

The Blueprint:
Hip Hop, Youth Politics and Culture

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Department of African American Studies
University of Connecticut

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Course Description: This course is designed to provide students with a familiarity with the political, social, cultural, aesthetic, and economic concerns surrounding hip hop. Of particular interest are the ways in which hip hop reflects ongoing historical questions about gender, race, class, violence, capitalism, sexuality and racism within black communities.

Course Goals: Upon completion of the course, students will have demonstrated the ability to: 1) analyze and articulate critical perspectives on the subject 2) refer with familiarity to the body of criticism and scholarly work on the subject 3) demonstrate research and writing skills as cultivated through the class assignments 4) articulate an informed perspective on the significance of popular culture and media in a contemporary democratic society 5) identify the major themes, developments and influences in the evolution of hip hop culture.

Grading Criteria:

Response Essays	20% each (40% total)
Class Presentation	15%
Final Paper	30%
Participation	15%

This course is both reading and writing-intensive: students are required to complete two response essays, each of which is to be five pages in length. Response essays will be due the class session after the work is discussed. Each essay will constitute 20% of the final grade.

Class participation -- attendance, punctuality and leading class discussion -- will constitute 15% of the final grade. The student will also give a brief presentation on their research (15%) and the remaining 30% of the final grade will be determined by the student's performance on the final -- a 20-page paper in which the student explores,

analyzes and expands upon one of the discussion topics. You should utilize primary sources -- both written and audio -- for your research.

Since the course is structured in a lecture/discussion format, the student is expected to arrive in class punctually and prepared to discuss the current reading assignment. Attendance is mandatory; since this class meets weekly, no more than two unexcused absences are permitted without a grade penalty.

Grade Scale:

A	94+	C+	77+	F	59-
A-	90+	C	74+		
B+	87+	C-	70+		
B	84+	D+	67+		
B-	80+	D	60+		

Late Assignments and Attendance: The instructor will accept late assignments but will assess a penalty of one-half grade per day. For example, an “A” paper will be demoted to an “A-“ if one day late, to a “B+” if two days late, and so on. The course meets weekly so no more than one absence is permissible.

All Cell Phones Must Be Turned Off Prior To Entering Class.

Readings: Each student is expected to read the weekly assignment and prepare notes/questions to facilitate discussion – each week. Given the nature of this course and the subject matter discussed in the genre, some of the listening material contains profanity, violent, sexualized and misogynistic references. These were included as they reflect the preoccupations of a certain portion of the music and are expected to be analyzed and critiqued by the student.

Plagiarism & Academic Honesty: Students are expected to adhere to the college’s academic code of conduct. The use of ideas, direct quotations and/or extended paraphrases in academic work without proper acknowledgment of their author or source constitutes plagiarism. This course operates on a zero-tolerance basis regarding plagiarism; assignments in which plagiarized materials are found will be given an immediate failing grade and the student will be referred to the Dean’s office for disciplinary action. Moreover, all papers turned in must be the intellectual work of the student to whom it was assigned and must be written solely for this course.

Academic honesty is a prerequisite for a productive learning environment. Dishonesty includes but is not limited to cheating on quizzes, tests, midterms and final exams, the

submission of falsified documents regarding class absence, a request for an extension on an assignment or an incomplete grade.

Course Requirements: The following books are required:

William Jelani Cobb *To the Break of Dawn: A Freestyle on the Hip Hop Aesthetic*, New York: NYU Press, 2007

Mark Anthony Neal, Murray Forman, eds. *That's the Joint: The Hip Hop Studies Reader*, New York: Routledge Press, 2005.

Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop, Won't Stop: A History of the Hip Hop Generation*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 2006.

Joan Morgan, *When Chickenheads Come Home To Roost*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1: January 27:

Introduction: **Black Music: Origins of the Dialogue**

Discussion: The Relationship Between Black History and Black Music

Questions: What is hip hop? When did it begin? Why is it worthy of study?

Assignment: Response Essay # 1: Write your musical autobiography. In a clear narrative essay describe the role music has played in your life thus far. Be specific in terms of influence and the ways in which particular forms of music or artists have related to your life in terms of experience, education or memory.

Week 2: February 3/4:

Diaspora Music: The Social Roots of Hip Hop from Slavery Through Black Power

Readings: Introduction, chapter 1, *To the Break of Dawn* (TTBOD) Introduction, *Can't Stop, Won't Stop* (CSWS)

Questions: What is the relationship between the forced migrations of the African diaspora and the musical traditions of African American history?

Listen: (Select 4) "Bicentennial Nigger," by Richard Pryor, The Last Poets, "Wake Up Nigger," Mutabaruka "Melanin Man," "Garvey," Gil Scott Heron, "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised," Grand Master Flash and the Furious Five, "The Message," "White Lines"

Film: *The Freshest Kids*

Week 3: February 10/11:

Old School: The South Bronx Crossroads: Migration, Geography and Art

Readings: *TTBOD*, Chapter 1, *Can't Stop, Won't Stop*, Chapters 1-4

Questions: What is significant about the South Bronx in the 1970s ethnically? Geographically? Economically? How do these dynamics culminate in the creation of hip hop?

Film: *Style Wars*

Week 4: February 17/18:

Graffiti, Breaking and DJ-ing: Hip Hop Aesthetics and Technology

Readings: *That's the Joint*, pgs 9-42

Film: *Scratch*

Questions: As hip hop culture evolved, how did its relationship to musical and creative technology change? What were the social and legal implications of these changes?

Week 5: February 24/25:

What's Beef?: The Freestyle, The Battle and Conflict in Hip Hop Culture

Readings: TTBOB, Chapter 2, *Can't Stop, Won't Stop*, Chapters 16-18, Excerpt: Gunfighter Nation

Listen: Common "I See The Bitch in You," KRS-One "The Bridge Is Over" Mos Def "Beef," Jay-Z "The Takeover," Nas "Ether," LL Cool J "Return of Jack the Ripper," MC Lyte "10% Dis."

View: *Beef* (Documentary)

Questions: How is hip hop's ideal of masculinity related to the earlier ideals of American manhood discussed by Slotkin? In what ways is it different? How is hip hop related to this concept of "regeneration through violence?"

Week 6: March 3/4:

The Art of MC: Hip Hop as Literature

That's The Joint: The Hip Hop Studies Reader, Introduction, pgs 421-436, 459-480.

Listen: (Select 4) Common, "I Used To Love H.E.R.," Wu Tang Clan "C.R.E.A.M.," Masta Ace "Unfriendly Game," Nas, "I Gave You Power" Slick Rick, "Children's Story," RZA "Animal Planet," Jeru The Damaja, "Can't Stop The Prophet."

Film: *The MC*

Week 7: March 10/11: Hip Hop as Political Statement

Readings: *That's The Joint*, pgs 307-362; *Can't Stop, Won't Stop*, Chapters 11, 13.

Fear of a Black President, Ta-Nehisi Coates, Atlantic Magazine:

<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/09/fear-of-a-black-president/309064/>

Assignment: Response Essay #2: Music Review. Select one release and write a review. This is to say, engage the music *and the ideas represented by it*. Why is/was it significant? What is artistically distinctive about it? How does it reflect the evolution of hip hop culture specifically and the social/political context in which it was released?

Listen: Public Enemy, “Black Steel in the Hour of Chaos,” “Night of the Living Baseheads,” Mos Def, “New World Water,” Immortal Technique, “Peruvian Cocaine,” Ice Cube, “Tear This MF Up.”

Film: *Bling: A Planet Rock*

Week 8 *Spring Break

Week 9: March 24/25:

Global Cipher: Hip Hop as International Culture

Readings: *That’s The Joint*, 159-232.

Listen: *Loango Rap* (Peru) selections from Godessa (South Africa) Jay-Z, “Where I’m From,” NWA “Straight Outta Compton,” Outkast, “West Savannah,” Common, “The Corner,” Schoolly D, “PSK” 2Pac, “California Love.”

Film: *Slingshot Hip Hop, I Love Hip Hop in Morocco*

Questions: Is hip hop an agent of American cultural imperialism? In what ways is hip hop associated with the changes in global capitalism following the end of the Cold War? Is the claim that this culture exists as a form of American cultural imperialism in blackface valid?

Week 10: March 31/April 1:

Research Session for Final Paper

Week 11: April 7/8:

Hip Hop and Gender I:

Readings: Excerpt: *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism* pgs 66-90; 74-77, 111-113, *That’s The Joint*, 265-306.

Listen: Jean Grae “Lovesong” Lauryn Hill, “Lost Ones,” De La Soul, “Millie Pulled A Pistol on Santa,” Trina, “No Panties,” Outkast, “Toilet Tisha.”

Questions: Do Davis's arguments regarding gender, sexuality and marginalization of black women during the blues era apply to hip hop? In what ways is this related to broader American ideas about gender roles and hierarchies?

Week 12: April 14/15
Hip Hop & Gender II
Thugs, Pimps, G's and Playas: Origins of Hip Hop Masculinity

Readings: Robert Warshow, "The Gangster as Tragic Hero" (handout), Robin Kelley Miles Davis: The Chameleon of Cool; A Jazz Genius In the Guise Of a Hustler Excerpt from *The Life*,

Listen: Eazy E, "Boyz-N-The-Hood," "Pimp in my own rhyme," 50 Cent, "P.I.M.P." Too Short, "Freaky Tales"

Questions: What do Warshow's ideas about the gangster in American culture of the 1940s illuminate regarding hip hop?

Film: *Hip Hop Beyond Beats and Rhymes, Unforgiveable Blackness*

Week 13: April 21/22
***Research Paper Due**

Blackface, Whiteface: Race and Authenticity in Hip Hop

Readings: TTBOD, Chapter 3; *That's The Joint*, pgs 61-86; 105-154.

Engage and critically analyze the arguments presented by any one or several of the authors of this week's readings. How might the issue of "realness" related to earlier discussions of "baaad men" and "tricksters."

Week 14: Thug Immortal? Tupac Shakur, Notorious B.I.G. and the MC as Icon

Readings: Excerpt, Dyson *Holler if You Hear Me*, 156-159, *TTBOD*, Chapter 4

Listen: Tupac Shakur, "Ambitionz az a Ridah," "No More Pain," Only God Can Judge Me." Notorious B.I.G. "Niggas Bleed," "Ten Crack Commandments" "Suicidal Thoughts," "Warning."

View: *Tupac: Resurrection*

Guidelines for Final Paper

This course requires that students complete a final research paper. This assignment is designed to help the student develop skills in research, writing and critical analysis. The student should be mindful of the following guidelines in writing the paper.

Structure

The paper should be based upon a topic germane to the subject matter of the course and submitted to instructor for approval. The student will be evaluated on the quality of research, the strength of her arguments and conclusions and the clarity of the writing. The student is to use standard margin size and a font no larger than Times New Roman 12. The paper should also fill 15-20 standard-sized sheets of paper (For example, 9 pages with a single paragraph on the 10th page does not count as a 10 page paper.)

The paper should include a cover page with the students name and the title, an introduction with a clearly defined thesis, a body and a strong conclusion.

Documentation

Students are to use footnoted citations to indicate their sources.

For precise details on the proper usage of footnotes, see the *Turabian Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. You may also utilize web resources on proper footnoting <http://www.collegeboard.com/article/0,3868,2-10-0-10314,00.html> or (<http://www.library.georgetown.edu/guides/turabianfoot/#foot>) for instance.

Quotes that are more than a single line in length should be offset as indented block quotations.

The paper should also include a list of the sources consulted and the works cited at the end of the paper. Separate newspaper articles, scholarly articles and books into their respective categories. Any primary source materials (beyond newspapers) should also be separately grouped. **The paper should utilize at least four primary and secondary sources each.**

Research

Students are expected to conduct library research into the subject of the paper. **Wikipedia does not count as library research.** Given the unreliable nature of much of the information found on the internet, website sources are to be used under highly specific circumstances. The student should verify the acceptability of a web-based resource with the professor prior to using one.