trust a Big Butt and a Smile" by Tricia Rose in <u>That's The Joint</u> pp 291-306
READ	"Women Writin' Rappin' Breakin'" by Nancy Guevara in <u>Droppin' Science</u> , pp. 49-62
READ	<u>Gangsta: Merchandising the Rhymes of Violence</u> by Ronin Ro

Unit 6 - Anarchy and Activism - 2 Sessions October 24, 26

Group Presentation October 26

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?

VIEW	<u>Rhyme and Reason</u> (1997)
LISTEN	<u>Steal This Album</u> by The Coup (1998)
LISTEN	Dead Prez <u>Let's Get Free</u> (2000)
READ	<u>Hip Hop Matters</u> Chapters 5, 6, 7 pp 143-205
READ	"The Challenge of Rap Music from Cultural Movement to Political Power" by Bakari Kitwana in <u>That's the Joint!</u> Pp 341-362
READ	"An Exploration of Spectacular Consumption: Gangsta Rap as Cultural Commodity" by Eric K. Watts in <u>That's The Joint!</u> Pp 593 - 609

Supplementary

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	Making the Strong Survive: The Contours and Contradictions of "Message Rap" by Ernest Allen, Jr, in <u>Droppin Science</u> pp. 159-191
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 Generations of Youth: Youth Cultures and History in Twentieth Century America edited by Joe Austin and Michael Nevin Willard, (New York, NYU Press, 1998) pp. 395-411

READ Hip Hop America "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

October 26 - 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 7 - Globalization - 2 Sessions October 31 and November 2

Spectral Event! Guest Lecture by MIT Associate Professor of FL&L Ian Condry, October 31

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

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?

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.

READ "Hip-Hop am Main, Rappin' on the Tyne: Hip-Hop Culture as a Local Construct in Two European Cities" by Andy Bennett in That's the Joint! pp 177 - 200

VIEW Resistencia [videorecording] : hip-hop in Colombia / directed and produced by Tom Feiling ; assistant producer, Daniel Wilson, 2002 In Class November 2

Unit 8 - DJ'ing, Musicality, Live Performance - 2 Sessions November 7, 9

Group Presentation November 9

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?

VIEW	Scratch (2002) November 6
LISTEN	The Roots Come Alive by The Roots (1999) College Dropout by Kanye West (2004)
READ	More Brilliant than the Sun "Transmaterializing the Breakbeat" pp. 013-025; "Virtualizing the Breakbeat" pp. 67-77
EXPLORE	battlesounds.com on the web

Unit 9 - Whiteness and Hip Hop -2 Sessions - November 14, 16

Group Presentation November 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?

VIEW	Jails, Hospitals, Hip Hop Danny Hoch (2002) November 13
VIEW	8 Mile (2002) on your own
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 Hip Hop Matters Chapter 3 pp 83-110
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 10 - Consumerism, Commodity Fetishism - 1 Session November 21

How important is consumption to hip hop culture? How does Hip Hop encourage the marketplace and circulation of commodities?

VIEW	Hustle and Flow (2005)
LISTEN	Black Album by Jay-Z (2004)
LISTEN	Grey Album by DJ Dangermouse (2004)

READ Hip Hop Matters Chapters 2 and 4 pp 55-84; 111-140
 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

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 11 - Electronica, Technology, Mediated Performance - 2 Sessions November 28, 30

Group Presentation November 30

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 "This is a Sampling Sport: Digital Sampling, Rap Music, and the Law in Cultural Production" by Thomas G. Schumacher in That's The Joint! pp 443-458

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

Supplementary

READ Interview with Kodwo Eshun - On Website

Unit 12 - Space and Place - 2 Sessions December 5, 7

Group Presentation 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?

VIEW Dirty States of America: Untold story of Southern Hip-Hop. (2004)

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

READ "Black Empires, White Desires: The Spatial Politics of Identity in the Age of Hip-Hop" by Davarian L. Baldwin in That's The Joint! pp 159 - 176

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

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 12

Compile Annotated Bibliographic Snapshot - Suggestions for [Academic] Interventions