ISSA CLASS:

Hip Hop HISTORY

Instructor: Daniel Koh

Office Hours: T/Th 5:30pm - 6:30pm; available by appointment

Office Location: Jones Commons

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Course Description:

“Hip-hop is the most important youth culture on the planet, bar none.”

* Kevin Powell

Hip Hop is a revolution. From its grassroots origins in the South Bronx, hip hop exploded onto the scene as an underground urban movement that encompasses music, fashion, politics, and identity. This course will examine the development of hip-hop and its power to create counter-narratives to the prevailing misrepresentations of oppressed groups. Students will listen to and analyze music ranging from the Sugarhill Gang to 21 Savage, supplemented by documentaries and excerpts from contemporary historical work on hip hop. Students will listen to interviews, read news articles, and watch movie clips that enrich their understanding of the wider social context. The curriculum will be structured chronologically from 1979 to the present. Over the course of the class, students will be graded on an annotated mixtape, a deeper song analysis, and a final group presentation, as well as participation, attendance, and a group evaluation. All work will help student answer the question, ***how does hip hop speak differently to different people?*** This class pursues that answer in the context of the wider significance of hip hop as a movement more than just fresh beats and fresher rhymes. Why should you listen to hip hop? I hope this class helps you find that answer for yourself.

Course Objectives/Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this course, students will know and be able to:

1. Analyze the role of hip hop as a social and political voice
2. Explain the origins and development of hip hop to someone with no knowledge of the subject
3. Critically examine songs in terms of style, lyricism, flow, and message
4. Develop and articulate a personalized taste in hip hop
5. Apply the critical vocabulary of hip hop music

Grade Policies

This course will be graded Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory based on the following rubric:

1. Informed Participation in Class - 20%
2. Mixtape and Liner Notes - 15%
3. Song Analysis - 15%
4. Essay - 20%
5. Final Group Presentation - 20%
6. Group Evaluation - 10%

Informed Participation in Class:

This requires prior listening of the songs and prior reading of the materials listed on the syllabus for each day of class. I will be referencing song lyrics, so I recommend having the lyrics during class, whether electronically or on paper. Quoting the songs and drawing connections between different materials are the best way to participate in discussions.

10%: Discussion

10%: Exit Tickets

Mixtape and Liner Notes:

Throughout the class, each student will be compiling a playlist of songs. Every week, students will add the one song they heard that week that taught them something new or changed their perspective. With each addition, students will write a paragraph explaining the significance of that song and the motivation for including it in the mixtape. By the second to last day of class, each student will create a title and cover art for their mixtape, and I will make CDs to be handed out on the last day. (≥10 songs with liner notes, 1% each for 10% total; title and cover art, 5%)

Song Analysis:

Midway through the class, students will prepare a 3 minute presentation on a song they argue I should have added to the syllabus. Students will prepare a one slide visual aid and make their case to be voted on by the class. Grading will be based on comprehensive analysis of the song and strength of the argument, not the vote

Essay:

Students will use the knowledge and vocabulary learned in class to answer the question, “What is your taste in hip hop?” in 500-750 words. This assignment invites students to critically analyze the music they choose to listen to and investigate what elements of hip hop inform that choice.

Final Group Presentation:

Groups of 3 will create a dream album of three rappers, one producer, and one singer, dead or alive. The presentation will compare and contrast the artists’ styles and sounds. Presentations will explain to the class why the artists would fit together and why this album would be a significant hip hop album. They will also describe the general vibe of the album. Finally, groups will come up with a title of a sample song and write one verse or one chorus in the lyrical style and flow of the artists they choose.

Group Evaluation:

This grade will be aggregated from group member evaluations following the final presentation

Class Schedule

**Week 1: “The Genesis”**

Songs 1-4, syllabus introduction, mixtape assigned

**Exit Ticket: Left column of Before/After: My Taste in Hip-Hop**

HW: Read Ice-T’s”Foreword” and the “Introduction” from *The Rap Year Book* (on Canvas); first mixtape entry

**Week 2: “Strictly Ghetto”**

Songs 5-9, the vocabulary of hip hop, guided song analysis

**Exit Ticket: Table group vocabulary rap**

HW: Read the *Preface* and the “Introduction” from *The Hip Hop Wars* (on Canvas); second mixtape entry

**Week 3: “Pipe It Up”**

Songs 10-13, watch and discuss clips from *Straight Outta Compton* (2015)

**Exit Ticket: “Check yo self before you wreck yo self” movie fact-check**

HW: Read <http://brokeassstuart.com/blog/2017/03/13/intercoastal-hip-hop-championship-belt-brief-history-east-v-west-coast-rap/>; third mixtape entry

**Week 4: “Friend or Foe”**

Songs 14-18, watch and discuss east coast vs west coast rap; introduction to beat production

**Exit Ticket: East Coast vs West Coast Venn Diagram**

HW: Movie night – *Rhyme and Reason* (1997); fourth mixtape entry

**Week 5: “Milennium”**

Songs 19-21, the transition of rap to the 21st century; flow

**Exit Ticket: Flow Flowchart**

HW: Read the chapter from *The Rap Year Book* on “Takeover” vs “Ether; Jay-Z vs Nas (on Canvas)

**Week 6: “Fight Night”**

Songs 22-24, diss track **diss**cussion; fashion and style

**Exit Ticket: Diss track verse with the flow and beat of an existing diss track**

HW: choose a diss track for your fifth mixtape entry

**Week 7: “Big Things Poppin’”**

Songs 25-27, party music; analyze and discuss hip hop-style art graffiti

**Exit Ticket: Pick and analyze an example of hip hop graffiti**

HW: sixth mixtape entry

**Week 8: “Mo’ Money Mo’ Problems”**

Songs 28-30, watch and discuss portrayals of rappers in movies

**Exit Ticket: Compare and contrast a movie rapper with real life**

HW: Read Chapter 2, “Hip Hop Reflects Black Dysfunctional Ghetto Culture” from *The Hip Hop Wars* (on Canvas); seventh mixtape entry

**Week 9: “The Next Episode”**

Songs 31-33, Rap of the 2000s, Examine the effect of the internet on rap

**Exit Ticket: Rise and fall timeline of an internet rap phenomenon**

HW: Read Chapter 31, “Best I Every Had” from *The Rap Year Book* (on Canvas); eighth mixtape entry

**Week 10:** **“My World”**

Songs 34-36, Discuss our favorite rappers today, compare and contrast the eras

**Exit Ticket: Style and flow breakdown for a current rapper**

HW: Song Analysis Assignment

**Week 11:** **“Lyrical Gangbang”**

Song Analysis Presentations

HW: Read Chapter 12, “Progressive Voices, Energies, and Visions” from *The Hip Hop Wars* (on Canvas); ninth mixtape entry

**Week 12: “Me Against the World”**

Discuss rap as a social and political movement, talk about the political relationships of rap

**Exit Ticket: Put a rapper on the political spectrum (**[**http://www.people-**](http://www.people-)**press.org/quiz/political-typology/)**

HW: choose a 2018 song by a new artist as your tenth mixtape entry

**Week 13: “Beware (The Funk is Everywhere)”**

Rap on the international scene, listen to and discuss rap from around the world

**\*\*\* ESSAY DUE\*\*\***

HW: Create mixtape album art

**Week 14:** **“Youthful Expression”**

The hip hop up-and-comers, Look at the XXL Freshmen list and discuss the new generation of violent rappers

**Exit Ticket: Criminal rap sheet for a post-2012 rapper**

HW: Fantasy Album Presentations

**Week 15:** **“It Was a Good Day”**

Culminating presentations, receive mixtapes and essays, jam session

Absence policies

Students may have three absences, excused and unexcused combined. Please try and let me know at least 3 days in advance that you won’t be able to come to class. Any more than three absences will result in a letter grade reduction.

List of required texts

Class material may contain offensive language and subject material, slurs, and references to drugs and alcohol

Required Songs: <https://open.spotify.com/user/12128542379/playlist/1NQ60ASli8tm2abIrEMvCi>

1. “Rapper’s Delight” The Sugarhill Gang
2. “The Breaks” Kurtis Blow
3. “Jazzy Sensation” Afrika Bambaataa and the Jazzy Five
4. “The Message” Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five
5. “Sucker M.C.’s” Run-DMC
6. “Friends” Whodini
7. “La Di Da Di” Doug E. Fresh and Slick Rick
8. “6 in the Mornin’” Ice-T
9. “Paid in Full” Eric B. and Rakim
10. “Straight Outta Compton” N.W.A
11. “Fight the Power” Public Enemy
12. “Bonita Applebum” A Tribe Called Quest
13. “Mind Playing Tricks on Me” Geto Boys
14. “Nuthin’ but a ‘G’ Thang” Dr. Dre, featuring Snoop Dogg
15. “C.R.E.A.M.” Wu-Tang Clan
16. “Juicy” The Notorious B.I.G.
17. “Dear Mama” Tupac
18. “California Love” Tupac, featuring Dr. Dre and Roger Troutman
19. “Can’t Nobody Hold Me Down” Puff Daddy, featuring Mase
20. “Ruff Ryders’ Anthem” DMX
21. “My Name Is” Eminem
22. “Big Pimpin’” Jay Z, featuring UGK
23. “Takeover” vs. “Ether” Jay Z vs. Nas
24. “Grindin” The Clipse
25. “In Da Club” 50 Cent
26. “Still Tippin” Mike Jones, featuring Slim Thug and Paul Wall
27. “Gold Digger” Kanye West, featuring Jamie Foxx
28. “Hustlin” Rick Ross
29. “International Players Anthem” UGK, featuring Outkast
30. “A Milli” Lil Wayne
31. “Best I Ever Had” Drake
32. “Monster” Kanye West, featuring Rick Ross, Jay Z, Bon Iver, and Nicki Minaj
33. “Niggas in Paris” Jay Z and Kanye West
34. “Same Love” Macklemore and Ryan Lewis
35. “Control” Big Sean, featuring Kendrick Lamar and Jay Electronica
36. “Lifestyle” Rich Gang, featuring Young Thug and Rich Homie Quan

Required Texts (electronic excerpts):

*The Rap Year Book* by Shea Serrano

*The Hip Hop Wars* by Tricia Rose

Documentaries (electronic)

*Style Wars* (1983)

*Rhyme and Reason* (1997)

Other Class Materials

* Personal computer
* Pencil
* Paper

Rice University Disability Accommodation Policy:

Any student with a documented disability needing academic adjustments or accommodations is requested to speak with the course instructor during the first two weeks of class. All discussions will remain confidential. Students with disabilities should also contact Disability Support Services in Allen Center 111.

Honor Code:

Students are expected to abide by the Rice Honor System (http://honor.rice.edu/)