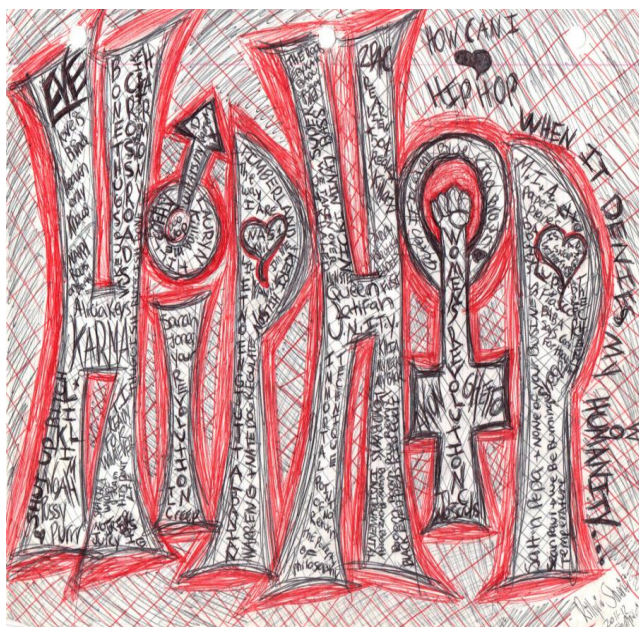


RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Hip Hop Syllabus: AME/MUS 303 Hip Hop: Art, Culture, and Politics

By Sarah Hentges



*SEE NOTE

"Hip-Hop is More than Just Music to Me. It's the vehicle I hope will someday lead us to change."

—Gwendolyn Pough, *Check It While I Wreck It*

Hip is to know

It's a form of intelligence

To be hip is to be update and relevant

Hop is a form of movement

You can't just observe a hop

You gotta hop up and do it..

—KRS-One and Marley Marl, *"Hip Hop Lives"*

"I love the art of hip hop, I don't always love the message . . . Art can't just be a rear view mirror—it should have a headlight out there, according to where we need to go."

—Jay-Z fan, American President Barack Obama

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Hip Hop is an umbrella term for art, music, dance, literature, identity, style and politics. We will begin to understand the art, culture, and politics of Hip Hop by looking at the movements and politics that inspired the birth of Hip Hop as a form of art and music. We will consider the art and aesthetics of Hip Hop and the musical styles that made Hip Hop music possible. Students will create a piece of art or music inspired by Hip Hop. The ways in which Hip Hop speaks to youth and speaks about oppression, violence, identity, culture, and power will also be considered. We will then explore Hip Hop as a form of cultural politics and activism toward social justice. Students will create art or music toward Hip Hop inspired social justice. Finally, we'll consider the possibilities of a Hip Hop future. 3 credits. Prerequisite: AME 201 OR MUS XXX OR ENG 102 OR permission of instructor.

COURSE THEME

The colloquium theme chosen for the 2011-2012 school year is revolution. This theme is fitting to the subject, motives, forms, critiques and actions inspired by Hip Hop. Thus, we will consider the revolutionary aspects of Hip Hop (as well as the challenges to Hip Hop's revolutionary qualities and visions). One of the most obvious ways that we will consider this theme is through the ways in which Hip Hop challenges oppression and creates counter-narratives to dominant misrepresentations and lack of representation in public life. We will also consider the many revolutionary aspects of Hip Hop art, culture, and politics as well as specific artists, albums, or songs that speak to, and about, revolution.

For instance:

Lupe Fiasco, *Lasers*; Immortal Technique, *Revolutionary Volume 1 and 2*; The Coup, *Pick a Bigger Weapon and Party Music*; Dead Prez, "Revolutionary But Gangsta"; Sarah Jones, "Your Revolution (Will Not Happen Between These Thighs)"; Payday Monsanto, "Revolution."

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Students will:

Develop an understanding of the ways in which Hip Hop has been shaped by the experiences of African Americans and other oppressed groups in the U.S. and the ways in which the U.S. (and cultures around the world) have been influenced by Hip Hop.

Understand the various elements that comprise Hip Hop as well as the variety of forms that Hip Hop takes

Develop an appreciation of the cultural, political, and artistic value of Hip Hop

Understand the nuances of mainstream Hip Hop, conscious rap and underground Hip Hop

Create Hip Hop inspired art, music, and activist projects

Develop critical thinking and writing skills as well as skills of observation, synthesis, and connection

COURSE RESOURCES

Dalton **Higgins**, *Hip Hop World* (a Groundwork Guide).

Gwendolyn **Pough**, et al., eds. *Home Girls Make Some Noise: Hip Hop Feminism Anthology*.

Jeff **Chang**, ed. *Total Chaos: The Art and Aesthetics of Hip-Hop*.

In addition to these books, **Blackboard (BB)** will include a number of resources each week, primarily links to YouTube videos and related websites as well as weekly power point "lecture" videos that review the course material for the week and how it connects to the previous week's material as well as the class as a whole. BB will also be the space where you will submit all of your work and engage in conversation with other students, and this is where you will find the pertinent information for class.

ASSIGNMENTS

Weekly Blog Postings and Comments

All Weekly Blog postings and comments are due by the end of the day on Sunday. There are 13 BLOGS possible and students will be required to submit at least 10 weekly BLOG postings. (Consider that this counts toward your "in-class" time.) Each weekly BLOG is worth 4 points and should be approximately 300 words. (Extra blog entries and thoughtful comments may be completed toward extra credit.)

Generally, each week students will post a BLOG and will comment on other students' BLOG postings. An introduction, questions/connections to consider will be posted on BB for each week of readings. Important!: You should not answer these questions directly. Instead, you should use these questions to shape a BLOG posting that critically engages with the course materials, provides specific examples, and analyzes these examples (see guidelines for writing papers). These questions are meant to give you something to think about as you read and to give you something to guide your writing. These questions also help to focus our reading and conversation on the most important points of these readings—the points that address the theme of our course. The power point/video introduction will also provide guidance and a bigger picture of the readings.

Blog entries should always refer directly to the readings when relevant. You should aim for critical analysis, pertinent questions, deep explorations, and scholarly engagement. You should not summarize the readings and you should not simply offer your opinion. There is certainly room for your own opinions and observations but there should always be specific relevance to the materials. Specific examples (quoted and paraphrased) from the readings and other class materials should be used and analyzed.

Titles for your BLOGS are important in order to give other students an idea of what you are writing about.

Revised BLOG final reflection

At the end of the semester, students will reconsider their blog entries and revise these entries into a final paper that addresses the general question: How can we better understand "Hip Hop" by considering art, culture, and politics through an American Studies lens? A prompt will be provided for this assignment though it is important to note here that this assignment is both about the content of the class as much as it is about the way in which you have understood the content of the class through your BLOG postings.

Both of these assignments (weekly blog and revised final) should be completed according to the guidelines for writing papers. You should have a central argument/thesis statement. You should provide specific examples (from readings, films, and other class materials) and analyze these examples.

Art, Culture, and Politics WIKI Postings and Comments

All Art, Culture, and Politics postings are due according to the schedule below (and on BB). These will be posted in the WIKI format on BB that allows you to post video, photos, and revise posts. Each posting should include a brief summary/description and **analysis of the connections** to some aspect of course materials and course readings and an example (or multiple examples) that also provides a multimedia representation (like a photo, a YouTube video, a website). Students may choose to do these WIKI postings in small groups, covering multiple aspects of the topic, for instance. Students can also choose to make comments or to add to someone else's WIKI page. Examples will be provided in the course materials as well.

Art, Culture, Politics WIKI Topics:

WIKI1: Politics in/of Hip Hop

WIKI2: History/Politics of Race/Revolution

WIKI3: Identity Politics in Hip Hop (Race, Class, Gender, Sexuality)

WIKI4: Hip Hop Across Borders

WIKI5: Hip Hop Feminism and Activism

WIKI6: Beyond the Four Elements

Comments should engage with a specific aspect of the original blog. Comments should question, support, counter, complement. They should not simply agree or praise. They also should not insult, belittle, or attack. Comments should be at least 50 or more words.

Please also be aware that all blogs and comments are public (to our class); therefore, I will comment on these blogs publicly. If there is an issue with a blog that I cannot address publicly, I will send a private e-mail to the person whose post or comment is in question. If a post is particularly offensive or inflammatory, I will remove the blog and the student may choose to re-do it.

Hip Hop Action/Education Project

This project should find a way to put Hip Hop into action—toward your education and/or the education of others. You may choose to create a video to complement your music or someone else's, or create a piece of Hip Hop art, or write Hip Hop journalism or spoken word. You might create jewelry, clothing, political action, or social movement. You may create a lesson plan to teach Hip Hop in elementary school or high school. There are many, many ways to fulfill this part of your course work and this project will include both an action and an analysis. I will provide a prompt for this assignment and students will submit an informal proposal during Week 10. Project and reflection due by the end of finals week. Students may choose to work in small groups for this project and should feel free to discuss project ideas with your professor and/or other students.

Contributions to Classroom Community/Engagement with Education (final statement):

On-line classes have different classroom communities than live classes and the success of this course greatly relies upon students' contributions to the classroom community. These contributions can be made through your assignments—timely posts and thoughtful replies—as well as through other opportunities for engagement. This assignment asks you to assess your contributions as well as the ways you have engaged in your education. For this part of your grade, you will submit a final statement where you will detail your work in the class and reflect upon your work overall including your participation and the ways in which you engaged in the course and your education. This is a report of the work you did throughout the semester and you may also grade yourself on a 10-point scale. For instance, I completed all of my weekly

blogs on time and submitted my revised final reflection. Through this work I learned_____. My project really helped me understand____. I attended... I commented..... and found _____.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Readings, supplementary texts, and assignment due dates are listed on the days when they are due. Course books are referred to by the author/editor's last name.

WEEK 1: Introduction to Hip Hop

This week we get acquainted with the books and themes for the course.

Read: Higgins. Chapter 1: "The Audacity of Hip Hop"

Read: Pough. Foreword (by Mark Anthony Neal) and Introduction (by Gwen Pough) and Afterword (by Joan Morgan)

Read: Chang. "Introduction: Hip Hop Arts: Our Expanding Universe"

Web links: Aceyalone, "Ms. Amerikkka"; Nas, "American Way"; Lupe Fiasco, "The Words I Never Said"; "Payday Monsanto, "Sheeple of Amerika"

WEEK 2: The Old School/ WIKI 1 (Politics in/of Hip Hop)

Read: Higgins. Chapter 2: "The Old School and the Elements"

Web links: The Last Poets, "When the Revolution Comes", "Niggers Are Scared of Revolution"; Afrika Bambaataa "Planet Rock"; Sugarhill Gang, "Rapper's Delight"; Rock Steady Crew, "Uprock"; Killa Kela, live beatboxing; Beat box example; Run DMC and Aerosmith, "Walk This Way"

WEEK 3: Roots

Read: Chang. Part One: "Roots: Perspectives on Hip-Hop History"

Web links: Gil-Scot Heron, "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised"; Nas, "Hip Hop Is Dead"; KRS-One and Marley Marl, "Hip Hop Lives"; Taalam Acey, "When the Smoke Clearz"; Dead Prez, "hip-hop", "(It's Still Bigger Than) Hip Hop", "Hip Hop" live.

WEEK 4: Race-ing Hip Hop/ WIKI 2 (History/Politics of Race/Revolution)

Read: Higgins. Chapter 3: "What's Race Got to Do With It?"

Web links: Dahlak Brathwaite, "Black Genius"; Murs, "D.S.W.G."; CNN Article "Rapper has defiant words for his new album" (Nas and his album 'Ni**er'); Tumi Molekane, "Bambezela", TEDxSoweto; ZOLA, "Mdlwembe"; Kwaito documentary trailer; EES featuring Gazza, "T.I.A (This is Africa)"

WEEK 5: Herstory and Conscience

Read: Higgins. Chapter 5: "Hip Hop's Herstory and Pride Rap" and Chapter 6: "Rap's Social Conscience"

Web links: Funky Four + 1 More, "Rappin and Rockin the House 12 ver. 1 of 2"; Queen Latifah, "U.N.I.T.Y."; Teremoana Rapley, "Beautiful People"; Invincible, "Sledgehammer", "Shapeshifter", "Spacious Skies"; Democracy Now interview, "Detroit Hip-Hop Artist and Activist Invincible: Another Detroit is Happening"; Colorlines, "Eight Openly Queer Rappers Worth Your Headphones"; World Hip Hop Market, "Women's Movement: DJ Leydis Breaks Down Hip Hop in Cuba"; Legendary K.O., "Bush don't like black people"; Common, "A Song for Assata"; The Roots, "Don't Feel Right"; Mos Def, Immortal Technique and Eminem, "Tell the Truth"; Mos Def, "The Katrina Klap (Dollar Day)"; Emmanuel Jal, "We Need Peace", "War Child"; Flobots, "Fight With Tools"

WEEK 6: Women in Hip Hop

Read: Pough. Section One, "B-Girls, Femcees, Graf Girls and Lady Deejays: Women Artists in Hip Hop," 1-109

Web links: "Brown Sugar" movie trailer, "When did you fall in love with hip hop?" scene; Erykah Badu

Featuring Common, "Love of My Life"; JenRO interview, "Try It", "Boss Up"; Interview with Paradigm; Interview with Hanifah Walidah; Ladies Lotto

WEEK 7: Identity in Flux/ WIKI 3 (Identity Politics in Hip Hop [Race, Class, Gender, Sexuality])

Read: Chang. Part Three: "The Real: Identity in Flux"

Web links: Robert Karimi, e-poets.net featured artist; Memorial for Dave Funkenklein on Bomb Hip Hop; Clutch, "Carry on Tradition" article on Joan Morgan; School Library Journal, "Street Fight: Welcome to the World of Urban Lit"; Deep Dickollective, "For Colored Boys"; "HomoRevolution" Tour preview; Humboldt State's Social Justice Summit 2009.

***Bangor Live Discussion Option: Identity Politics in Hip-Hop Culture**

WEEK 8: Economics and Globalization/ WIKI 4 (Hip Hop Across Borders)

Read: Higgins. Chapter 4: "Hip Hop's Economic Stimulus Plan" and Chapter 7: "The Globalization of Hip Hop"

Web links: The Coup, "Kill My Landlord", "5 Million Ways to Kill a CEO", "Fat Cats Bigga Fish"; Immortal Technique, "The Poverty of Philosophy"; MSN article, "Who will be hip hop's first billionaire?"; M.I.A. biography on Sweets Lyrics; k'naan, "Soobax"; Poetas de Karaoke "Sam the Kid"

WEEK 9: Hip-Hop Arts Beyond Borders

Read: Chang. Part Four: "Worldwide: Hip-Hop Arts Beyond Borders"

Web links: Theatre Maina, "Border/Clash" article/review of Stacey Chin; KCRA interview with Eli Jacobs-Fauntauzzi; Ted Talk: Suheir Hammad; JAAS, "Newen"; Upper Hut Posse, "E tu", "Ragga Girl"; Invincible, "People Not Places", "Spacious Skies", "Deuce/Ypsi"; Afro Pop, "Hip Hop Revolution"; The Native Press, article on OutKast

WEEK 10: PROJECT PROPOSAL DUE

Web links: This.org, "Quebec's "hip hope historian" raps about Quebecois black heritage", article on Webster; Webster with Karim Ouellet, "QC History X", "La force de la multitude"

***WEBSTER: Live Culture and Discussion Option**

Culture Option: Augusta Thursday 6:30

Culture Option: Bangor Friday 12-1

Discussion Option: Bangor (or Compressed Video)

***Bangor Optional Culture, Friday 6:30 pm, "Revolutionary Movements" (fitness-dance class)**

WEEK 11: Gender Representation

Read: Pough. Section Two: "Representin' (for) the Ladies: Issues of Gender and Representation in Hip-Hop Culture," 111-299

Web links: CNN, "Hip-hop portrayal of women protested"; Essence, "10 Hip-Hop songs that uplift women"; "Aya de Leon", trailer; Aya de Leon, "99 Reasons"; Luna Magazine, "Santigold"; Santigold, "L.E.S. Artists", "Go"; Jay-Z, "Brooklyn we go hard"

WEEK 12: Cultural Critiques of Gender, Sexuality, and Patriarchy

Read: Pough. Section Three: "That's My Word!: Cultural Critiques of Gender, Sexuality, and Patriarchy in Hip-Hop Culture," 301-474

Web links: ABC News, "Marry Your Baby Daddy Day"; Christian Science Monitor, "Marry Your Baby Daddy Day: Activist Marries Unwed Parents", article about "activist" Marilyn Reed; Revolving Door Reading Series, Tara Betts

Augusta Live Discussion Option: Hip Hop Feminism (BLOG 10 or 11)

WEEK 13: WIKI 5 (Hip Hop Feminism and Activism) **due**

WEEK 14: Beyond the Four Elements/ WIKI 6 (Beyond the Four Elements)

Read: Chang. Part Two: "Flipping the Script: Beyond the Four Elements"

Web link: Rennie Harris, Puremovement; Best of Rennie Harris; Blog interview with Bill Adler and Cey Adams; Slingshot Hip Hop, trailer; Born Here, "Dam"; Eisa Davis was Born To Do It All

WEEK 15: Futures for Hip Hop

Read: Higgins. Chapter 8: "Black to the Future"

Read: Chang. Part Five: "Next Elements: Hip-Hop Arts and Future Aesthetics"

Listen: *Deltron 3030* (album suggestion)

Web link: Spank Rock, "Put That Pussy On Me"; Oregon Humanities – Conversation Project: Break It Down, interview with Walidah Imarisha; Kid Sister, featuring Kanye West, "Pro Nails"; Mickey Factz, featuring The Cool Kids, "Rocking N Rollin"; Kid Kudi, featuring Kanye West, "Erase Me"; K-OS, "Zambony"; Fog and Smog, "Whole Foods Parking Lot", "Yoga Girl"

FINALS WEEK

Final statement on Contributions to Classroom Community; Final Revised BLOG Reflection; and Action/Education Project and Reflection

A FEW CONCLUSIONS

One of the challenges of this course was the diversity of students who signed up for it. Some students who took this course were self-professed fans and lovers of Hip Hop; other students had only heard mainstream radio Hip Hop and were neither fans nor haters. Both sets of students, and those in between, learned about Hip Hop from where they started. I have found that Hip Hop provides opportunities to talk about ideas, experiences, art forms, and policies that are not often included in students' other classes. For some students, these are important aspects of their past, present, and future lives. We also have opportunities to challenge knowledge production and evaluation through an interdisciplinary approach and to challenge stereotypes and complicate identities and structures through considerations of intersections. Most students conclude the course with a much richer understanding of what Hip Hop is—a form of art, a forum for politics, and a rich part of American culture. And many students take this understanding outside the classroom as they share this new-found knowledge with friends, family, and their communities.

NOTES

*This artwork was created by a student in this course for her action/education project. In her project reflection she writes: "Within the semester, my project ideas kept changing like my environment . . . however I ended up creating some rasquache art." And, "In closing, all of my projects that I have done in the past [American studies and women's studies classes] have a piece of me within them, and this one is no exception. From my introduction to my closing of this class, Hip Hop is a beautiful art form that allows me and anyone to create a voice and connect with people all around the world." I

also include reference to this student's work and use this artwork in my recent/forthcoming article in *Words, Beats, Life: A Global Journal of Hip-Hop Culture*, "Rasquachismo: A Theory, Methodology, and Pedagogy for Hip-Hop Intersections."



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