THE POLITICS OF HIP HOP  
PAS 496S – Fall 2004  
M/W/F 10:00-10:50

Professor: Dr. Karin Stanford
Office Hours: M/W 11:00 – 12:30 and by appointment  
Classroom: SH 282  
Office: FOB 207  
Telephone: 818 677-2252  
Email: karin.stanford@csun.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This upper division course is a critical examination of the political and cultural dynamics of Hip-Hop. Using standards of evaluation set forth by scholars of cultural studies, African American politics and Hip-Hop activists, students will explore the inter-relationship between African-American youth and society through the medium of Hip-Hop. In particular, we will examine the connection between the Hip-Hop community and the various political, corporate and institutional actors that influence society both locally and globally. We will also explore the real and perceived political, social and marketing power of Hip-Hop and its political consequences. Those consequences will be considered in the realm of public policy.

Students will research and analyze contemporary texts, commentary, music and other relevant cultural idioms related to this worldwide phenomenon. We will begin by tracing the foundation, development and manifestations of Hip-Hop over its 35-year history. Then, students will grapple with questions related to the role and responsibility of African-American youth in our world. We will also interrogate Hip Hop’s representation as an oppositional culture. By extension, we will analyze whether or not Hip-Hop practitioners have succumbed to national and international corporate interests. Additional concerns include whether or not Hip Hop contributes to the prevailing notion of Black life as pathological, or does it simply provide a line of demarcation between traditional and contemporary cultural expectations. What are the representations of Black women in Hip-Hop; is Hip-Hop an empowering expression of Black youth discontent, or is it just a creation of Wall Street and Madison Avenues executives. How has Hip-Hop influenced new forms of youth identity throughout the world? These and other questions will serve to provide a rigorous intellectual environment.

TEXTBOOKS


COURSE EXPECTATIONS AND REQUIREMENTS

FORMAT AND ATTENDANCE
This class will be taught in discussion format with a minimum of lecturing. Groups of 4-5 students will work together to complete group projects that will be assigned periodically throughout the semester. Groups will be called upon to discuss important issues, answer questions or lead discussions related to Hip Hop. Although students work within groups, grading is done on individual performance. Students should also expect several in-class written, media and other interactive assignments. Therefore attendance is required.

READING REACTION PAPERS
Students are required to provide a typed-written response to 3 film, recording or hip hop related assignments. The reaction should incorporate information from the week’s readings as well as the cultural production. The paper should be no more than 1-2 double-space pages and is due at the beginning of the class session. LATE READING REACTION PAPERS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED.

EXAMS
Examinations will test your knowledge and comprehension of information from your class lectures and reading assignments. There will be two examinations for this class—a mid-term and a final. Exams comprise of short answer and essay questions. The mid-term will be given in-class on October 7. The date of the final exam will be announced. Make up exams will not be given without a valid, written excuse from a physician. Do not send an email regarding absences. Believe me, I will not respond. Make-ups must be completed within one week of missing an exam or quiz. Make-up exams will be in essay format.

GROUP PRESENTATIONS
The group project is an oral presentation developed in collaboration with all members of your group. The group will assemble a 30-40 minute presentation on the topic assigned for that week’s session. The presentation should reflect an understanding of the key concepts proposed by the readings. It should build on those concepts in consent or dissent, with additional musical or visual materials. Your creativity is welcomed! The most successful presentations will include critical analysis and supporting materials. Using PowerPoint, creating websites or posters are examples of acceptable visuals. Your presentation should also contain questions that the class will answer and incorporate into further discussion of the topic. An Outline is Required One Week Before Your Presentation.
RESEARCH PAPER
One research paper is required for this class. The paper can be related to any of the topics discussed in class or your group presentation. The length of your research paper should range from 7-10 pages. Students are required to turn in a research paper topic by November 1. Please refer to your research paper guide for additional information on the format and content of the assignment. The paper must be an original piece of work written by the student for this class. Plagiarism is taken very seriously. For the university policies on plagiarism go to Student Affairs/Academic Integrity on the CSUN website.

OPTIONAL ORAL PRESENTATIONS
Oral Presentations of Research Topics are optional. Student presenters will receive extra-credit of 3 additional points. I must receive notice of your intent to present by November 1.

POLICIES
• **TARDINESS:** Class will begin promptly at 10:00 a.m. Tardiness is disruptive and will be frowned upon. After a student has been late two (2) times, they will no longer receive credit for attendance after 10:10 a.m.
• **CELLULAR PHONES AND PAGERS:** Under no circumstances should students receive calls or pages during class.
• **EATING IN CLASS:** Without exception, students are not allowed to eat in class. This includes snacks of any kind, donuts, sandwiches, French fries, etc.

DATES/REQUIREMENTS TO COMMIT TO MEMORY
Midterm Examination—Oct. 1
Research Paper Topic—Nov. 1
Research Paper —Nov. 19
Final Examination—To Be Announced

FINAL GRADE CALCULATION
Reading Reaction Papers 15%
Midterm Examination—20%
Group Presentation—15%
Research paper—20%
Final examination—20%
Class Participation—10%
Optional Oral Presentation—3%
**GRADING METHOD**

Grades will NOT be curved, but based on a straight scale:

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**TOPIC AND READING OUTLINE**

**Week 1: August 23-27: Introduction**
Roster Verification; Classroom Protocols; Syllabus Review
Diagnostic Tool
Definitions
Boundaries for Discussion

**Reading Assignment:**
Bakari Kitwana: The Politics of the Hip Hop Generation, Chapter 1

**Week 2: August 30-Sept 3: The Roots and Evolution of Hip Hop: Social-Political and Cultural Contexts**
Social, Political and Cultural Connections to Africa
African American Cultural Forerunners: Signifying and Toasting, Playing the Dozens
Capoeira Angola-Hip Hop Dance
Black Arts and Black Power Movements
The Geography of Hip Hop
Hip Hop’s Early Years

**Reading Assignment**
Robert Farris Thompson, “Hip Hop 101,” Droppin’ Science Chapter 8
Katrina Hazzard-Donald, “Dance in Hip Hop Culture,” Droppin’ Science Chapter 9
Alim Kamat, “The Evolution and Impact of Hip Hop,” Student Voices
Film: The Freshest Kids
Week 3: Sept 6 (No Class) Sept 8-10: The Roots Cont.

Reaction paper due, Sept. 10

Week 4: Sept. 13-17: Theoretical Frameworks, Theoreticians and Critiques of Hip Hop
Progressive, Conservative and Nationalist Views; Hip Hop Challengers;
Capitalist/Business Justifications (Sean Combs, Tupac, Chuck D, Queen Latifah, Afrika
Bambaata and others)

Reading Assignment:
Kimberly Glanville, “Born To Speak Free,” *Student Voices*
Pearl Celious, “Hip Hop Culture: From the Perspective of A Member of the Civil Rights
Generation,” *Student Voices*
Cornel West, “Nihilism in Black America,” *Race Matters* Chapter 1 (On Reserve)

Hip Hop as Oppositional Culture
Socially Conscious Hip Hop
Black Nationalist Organizational Influences on Hip Hop
Nation of Islam, Five Percenters and Others

Reading Assignment:
Rap,” *Droppin' Science* Chapter 6

Week 6: Oct. 4-8 Hip Hop Genre 2: Gangsta Rap and Pseudo-Authenticity
Social Roots of Gangsta Rap
West Coast/East Coast Gangsta and Feuds
Influence of Gangsta Rap on Hip Hop Culture

Reading Assignment:
Robin Kelly, “Kickin’ Reality, Kickin’ Ballistics: Gangsta Rap and Post-Industrial Los Angeles,” *Droppin' Science* Chapter 4
Alex Tutt, “Gangsta Rap and the Style of Hip Hop,” *Student Voices*

Midterm Exam-October 7
**Week 7: Oct. 11-15  Role and Representation of Women in Hip Hop**

Women as Subject and as Object
The Role of Women in Hip Hop
Feminist Responses to Misogyny in Hip Hop Culture

**Reading Assignment:**
Leslie Hatch, “Rejection, Revision, Subversion: Discourse Redirected by the Women of Hip Hop,” *Student Voices*
Vernesha Thomas, “Is it Worth the Money, Power and Fame?” *Student Voices*
Shareipha Myvett, “That’s Just My Baby’s Daddy,” *Student Voices*

**Week 8: Oct. 18-22  The Policing of Hip Hop**

First Amendment and Censorship
Violence at Rap Concerts
Institutions of Control: Government and the Media
The Courts and Hip Hop - Important Legal Cases

**Reading Assignment:**

**Week 9  Oct. 25-29  The Commodification of Hip Hop**

The Dominance of Bling, Bling
Music Business and Control of Black Cultural Production
Black Agents of Change
Black Hip Hop Moguls, Whose Really In Control of Hip Hop

**Reading Assignment:**
Jarrett Harris, “The Funeral: The Birth and Death of Hip Hop,” *Student Voices*
Jocelyn Christman, “Blinded by the Media,” *Student Voices*
Week 11: Nov. 1-5  Hip Hop in Global Spaces
More Flavors Than Ever
Hip Hop as World Wide Phenomenon
White, Latino, Asian and Pan African Expressions of Hip Hop

Reading Assignment:
Armond White, “Who Wants to See Ten Niggers Play Basketball?” Droppin’ Science
Chapter 10
Mandalit Del Barco, ‘Raps, Latin Sabor,” Droppin’ Science Chapter 3
Juan Flores, “Puerto Rocks: New York Ricans Stake Their Claim,” Droppin’ Science
Chapter 4

Week 13: Nov. 8-12  The Politics of the Hip Hop Generation: Activism and Agenda Building
Activism in the Hip Hop Community
Representing Hip Hop Politics
Redefining Social Responsibility
Identifying a Hip Hop Political Agenda
The Ideology and Impact of the Hip Hop Summits

Reading Assignment:
Bakari Kitwana, The Politics of the Hip Hop Generation Chapters 6 and 7
Earvin Baker, “Russell Simmons and the Hip Hop Summit,” Student Voices
Yvonne Bynoe, “Hip Hop Politics: Deconstructing the Myth,” Stand & Deliver Chapter 1

Week 14: Nov. 15-19  The Politics of the Hip Hop Generation: The Challenge
Rap Music and Black Cultural Integrity
The Challenge of Rap Music: From Cultural Movement to Political Power

Reading Assignment:
Bakari Kitwana, The Politics of the Hip Hop Generation Chapter 8

Research Papers Due, Nov. 19

Week 15: Nov. 22-24 (Nov. 26-Holiday)
Oral Presentations

Week 16: Nov. 29-Dec. 3  Last Day of Class
Oral Presentations
Final Exam Review

FINAL EXAMINATION: To Be Announced