

# HIP-HOP MUSIC AND CULTURE

FALL 2015 / MUSC 420M  
TUESDAYS, 6:00-9:50PM  
THH 202

**Instructor: Dr. Sean Nye**

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Wednesdays, 3:00-5:00pm, or by appointment

MUS 305

**Teaching Assistant: Keenan Reesor**

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## **Course Description:**

In under forty years, hip-hop music has risen from local obscurity to become the single most popular and lucrative form of music in the world. This success has produced regional, national, and international culture(s) of hip-hop, which have in turn resulted in diverse representations and analyses, ranging from feature films to book-length publications. In this course, we will examine hip-hop from a dual perspective emerging from our present moment: (1) the history of hip-hop music and culture from the 1970s to the present and (2) current developments and debates in hip-hop, with special attention to Los Angeles.

During the semester, we will carefully read the classic history of hip-hop, Jeff Chang's *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation*. The course will also explore how musical processes like rapping, DJing, scratching, and sampling have evolved, as well as how styles and subgenres have proliferated. Furthermore, we will draw from cultural criticism to study social, political, and cultural phenomena such as constructions of race, neighborhood, and masculinity, misogyny and homophobia, political activism, and the uses of technology. When possible, we will also have guest speakers to discuss a range of issues in hip-hop music and culture.

No prior musical experience is required, but one of your tasks will be to develop a basic set of skills for discussing the structure and function of hip-hop songs.

## **Diversity statement:**

This course fulfills the Diversity Requirement by focusing on three areas of difference: race, nationality, and gender. Students will learn about how hip-hop has both articulated and refuted conventional notions of racial identity in the United States, how hip-hop negotiates issues of national identity (as distinct from racial identity), and how hip-hop artists and listeners construct gender.

## **Course Requirements:**

The class will be run in a lecture format, but you are also expected to keep up with weekly reading assignments and listening materials. In-class activities will include group work, discussion, and brief written responses. There will be five quizzes and two essays in this course. Please note: the *Blackboard* website will contain additional readings as well as a weekly listing of hip-hop tracks.

**Grading:**

You will be graded on the following items:

- five quizzes (see guidelines below in the syllabus): each worth 10% of the class grade. Four quizzes will be administered during class meetings, and one will take place during the Final Exam meeting specified by the university. Of these five possible quizzes, your *four highest grades* will count toward your grade.
- two essays, each worth 20% of your class grade. These are to be written outside of class and submitted (on paper) to me in class. No late essays will be accepted for any reason short of **serious, documented medical emergency**. A doctor's note explaining why you were unable to write the essay will be required for any extension to the due date.
- participation: worth 20% of your class grade. To receive full credit, you must attend class regularly, participate constructively in class discussions, and turn in brief written responses during class. It is your responsibility to make sure that you attend class consistently.

Grading is as follows:

90-100% = A  
80-89% = B  
70-79% = C  
65-69% = D  
below 65 = F

Pluses and minuses are as follows: B+ means 87 through 89; A- means 90 through 93, etc.

**How to Access Reading and Listening Materials:**

The syllabus and additional readings are available on Blackboard: <https://blackboard.usc.edu>  
Our library does not own recordings for most of the assigned listening, but they are easily streamed on Spotify or Apple Music, or available on YouTube.

**Essays:**

You will submit two (2) essays during the semester. Each essay should contain between 1000 and 1200 words, and will reflect on both the musical and lyrical content of hip-hop. The essays are not research assignments. Instead, you will focus on critical and aesthetic interpretations with information gleaned only from the assigned readings.

**Statement for Students with Disabilities**

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Website and contact information for DSP:  
[http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home\\_index.html](http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html), (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 814-4618 (Video Phone), (213) 740-8216 (FAX) [ability@usc.edu](mailto:ability@usc.edu).

## Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

### Academic Conduct

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Section 11, *Behavior Violating University Standards* <https://scampus.usc.edu/files/2015/08/SCampus-2015-16.pdf>. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct/>.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity* <http://equity.usc.edu/> or to the *Department of Public Safety* <http://capsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us>. This is important for the safety whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. *The Center for Women and Men* <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/> provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage [sarc@usc.edu](http://sarc@usc.edu) describes reporting options and other resources.

### Support Systems

A number of USC’s schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the *American Language Institute* <http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali>, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students. *The Office of Disability Services and Programs* [http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home\\_index.html](http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html) provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, *USC Emergency Information* <http://emergency.usc.edu/> will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

Schedule and Assignments:

(NB: all reading and listening assignments should be completed \*by\* the date listed, not after)

**25 August:** Introduction to Musical and Cultural Concepts; How do we talk about hip-hop in an academic setting?

**1 September:** Funk, Dub, and Soul, Early hip-hop 1

Reading:

*Can't Stop Won't Stop*, Prelude, Chapter 1, "Necropolis: The Bronx and the Politics of Abandonment," and Chapter 2, "Sipple Out Deh: Jamaica's Roots Generation and the Cultural Turn" (1-39)

Hsu, Hua. "Foucault's Turntable: Hip Hop Scholars Bumrush the Academy." *The Village Voice* (January 8 - 14, 2003).

**8 September:** Early hip-hop 2

Reading:

*Can't Stop Won't Stop*, Chapter 3, "Blood and Fire, with Occasional Music: The Gangs of the Bronx," Chapter 4, "Making a Name: How DJ Kool Herc Lost His Accent and Started Hip-Hop," and Chapter 5, "Soul Salvation: The Mystery and Faith of Afrika Bambaataa" (41-107)

**15 September:** Early hip-hop 3

QUIZ #1

Reading:

*Can't Stop Won't Stop*, Chapter 6, "Furious Styles: The Evolution of Style in the Seven-Mile World," and Chapter 7, "The World is Ours: The Survival and Transformation of Bronx Style" (109-40)

Screening in class:

*Wild Style*, dir. Charlie Ahearn

**22 September:** Early hip-hop 4

Reading:

*Can't Stop Won't Stop*, Chapter 8, "Zulus on a Time Bomb: Hip-Hop Meets the Rockers Downtown," Chapter 9, "1982: Rapture in Reagan's America," and Chapter 10, "End of Innocence: The Fall of the Old School" (141-211)

**29 September:** Afrofuturism and hip-hop

Reading:

Gabriela Jiménez, “‘Something 2 Dance 2’: Electro Hop in 1980s Los Angeles and Its Afrofuturist Link.” *Black Music Research Journal*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (131-44)  
Selections from Mark Dery, “Black to the Future,” *Flame Wars* (179-222)

Screening in class:

*The Last Angel of History*

**6 October:** Post-Civil Rights Era and Public Enemy 1

QUIZ #2

Reading:

*Can't Stop Won't Stop*, Chapter 11, “Things Fall Apart: The Rise of the Post-Civil Rights Era,” and Chapter 12, “What We Gotta Say: Black Suburbia, Segregation and Utopia in the late 1980s” (215-61)

**13 October:** Post-Civil Rights Era and Public Enemy 2, Turntablism

ESSAY 1

Reading:

*Can't Stop Won't Stop*, Chapter 13, “Follow For Now: the Question of Post-Civil Rights Black Leadership” (263-97)

Screening in class:

*Scratch* (2002), dir. Doug Pray

**20 October:** Los Angeles 1

Reading:

*Can't Stop Won't Stop*, Chapter 14, “The Culture Assassins: Geography, Generation and Gangsta Rap,” and Chapter 15, “The Real Enemy: The Cultural Riot of Ice Cube’s *Death Certificate*” (299-353)

(Required viewing)

*Straight Outta Compton* (2015)

**27 October:** Los Angeles 2

Reading:

*Can't Stop Won't Stop*, Chapter 16, “Gonna Work It Out: Peace and Rebellion in Los Angeles,” and Chapter 17, “All the Same Gang: The War on Youth and the Quest for Unity” (357-405)

**3 November:** Rap and Poetry

QUIZ #3

Reading:

Selections on rap as poetry

Screening in class:

*Something from Nothing: The Art of Rap*

**10 November:** Labels, Moguls, and Empires; Hip-hop capitalism 1

*Can't Stop Won't Stop*, Chapter 18, "Becoming the Hip-Hop Generation: *The Source*, the Industry, and the Big Crossover," and Chapter 19, "New World Order: Globalization, Containment, and Counterculture at the End of the Century" (407-65)

**17 November:** Hip-hop capitalism 2, Hip-hop misogyny, Progressive hip-hop

ESSAY 2

Reading:

Tricia Rose, *The Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk About When We Talk About Hip Hop – And Why It Matters* (selections)

**24 November:** Global hip-hop (case study of German hip-hop)

QUIZ #4

Reading:

Kathrin Bower, "Minority Identity as German Identity in Conscious Rap and Gangsta Rap: Pushing the Margins, Redefining the Center." *German Studies Review*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (377-98)

**1 December:** Los Angeles 3, Final exam review

Readings:

Selections on Blackboard

**FINAL EXAM (5<sup>th</sup> QUIZ): TUESDAY, 15 DECEMBER 2015, 7:00-9:00 PM**

**MUSC 420m (Hip-hop Music and Culture)**  
**Quiz Guidelines**

Five quizzes will be administered throughout the semester. All quiz dates are announced in the Class Schedule of the Syllabus. **Your four highest quiz grades will be kept; your lowest quiz grade will be dropped.**

**Format:** Each quiz will be distributed on paper. There is no need to bring your own paper or blue books, but you will need to bring your own writing implement (pen or pencil).

The quiz could ask you to:

- listen to and comment on a track played during the quiz period,
- answer questions relating to material covered in lecture,
- answer questions pertaining to an assigned reading.

How much do I write?:

Good responses are often no longer than one page in length, but there are no minimum or maximum length guidelines. Be succinct, not flowery.

How to study: If you attend lecture regularly and study your lecture notes, and if you complete the required readings on time, you will be more than adequately prepared to write excellent answers. What counts is that you can demonstrate some knowledge of musical characteristics, stylistic traits, and accurate historical and cultural context, **given what we have covered in class.**

Scheduling: Quizzes will be administered on the following dates:

- 15 September
- 6 October
- 3 November
- 24 November
- 15 December (7:00pm, during the Final Exam period)

Make-ups

If you do not attend lecture the day that any quizzes are scheduled, you will be allowed to make it up only if your absence was due to one of the following reasons:

- a documented illness (doctor's or health clinic's note required)
- a USC-affiliated sports event (coach's letter required; you must give me one week of advance notice.)
- observance of a religious holiday (you must give me one week of advance notice)

**No make-ups will be permitted for students who miss any quizzes due to Greek events, work, other class events (i.e., labs), etc.**

## Grade Rubric

Quizzes will be graded on a ten-point scale.

An "A" (i.e., 9 or 10) quiz will do the following:

- demonstrate that you have truly read and understood the arguments of assigned readings that pertain to your quiz prompt
- demonstrate that you have thought about the assigned listening, and are able to draw on examples from it to discuss various facets of hip-hop
- show clear organization, not just stream-of-consciousness ordering
- succeed in answering or addressing all facets of the quiz prompt in a satisfactory manner

A "B" quiz (i.e., 8) will do the following:

- succeed in answering or addressing all facets of the quiz prompt
- shows some familiarity with the assigned reading and listening, but not enough to make the response totally convincing
- shows adequate, but not crystalline, organization

A "C" quiz (i.e., 7) will do the following:

- address some of the quiz prompt, but not all of it to be considered a complete response
- does not draw on enough examples from assigned reading or listening to prove the argument
- lacks clear organization; wanders from idea to idea with no real thread

"D" and "F" quizzes (i.e., 6 and below) will do the following:

- ignore the quiz prompt, or address issues not raised in the prompt
- fail to draw on any assigned reading or listening
- be so short as not to count as adequate responses



### Course Calendar Overview

<b>August</b>	
25 <sup>th</sup>	
<b>September</b>	
1 <sup>st</sup>	
8 <sup>th</sup>	
15 <sup>th</sup>	QUIZ 1
22 <sup>nd</sup>	
29 <sup>th</sup>	
<b>October</b>	
6 <sup>th</sup>	QUIZ 2
13 <sup>th</sup>	ESSAY 1
20 <sup>th</sup>	
27 <sup>th</sup>	
<b>November</b>	
3 <sup>rd</sup>	QUIZ 3
10 <sup>th</sup>	
17 <sup>th</sup>	ESSAY 2
24 <sup>th</sup>	QUIZ 4
<b>December</b>	
1 <sup>st</sup>	
Finals week	<b><i>FINAL QUIZ (Dec. 15<sup>th</sup>)</i></b>