

PAS 368: THE POLITICS OF HIP-HOP CULTURE

Fall 2009
Department of Pan-African Studies
California State University Northridge
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Hours: T/TH 2-3pm
Class meets: T/TH 11am-12:15pm
Location: Sierra Hall 282

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course traces the cultural and political history of Hip-Hop and the impact it has had on Black and Latina/o youth culture, North American society, and global culture industries in general. We will begin by examining the African, Afro-North American and Afro-diasporic cultural traditions, as well as the political and socio-economic environments, which were integral to Hip-Hop's formation and evolution. Through readings, films, music, discussions, research, performance, writing, and "new media" we will investigate the many elements of the culture: from B-boys/B-girls ("breaking"), turntablism ("deejaying"), emcees ("rapping"), writing ("graffiti art"), and the human beatbox, to the fashion, language, and knowledge that its participants generate. From this in-depth examination, we will discover the richness and diversity of Hip-Hop, thereby challenging the narrow manner in which it is portrayed on commercial radio and television. By employing various theories and methods of Black cultural studies in analyzing Hip-Hop, we will explore issues such as representation(s)—race, class, gender and sexuality—difference, hegemony, ideology, reception, encoding/decoding, and media justice. Throughout the course we will also interrogate the literary aspects of Hip-Hop culture, by conducting close textual analyses of lyrics that invoke literary techniques (simile, metaphor, alliteration, allusion, intertextuality, etc.), all the while recognizing the social and historical contexts in which these lyrics were produced.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- To expose students to academic and scholarly literature on Hip Hop, and to approach scholarly works from an historical, cultural and political perspective.
- To investigate the roots of Hip Hop culture and the socio-political conditions that spawned its development.
- To examine the lyrical content of rap music and its relationship to African American political thought and activism.
- To examine the connection between the Hip-Hop generation and the various political, corporate and institutional actors that influence society both locally and globally.
- To help students think critically about the impact of Hip-Hop on African American identity and politics in the national and international arena.
- To guide students in writing and researching in contemporary African-American studies.

PLEASE NOTE: THIS SYLLABUS IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE AT PROFESSOR'S DISCRETION

COURSE DOs & DON'Ts

DO get in the habit of checking your email and the course WebCT page at least once a day. You will receive most of your assignments and class communications via these two sites. This means that you must always keep your email account clear of unnecessary emails. Please get comfortable with these modes of distribution/communication. Also, **DO** arrive to class at the assigned time. Punctuality is imperative for success in my course. **DON'T** use your cell phone or text messaging device during class. If I find you texting while in class, I will ask you to leave and I will mark you as absent for the day. I'm positive that you can last at least 75 minutes without texting your friends or family. Also, please **DON'T** even think about **PLAGIARIZING** (stealing) material for your assignments in this class. (See below for more information on plagiarism.)

REQUIRED TEXTS

All texts are available at the Matador Bookstore:

Chang, Jeff. *Can't Stop, Won't Stop: The History of the Hip-Hop Generation*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2005.

Asante, Jr., M.K. *It's Bigger than Hip-Hop: The Rise of the Post-Hip-Hop Generation*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2008.

Pough, Gwendolyn D. *Home Girls Make Some Noise! Hip-Hop Feminism Anthology*. New York: Parker Publishing, 2007.

Other course readings will be available on WebCT

DOCUMENTARIES AND FILMS

Charlie Ahearn, *Wild Style* (1982) – 82mins

Kevin Fitzgerald, *Freestyle* (2004) – 75mins

Ava DuVernay, *This is the Life* (2008) – 97mins

FYH Coalition, *Free Ya Hood* (2007)

Byron Hurt, *Beyond Beats and Rhymes* (2006) – 60mins

Israel, *Freshest Kids* (2002) – 94mins

Nirit Peled, *Say My Name* (2009) – 73mins

Doug Pray, *Scratch* (2002) – 92mins

Peter Spirer, *Beef IV* (2007) – 108mins

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

Attendance and Class Participation

50

Discussion Leaders

50

Two Music Reviews

30

Two Critical Responses

20

Mid-term

50

Group Survey and Presentation

50

Final Paper of 12-15 pages

100

Total Points

350

POINT DISTRIBUTION

350-315 = A

314-280 = B

279-245 = C

244-210 = D

209-0 = F

THE HIP-HOP THINK TANK: It is my hope that everyone enrolled in this course will participate in the activities of CSUN's Hip-Hop Think Tank this semester and beyond. It is imperative that we move from passive consumers of Hip-Hop to active participants in

its present and future progress. According to the HHTT website: “The Hip Hop Think Tank (HHTT) of California State University, Northridge (CSUN), exists to facilitate, provoke, and realize positive movement through academic analysis, research and critical discourse relative to issues which impact and/or emanate from the world of hip hop. HHTT represents the merge of Hip Hop culture with academia, completing the core components of Hip Hop Culture by expediting Hip Hop’s political, social, and economic evolution through community activism, organizing, and mobilizing the hip-hop generation. While maintaining local, national, and global communication between Hip Hop organizers, activism, artist, and students via the Hip Hop Think Tank annual Scholarly Journal and its corresponding website, podcast, blogs, publication, and other media outlets.”

ATTENDANCE/CLASS PARTICIPATION: Active participation is essential to the success of this course, thus regular attendance and thorough work are required (if you are absent you cannot participate in class discussions and group activities). Your class participation and final grades will depend upon your contribution to class discussion of all scheduled assignments. Your grade will be negatively affected if you miss more than **two classes** in the semester; for each absence thereafter your final grade will be lowered by ½ a letter grade. *If you have to miss class, please contact me in advance.*

PAPER FORMAT: All papers must be typed and double-spaced (no larger than 12pt. Font) with one-inch margins, according to MLA, Chicago, or APA format. You are responsible for correct grammar, spelling, and typography. Pages must be numbered, and your name should appear on each page. You will submit all papers via “turnitin.com” on the assigned date. I will then edit your papers and return them to you so they can be added to the course weblog. (I will only accept late papers at my discretion and they will automatically be reduced by at least one letter grade.)

DISCUSSION LEADERS: Each week, students will lead class discussions. Discussant groups of two to three people should meet in person or via email well before class time, and be prepared to offer a critique and interpretation of the week’s reading, music and films (not just a simple summary). The group should also formulate at least four critical discussion questions on which the class can focus.

MUSIC REVIEWS: You will be asked to write two music reviews throughout the semester of 2-to-3 pages in length. The reviews should consider both the lyrical and musical aspects of a song; for example, if you review a Lil Wayne song, I want you to not only conduct a textual analysis of his lyrics, including any literary devices and social/historical commentary employed, but also the production aspects of the music, such as the usage of sampling, scratching, and other musical techniques.

CRITICAL RESPONSES: You will also be asked to write two critical response papers throughout the semester that should be no more than 3 pages long. I am looking for an in-depth analysis of the themes and topics that we will be reading/discussing in class this semester. Remember that this course is interdisciplinary in its scope and there are numerous perspectives, frameworks, and methods in which to write your papers.

However, it is best to have a narrow focus in these responses rather than a broad one, because one of the primary reasons for doing these assignments is to practice writing clear and concise papers that incorporate/analyze the various methods of Hip-Hop/Pan-African Studies.

MID-TERM: The mid-term will be taken in-class and cover information from the readings, lectures, and class discussions. You will take the mid-term on Tuesday, October 27, and it will roughly cover information from the first half of the course. The format will include multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions. You will need to purchase a blue book for the mid-term.

GROUP SURVEY AND PRESENTATION: In order to ascertain the general thoughts, feelings, and perceptions held by your peers about Hip-Hop, we will develop group surveys to gauge their knowledge. Your group will then compile the data on some form of “new media”: either a weblog, myspace or facebook page, website or other form of visual communication. In addition, each group will write a 5-page report of their surveys, and deliver their findings in a 15-minute presentation to the class. The presentations will begin the week of December 1, 2009. Please prepare your presentations by knowing exactly what each person in your group will say within the time allowed (presentations of more than 15 minutes will lose points). Each presentation will be followed by a question-and-answer period, giving your group a chance to provide additional details as your audience requests. You will be evaluated not only by your group’s completed new media site, written report and oral presentation, but also by your individual participation throughout the project.

FINAL PAPER/PROJECT: For the final paper/project you will have the option of either writing a 12- to 15-page research paper or developing an original creative project. The paper can be written in the form of a literary, film/documentary, or music analysis, or an artistic, biographic, ethnographic, psychological, or sociological paper that addresses some of the issues discussed in this course. It must have **at least five** secondary sources and ample primary resource material (we will discuss this in class). Since this is a 300-level course, I expect everyone to conduct serious research that goes beyond simply utilizing Internet search engines or websites such as Google or Wikipedia. If you decide to do a creative final project (artwork, documentary/video, lyrics, a musical production, etc.) you will need to write a thorough synopsis of four-to-five pages that describes the methods and scope of your project as well as its relation to Hip-Hop culture. I am also open to other ideas for you to complete this assignment; however, your final paper/project topic must be approved by November 3rd. The final paper/project is due December 15, 2009 by 12:15pm in my office.

POLICY ON ACADEMIC DISHONESTY: All WRITING, IDEAS, and INFORMATION from journal articles, the Internet, textbooks, etc. must be acknowledged. If you use words directly from these sources, the author(s) must be quoted and referenced. It is also considered plagiarism to recycle papers from other classes. I expect all assignments completed for PAS 368 to be original and innovative work. According to the CSUN Policy on Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty: “The maintenance of academic integrity

and quality education is the responsibility of each student within this university and the California State University system. Cheating or plagiarism in connection with an academic program at a campus is listed in Section 41301, Title 5, California Code of Regulations, as an offense for which a student may be expelled, suspended, or given a less severe disciplinary sanction. Academic dishonesty is an especially serious offense and diminishes the quality of scholarship and defrauds those who depend upon the integrity of the campus programs. Such dishonesty includes:

- A. CHEATING (see catalog for details)
- B. FABRICATION (see catalog for details)
- C. FACILITATING ACADEMIC DISHONESTY (see catalog for details)
- D. PLAGIARISM: Intentionally or knowingly representing the words, ideas, or work of another as one's own in any academic exercise" (pp. 553-554)

NOTES ON BUDGET CUTS, TUITION INCREASES, and WORK FURLOUGHS: For the past 10 years the CSU system has suffered chronic under-funding. This year, because of the state economic crisis, the budget cuts are draconian, \$584 million, the worst ever in decades. The CSU administration is attempting to manage these cuts by dramatically increasing student fees and by furloughing almost all University employees, including faculty, staff, and administrators. A furlough means mandatory un-paid days off for employees; there are 18 of these this year for the faculty, nine per semester.

For students this means that on some days the campus will be closed. The library will have shorter hours and many campus support services will be decreased or eliminated. It will, for example, be more difficult to get signatures to meet deadlines. Additionally, many classes you need have been cut from the class schedule or are full. These cuts have consequences, especially for you.

As a professor, the days when I'm forced to cancel class because of the furloughs are marked on your syllabus below. These days off are not holidays; they are a very concrete example of how budget cuts have consequences for education.

So let's talk today about what is happening, after you leave class you can stop by the tent on the quad this week during lunch hour to tell your stories of how these cuts effect students and when you ask yourself what can you do - get involved (Students for a Quality education is one way – they will be at the tent).

READING AND ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE

WEEK 1: Course and Syllabus Overview - Introduction to Hip-Hop Cultural Studies

Tuesday, August 25

Syllabus Overview, Student Introductions, and Black Cultural Studies Model

Assignment: Purchase Books and Print Syllabus

Thursday, August 27

Discuss Hip-Hop as Personal Narrative

Listen: Common, Roots, and Erykah Badu

Assignment: *CRITICAL RESPONSE #1*

Read: Gilliam, "Hip Hop and Politics"

WEEK 2: Cultural, Political, and Socioeconomic Roots of the Hip-Hop Generation

Tuesday, September 1

(CR #1 Due)

Discuss Gilliam article

Listen: KRS-One "Ruminations" about Hip-Hop

Read: Chang, pp. 7-65

Thursday, September 3

Discuss Chang chapters 1-3

Listen: West African music, African American culture, Jamaican Sound Systems, James Brown, Last Poets, Watts Prophets, and Gil Scott Heron

Read: Chang, pp. 67-139 and Tucker, "Graffiti: Art and Crime"

WEEK 3: The Bronx as a Cultural Nexus

Tuesday, September 8

On-Line Class (No Formal Meeting)

View: [*Wild Style*](#) on Google videos

Thursday, September 10

Discuss Tucker article, Chang chapters 4-7 and Film

Read: Chang, pp. 141-165 and Fabel, "Physical Graffiti"

WEEK 4: The Reign of the B-Boy/B-Girl

Tuesday, September 15

View: *Freshest Kids*

Read: Chang, pp. 167-211

Assignment: Music Review #1

Thursday, September 17

View: *Freshest Kids* cont.

Discuss Chang chapters 8-10, Fabel's article and Israel

Read: Markski, "History of Turntablism"

WEEK 5: Musicality: Turntablism, Sampling, & the Mixtape

Tuesday, September 22

(MUSIC REVIEW #1 DUE)

Discuss Markski article

Read: Ball, "FreeMix Radio: The Original Mixtape Radio Show"

Thursday, September 24

View: Segments of *Scratch*

Discuss Ball article and Pray Film

Read: Salaam, "The Aesthetics of Rap" and Dimitriadis, "Pedagogy and Performance in Black Popular Culture"

WEEK 6: The Rise of the MC

Tuesday, September 29

Discuss Salaam and Dimitriadis articles
Listen: Big Daddy Kane, Rakim, Mos Def, Jay Z, Kayne West and Lauryn Hill
Read: **Roberts**, "Music Videos, Performance and Resistance: Feminist Rappers"
Assignment: *CRITICAL RESPONSE #2*

Thursday, October 1

View: Segments of *Freestyle*
Discuss Roberts article and Fitzgerald Film
Read: Chang, pp. 215-229 and Alridge, "From Civil Rights to Hip-Hop"

WEEK 7: The Message is in the Music

Tuesday, October 6

(CR #2 Due)

Discuss Chang chapters 11-12 and Alridge article
Listen: Melle Mel, KRS-One, A Tribe Called Quest, X-Clan, Brand Nubian, and Public Enemy
Read: Chang, pp. 231-297

Thursday, October 8

Listen: Common, dead prez, The Coup, and Immortal Technique
View: Segments of *Free Ya Hood*
Read: Chang, pp. 407-435 and Asante, pp. 1-52

WEEK 8: Commodification, Consumerism, and Counter-Hegemony

Tuesday, October 13

Discuss "Who Run's Hip-Hop?"
Listen: KRS-One "Love's Gonna Get'cha," Wordsworth "Evol" and Mos Def "Rape Over"
Read: Chang, pp. 437-465 and Asante, pp. 53-122
Assignment: Music Review #2

Thursday, October 15

Beyond the Five Elements: Hip-Hop Fashion, Language, and Knowledge Production
Discuss Hip-Hop and Hegemony: Digital Music, New Media and the Challenge to the Corporate Record Industry
Read: Chang, pp. 299-353

WEEK 9: Hip-Hop's Cultural Battles: Regionalism, Representation, and Race

Tuesday, October 20

(MUSIC REVIEW #2 DUE)

Discuss Chang chapters 14-15
L.A. Hip-Hop Beyond Gangsta Rap
View: *This is the Life*
Read: Chang, pp. 357-405

Thursday, October 22

(Receive Mid-Term Study Guide)

Discuss the "East Coast-West Coast" Drama
Listen: NWA, Ice T, Snoop Dogg, Tupac, Biggie, and the Wu-Tang Clan
Read: Asante, pp. 123-198

WEEK 10: Mid-Term/Hip-Hop's Cultural Battles: Regionalism, Representation, and Race II

Tuesday, October 27

Mid-Term (IN CLASS)
Read: Asante, pp. 199-259

Thursday, October 29

View: Segments of *Beef IV*

Discuss “Just to get a rep?”

Listen: Nas vs. Jay Z, 50 Cent vs. Ja-Rule

Read: Miller, “Rap’s Dirty South” and Pough, pp. 170-184

WEEK 11: Hip-Hop’s Cultural Battles: Regionalism, Representation, and Race III

Tuesday, November 3

(Final Paper/Project Abstracts)

Discuss the Rise of the “Dirty Dirty”

Listen: Geto Boys, OutKast, Ludacris, Lil Wayne, TI, Soulja Boy, and Little Brother

Read: Pough, pp. v-91

Thursday, November 5

View: *Beyond Beats and Rhymes*

Read: Pough, pp. 111-165

WEEK 12: Engendering Hip-Hop Culture I

Tuesday, November 10

(Begin Hip-Hop Group Surveys)

Meet with your group members in the Library (No Formal Meeting)

Read: Pough, pp. 234-247

Thursday, November 12

Discuss Pough readings and Hurt Film

View: *Say My Name*

Read: Pough, pp. 304-382

WEEK 13: Engendering Hip-Hop Culture II

Tuesday, November 17

Discuss Pough readings and Peled Film

Listen: Queen Latifah, Lauryn Hill, Jean Grae, Rah Digga, and Bahamadia

Read: Pough, pp. 389-479

Thursday, November 19

Discuss Hip-Hop Feminism as Political Praxis

Read: For Final Papers/Projects

WEEK 14: Finalize Group Surveys

Tuesday, November 24

Work on Group Surveys

Read: For Final Papers/Projects

Thursday, November 26

THANKSGIVING BREAK (No Class)

WEEK 15: Survey Presentations

Tuesday, December 1

Hip-Hop Survey Presentations: Groups 1, 2 & 3

Read: For Final Papers/Projects

Thursday, December 3

Hip-Hop Survey Presentations: Groups 4, 5 & 6

WEEK 16: Finish Survey Presentations and Semester CW/Rap Up!!!

Tuesday, December 8

Hip-Hop Survey Presentations: Groups 7, 8 & 9

WEEK 17: Finals Week

Tuesday, December 15

FINAL PAPERS/PROJECTS DUE