Race, Religion, and Rap

Course Description
The course explores how race and religion intersect with the production and distribution of rap music in the United States and abroad. Through this course, students will explore how the boundaries of the religious and secular spheres are blurred and contested through the use of music. This course is broken into three interconnected themes: devotion, identity formation and articulation, and resistance.

Using an interdisciplinary approach we will try to answer a number of questions together including: What is the difference between hip hop and rap? Is rap music a distinctively Black art form or a global phenomenon? Can you be a “good” religious person while rapping about sex and drugs?

Instructor Contact Information
Kayla Wheeler
Email: kayla-wheeler@uiowa.edu
Skype/GChat: kaylar824
Class Twitter: @racerlgnandrap
Office: 324 Gilmore Hall
Physical Office Hours: T, R 1:30-3PM
Virtual Office Hours: W 8-10PM

Course Objectives
- Gain basic knowledge of a variety of religions and hip hop subgenres
- Demonstrate critical thinking and writing skills
- Learn how to create and maintain a blog
- Improve research skills
**Course Material**

All required readings and music videos will be posted on ICON, unless otherwise noted. Assignments should be completed before class to ensure productive discussion. Because new music is constantly released, I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus. Students will be given two weeks’ notice of any changes.

**Recommended material:**
Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal (editors), *“That’s the Joint”: The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*, 2nd edition (Routledge, 2011)

Andre E. Johnson (editor), *Urban God Talk: Constructing a Hip Hop Spirituality* (Lexington Books, 2013)

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**Submission Guidelines**

All assignments are due by the beginning of the class. Papers should be submitted both electronically and in hard-copy form.

A one-week assignment extension will be given to students who are otherwise up to date on their assignments and actively participate in class. Students must contact me at least 48 hours before the due date to request an extension. Students will only be given one extension per assignment.

Because I provide students with assignment extensions, I do not accept late work. Any assignment turned in late, without my permission, will be given a 0.

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**Grades**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>98% and above</td>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>94-97%</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
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<td>B</td>
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<td>C+</td>
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<td>C</td>
<td>73-75%</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>86-89%</td>
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## Grading Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Your active participation in our class makes it more fun for all of us. Grades will be based on participating in our class discussion, coming to my office hours, and completing class surveys.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blog entries</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Each student will be responsible for writing five, 200-300 word posts for our hip hop and religion blog over the course of the semester. Students may use this space to summarize and analyze readings, or raise interesting questions. The posts can address topics covered in either the readings or the music videos.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper 1 (due 2/17)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Write a 3-4 page reflection paper of one of the readings discussed in class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper 2 (due 3/12)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Write a 6-8 page investigative paper based on an artist discussed in the course. Examine how they incorporate religion into their music.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper 3 (due 5/12)</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Option 1: Write a 12-15 page research paper on the intersection religion and hip hop in material and visual culture.</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Option 2: Create a 5-7 minute audio-visual presentation exploring the intersection of religion and hip hop in material and visual culture AND write 7 page research paper.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Proposal</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Write a 2 page overview of your research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Presentation</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Give a 5 minute presentation on your research paper.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Course Material

Defining Race, Religion, and Rap: These readings will provide a foundation for understanding the readings and music that we will be discussing throughout the semester.

Week 1


January 22: Clifford Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System”, pp. 87-125

Week 2


This Bridge Called my Back, pp. 27-35, pp. 46-53, pp. 232-238

January 29: Imani Perry, Prophets of the Hood, pp. 1-37

Videos
- Nikki Giovanni, “Ego Tripping” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r1o5MNTIrOc
- Lightnin’ Rod, “The Shit Hits the Fan Again” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p-EUXgpQsyo
- The Last Poets, “Blessed are those who Struggle” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pKMPE7DjKeQ
- Gil Scott-Heron, “The Revolution will not be Televised” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qGaoXAwI9kw
- Sonia Sanchez, “Middle Passage” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P98JZhWUijY
- James Brown, “Funky Drummer” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dNP8tbDMZNE

Devotion: Explore how people across the globe use rap music to help maintain their faith and to spread their religion to others.

Week 3

February 3: Mark Lewis Taylor, “Bringing Noise, Conjuring Spirit: Rap as Spiritual Practice”, pp. 107-130
February 5: Felicia Miyakawa, *Five Percenter* Rap, pp 23-73

Songs:
- KRS One, “Know Thy Self” [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zmVF7_pIUo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zmVF7_pIUo)
- Brand Nubian, “Ragtime” [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XD43PZNRIEi](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XD43PZNRIEi)
- Rakim, “The Mystery” [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s5k6Y6suz68](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s5k6Y6suz68)
- Poor Righteous Teachers, “Holy Intellect” [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6eiDAXpMVwE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6eiDAXpMVwE)
- Erykah Badu, “On & On” [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CPCs7vVz6s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CPCs7vVz6s)

Week 4


**PAPER 1 DUE 2/10**


Songs
- R.E.I.G.N, “Getcha Blessin” [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ciaby4zIM4o#t=84](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ciaby4zIM4o#t=84)
- CunninLynguiss ft. Big K.R.I.T., “Murder (Act II)” [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lD8oBR82nnw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lD8oBR82nnw)
- Applejaxx ft. Odetta, “Jesus High” [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qZkhRV41n90&list=PLD13D4EA4D3007122&index=13](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qZkhRV41n90&list=PLD13D4EA4D3007122&index=13)

Week 5:

February 17: Harry Nii Knowy Odamtten, “Morality, the Sacred, and God in Ghanaian Hip Hop”, pp. 189-207

Noel Erskine, “Rap, Reggae, and Religion”, pp. 71-84
Songs
- Reggie Rockstone, “Keep Your Eyes on the Road” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lCT9BRgYXdM
- Christ Image, “Hiplife is Dead” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bhpUxedVAiw


Songs
- D-Lo, “Cold World” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t6uCEvQEmzI
- Fresco Suave, “How We Bang” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zlUXntwWSSk&list=UU3S9Kr4nxkogG4YSO-MZlTQ&index=6
- T-Bone, “Can I Live” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lf5E8wxZQLw

Identity: Explore how people have used rap music to maintain their unique religions, cultures, and languages.

Week 6


Songs:
- Native Deen, “My Faith My Voice” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bx7uj-yFpC0
- Jay Electronica, “Better in Tune with the Infinite” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DBGk8xCxxoE
- Rapsody, “Betty Shabazz” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zhz0u0nBSZk
- Omar Offendum, “Straight Street” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KbJq8BRvCSQ
- Maimouna Youssef, “We’re Already Royals” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DJ9qeDTVJ74
- Immortal Technique ft. Mos Def, Talib Kweli, and Eminnem “Bin Laden” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hdagS1a-UQ8
Week 7

March 3: Katy Khan, “Gendering Islam: Ms Undastood and the Search for Alternative Models of Black Womanhood”, pp. 60-71


Songs:
- Miss Undastood, “Looking Ass People” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lfS_oBpkBY&list=UU9Y6dlm70gzUpdYdfD3SeuA
- Miss Undastood “Aint Worried Bout the Weather” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xjWVzqO4rKc
- Eve, “Heaven Only Knows” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VzXhf6hOORI


Songs
- Snow Tha Product-“Lord be with You” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ciw0eUFhObo
- Sir Dyno a.k.a David Rocha, “I Can’t Wait to Get Out” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2q2fw7GPjD4
- Funky Aztecs, “Barriorism” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VU68LTEdLTs
- Funky Aztecs, “Straight Up Loco” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M1oluuuNtz0o

Week 8


Songs
- PraCh Ly, “Fragile Hope” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=97UZ5C2FbDU
- HeeSun Lee ft. MC Jin, “I Break Stereotypes” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Tc9xr_LpAg
- HeeSun Lee & Seda, “I’m a Christian” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PQd9sLJ4-s
- Ras Ceylon, “Fyah Still Burnin” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=whPRuBaW2hE
- M.I.A., “Come Walk with Me” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_11uQV121mQ
March 12: Lauren Jessica Amsterdam, “All the Eagles and the Ravens in the House Say Yeah: (Ab)original Hip-hop, heritage, and love”, pp. 53-72


Songs:
- Sisters Underground, “In the Neighbourhood” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vhK8o2lRy5o
- A Tribe Called Red, “Electric Pow Wow Drum” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_zH9wHWMi_k
- Drezus, “Warpath” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E8Cy1Knyu6A
- Supaman, “Prayer Loop Song” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_0jq7jJa34Y
- Frank Waln ft. Cody Blackbird, “Hear My Cry” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uWkatyezYQ0

PAPER 2 DUE ON 3/12

Week 9: Spring Break

Week 10

March 24: Jon Stratton, “The Beastie Boys: Jews in Whiteface”, pp. 413-432


Songs:
- Beastie Boys, “Intergalactic” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qORY0atB6g
- Beastie Boys, “Sabotage” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z5rRZdjiu1UE
- Beastie Boys, “No Sleep Till Brooklyn” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=07Y0cy-nvAg
- Drake, “Bar Mitzvah Monologue” http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zqTXwvo4MY0


Songs:
- Matisyahu, “Jerusalem (Out of the Darkness Comes Light)” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H8ULlw0Zgaw&list=UUG-ZIDV8AYYwGzl6Ekv1kQg
Race, Rap, and Religion

Matisyahu, “King Without a Crown”  
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ChV5BZ8SmS0&list=UG-ZIDV8AYYwGzl6Ekv1kQg

Matisyahu, “Sunshine”  
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E_Vt4MlbM0c

Matisyahu, “Surrender”  
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YTuoaisKj3c&list=UG-ZIDV8AYYwGzl6Ekv1kQg

Resistance: Explore how rap music has been the voice of the oppressed and how it has inspired social justice movements across the world.

Week 11

March 31: Theresa A. Martinez, “Popular Culture as Oppositional Culture: Rap as Resistance”, pp. 265-286

Songs:
- Billie Holliday, “Strange Fruit”  
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h4ZyuULy9zs
- Nina Simone, Mississippi “G*ddamn”  
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fVQiGGJVSXc
- Bob Marley, “Chant Down Babylon”  
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ixGrA0dQKeI
- Grand Master Flash & the Furious Five, “The Message”  
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gYMkEMCHJ4
- Public Enemy, “Fight the Power”  
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kj9SeMZE_Yw
- KRS One, “Sound of Da Police”  
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A572ecILc68


Explore this website:  
http://www.zulanation.com/

Songs:
- Artists United Against Apartheid, “Let Me See Your ID”  
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=joYTCwNMdq8
- Immortal Technique, “Point of No Return”  
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Igt-jW4e8ts
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=221lsf5JZD0
- Sister Souljah, “The Hate That Hate Produced”  
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=neNboH3paQ
- Killer Mike, “Reagan”  
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6lIqNjC1RKU#t=13
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tEddixS-UoU
Rebel Diaz, “Libertad” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CSNbzivba4
“Rapeando ante la Policía por los 43 de Ayotzinapa” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jbBFT4VSYUQ#t=36
Talib Kweli, “Papers Please” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5s8jgZUgGpg

RESEARCH PROPOSAL DUE ON 4/2

Week 12

April 7: Demetria Irwin, “QuestLove is Right, Hip Hop is too Silent on Ferguson and Garner” http://thegrio.com/2014/12/04/questlove-hip-hop-protest-song/


Songs:
- Big Mike, “Forgiveness” https://soundcloud.com/bigmike-jr-brown
- Lauryn Hill, “Black Rage” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5gq-vqh6zb0
- J Cole, “Be Free” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_0LNMviSTTg
- Jasiri X, “Do We Need to Start a Riot” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VcSm6EX1coo
- RDACBX ft. Rebel Diaz, Vithym, Luss, “Stop! Stop and Frisk!” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t-duTrV9hSg
- Papoose, “Trayvon Martin Tribute” https://www.youtube.com/embed/6a8nHcs3ftA

April 9:


Songs
- Eekwol, “I will not be Conquered” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ouZ8BDjNCCU
- DrasticOne ft. Manny Loc and Kiawitl Xochitl, “Deadly” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VA4WaLE79A0
- Quese Inc, “I am my Ancestors” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TwFZkyNqIlw
- Frank Waln, “AbOriginal” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5_1fmbKCMmY
- Tall Paul “Prayers in a Song” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=61V69jRF5ys
- JSK, “Skin is my Sin” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pRIUp6GkjgA
Week 13

April 14: Hisham Aidi, “‘Verily, there is only one hip-hop Umma’: Islam, cultural protest and urban marginality”, pp. 107-126

Ela Greenberg, “‘The King of the Streets’: Hip Hop and the Reclaiming of Masculinity in Jerusalem’s Shu’afat Refugee Camp”, pp. 370-382

Songs:
- Soosan Firooz “Untitled” [link]
- Alia Sharrief ft Aminah Bell, “Black Heros” [link]
- Shadia Mansour, “Assalamu Alaikum” [link]
- Brother Ali, “Mourning in America” [link]
- Lowkey, “My Soul” [link]
- DAM, “Who is the Terrorist” [link]

April 16: Linda Tucker, “‘Holler if Ya Hear Me’: Black Men, (Bad) Raps, and Resistance”, pp. 57-88

Songs:
- Tupac, “I Ain’t Mad at Ya” [link]
- Tupac, “Only God Can Judge Me” [link]
- Tupac, “Changes” [link]
- Tupac, “Lord Knows” [link]
- Funky Aztecs ft. 2Pac, “Salsa con Soulfood” [link]

Week 14

April 21: “Combahee River Collective” [link]

Leola A. Johnson, “The Spirit is willing and so is the Flesh: The Queen in Hip-Hop Culture” pp. 154-167

Ana Sobral, “UNLIKELY MCS’: Hip Hop and the Performance of Islamic Feminism”, pp. 259-271

Songs:
- Queen Latifah, “U.N.I.T.Y” [link]
- Queen Latifah ft. Monie Love “Ladies First” [link]
• Poetic Pilgrimage and Mohammed Yahya, “Silence is Consent”  
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z1orCqZg4SA

• Poetic Pilgrimage, “Land Far Away”  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-mdLvy8o1cU

• Poetic Pilgrimage ft. Raggo Zulu Rebel, “Rebel Anthem”  
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PamsjbUyb8M

April 23: Writing Workshop

**Week 15**

**April 28: Andrew Noz, “Lil B: Understanding Rap’s New Rebel”**  

Based Scripture: The Full Transcript of Lil B’s Lecture at NYU  

Songs
  • Lil B, “I Think I’m Based God”  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-K8lEFnFqcU


Explore this site:  http://yeezianity.com/

Eric Sundermann, “We interviewed the founder of Yeezianity, the first religion based on Kanye West”  http://noisey.vice.com/blog/yeezianity-kanye-west-religion-interview

Songs
  • Kanye West, “I am a God”  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ViGNBLQpGWE
  • Kanye West, “New Slaves”  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dT3swdCJrrg
  • Kanye West, “Jesus Walks”  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MYF7H_fpc-g
  • Kanye West ft. Adam Levine, “Heard ‘Em Say”  
    https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=elVF7oG0pQs

**Week 16: Paper Presentations**

**MAY 12: PAPER 3 DUE**
Administrative Home

The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences is the administrative home of this course and governs matters such as the add/drop deadlines, the second-grade-only option, and other related issues. Different colleges may have different policies. Questions may be addressed to 120 Schaeffer Hall, or see the CLAS Academic Policies Handbook at http://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook.

Electronic Communication

University policy specifies that students are responsible for all official correspondences sent to their University of Iowa e-mail address (@uiowa.edu). Faculty and students should use this account for correspondences (Operations Manual, III.15.2, k.11).

Accommodations for Disabilities

A student seeking academic accommodations should first register with Student Disability Services and then meet with the course instructor privately in the instructor's office to make particular arrangements. See http://sds.studentlife.uiowa.edu/ for more information.

Academic Honesty

All CLAS students or students taking classes offered by CLAS have, in essence, agreed to the College's Code of Academic Honesty: "I pledge to do my own academic work and to excel to the best of my abilities, upholding the IOWA Challenge. I promise not to lie about my academic work, to cheat, or to steal the words or ideas of others; nor will I help fellow students to violate the Code of Academic Honesty." Any student committing academic misconduct is reported to the College and
placed on disciplinary probation or may be suspended or expelled (CLAS Academic Policies Handbook).

CLAS Final Examination Policies

The final examination schedule for each class is announced by the Registrar generally by the fifth week of classes. Final exams are offered only during the official final examination period. **No exams of any kind are allowed during the last week of classes.** All students should plan on being at the UI through the final examination period. Once the Registrar has announced the date, time, and location of each final exam, the complete schedule will be published on the Registrar's web site and will be shared with instructors and students. It is the student's responsibility to know the date, time, and place of a final exam.

Making a Suggestion or a Complaint

Students with a suggestion or complaint should first visit with the instructor (and the course supervisor), and then with the departmental DEO. Complaints must be made within six months of the incident (CLAS Academic Policies Handbook).

Understanding Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment subverts the mission of the University and threatens the well-being of students, faculty, and staff. All members of the UI community have a responsibility to uphold this mission and to contribute to a safe environment that enhances learning. Incidents of sexual harassment should be reported immediately. See the UI Comprehensive Guide on Sexual Harassment for assistance, definitions, and the full University policy.

Reacting Safely to Severe Weather

In severe weather, class members should seek appropriate shelter immediately, leaving the classroom if necessary. The class will continue if possible when the event is over. For more information on Hawk Alert and the siren warning system, visit the Department of Public Safety website.