Syllabus: Hip Hop Theater

By Djola Branner (Hampshire College) and Priscilla Page (UMASS Amherst)

This course examines the influence of Hip Hop music, dance and visual art on the content and character of contemporary American drama. Primary considerations are identifying this "new" aesthetic, its origins and major players, and exploring the convergence of art, culture, politics and community. We will analyze the works of such theatre artists as Will Power, Renita Martin, Rennie Harris, Kamilah Forbes, Marc Bamuthi Joseph and Universes. We will take a close look at the cultural, social, and political conditions in place at the time of Hip Hop's genesis and consider the political nature of Hip Hop as culture and how and when its political roots are acknowledged by contemporary artists.

Course Curriculum:

Week 1
Introductions; Review of Syllabus; What is Hip Hop?
1st Assignment: Each student will bring in something that exemplifies Hip Hop. This could be aural, visual, performative; spoken or written. Limit the presentation to 5 minutes.

Week 2
Share 1st Assignment, Group 1.
Share 1st Assignment, Group 2.

Week 3
Lecture/Discussion - Can't Stop, Won't Stop by Jeff Chang, Chapter 1
Film excerpt: Style Wars

Week 4
Lecture/Discussion - Can't Stop, Won't Stop, Chapters 9 & 10
In-Class Response #1: Last Poets & Gil Scott Heron
Lecture/Discussion - Can't Stop, Won't Stop, Chapter 11
1st Critical Response Due.

Week 5
In-Class Response: "a/coltrane/poem" by Sonia Sanchez and "Black Art" by Amiri Baraka; Film Excerpt: Style Wars
Lecture/Discussion - for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf by Ntozake Shange (electronic copy)

Week 6
Lecture/Discussion - Can't Stop, Won't Stop, Chapters 18 & 19
"Can You Rock It Like This" by Holly Bass in The Fire This Time, edited by Vivien Labaton and Dawn Lundy Martin (electronic copy)
Peer Review Comments Due

Week 7
Goddess City by Abiola Abrams & Antoy Grant in Say Word: Voices from Hip Hop Theater, edited by Daniel Banks (electronic copy)
2nd Critical Response: White Chocolate for My Father by Laurie Carlos
**Week 8**
Spring Break

**Week 9**
Lecture/Discussion: What is Hip Hop Theater?

“Shango’s Mixtape”, Introduction to Plays from the Boombox Galaxy by Kim Euell

In Case You Forget by Ben Snyder (electronic copy); group one presents

1st Critical Response, second draft due

**Week 10**
“Minstrel Reprise: Hip Hop and the Evolution of the Black Image in American Popular Culture” by Jeffrey Ogbar

Welcome to Arroyo’s by Kristoffer Diaz; group two presents

**Week 11**
Preface and Introduction to The Hip Hop Wars by Tricia Rose


“World Wide Hip Hop Art Beyond Borders” by Chang (electronic copy)

3rd Critical Response

**Week 12**
Low by Rha Goddess (electronic copy); group three presents

The Evidence of Silence Broken by Zell Miller III in Plays from the Boombox Galaxy, group four presents

**Week 13**
Flow by Will Power in Plays from the Boom Box Galaxy, group five presents

Attend Hip Hop and Theater panel, performance & discussion with Zell Miller III, Curtain Theater

Class Discussion of Panel and Performance

**Week 14**
“word becomes flesh” by marc bamuthi joseph in Plays from the Boom Box Galaxy, group six presents

Portfolio (with all course work) and Final paper (10 pages) due.

**Hip Hop and Theater Course Bibliography**