

USC University of Southern California

Hip Hop Music and Culture

Spring 2025

Tuesday and Thursday, 6:00 pm – 7:50 pm

MUSC 320, 4.0 Units

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Course Description:

In just several decades, hip-hop rose from local scenes in New York City to become the most popular and lucrative music genre worldwide. Hip-Hop's success has produced regional, national, and international cultures, which have resulted in diverse representations and sometimes appropriation. In this course, we will examine Hip Hop from the following perspectives: (1) the history of hip-hop music and culture from the 1970s to the present, (2) the humanization of Hip-Hop, (3) current developments, conversations and debates in hip-hop culture from Hip Hop owned spaces globally and (4) emphasizing Los Angeles contributions and influences that impact hip-hop culture.

We will pay particular attention to how musical processes such as rapping, DJing and sampling have evolved since the 1970s, as well as to how styles and subgenres have proliferated. Furthermore, we will assess Hip-Hop's success at translating itself from the music of disenfranchised minorities in multiple cities to *the* global musical language for the dispossessed—and, now, even the vernacular of mainstream popular culture. To explore the legacy of Hip Hop, MUSC 320 will draw from cultural curators to study social, political, and cultural phenomena such as constructions of race, neighborhood, and gender; masculinity and femininity within the culture; nuisances of perceived misogyny, homophobia and patriarchy; intellectual property and ownership; and political activism.

Note: No prior musical experience or knowledge of music notation 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 music.

GE-A (Arts) and GE-G (Citizenship in a Diverse World) aspects:

This course fulfills the GE-A and GE-G requirements by tracing how hip-hop bears witness to political, economic, and social turmoil, and what solutions it offers in moments of crisis. Students will examine the tools hip-hop provides for understanding race and ethnicity in an international context, especially in the cases of immigrant and diasporic communities. By the end of the semester, students will have a deeper appreciation for how Hip Hop artists and audiences conceive the rights and responsibilities of global citizenry.

Learning Objectives:

MUSC 320 will result in the acquisition of the following skills:

1. Critical Analysis: The course will empower learners to listen to hip-hop lyrics, music and “clip culture” with critical awareness, especially through employing terminology for musical characteristics (e.g. flow, cadence, tempo, mix, beats, use of literary tools). The course will also introduce students to Hip Hop owned outlets and research where discussions of hip-hop are grounded in such terminology. How do lyrics and music “translate” differently when hip-hop is consumed by listeners within its culture versus outside of its culture?

2. Knowledgeable Creation: We will explore the creative process of making hip-hop music through discussing, listening to and writing about specific albums and tracks. We will pay special attention to lyricism, style, impact, and sound. What is essential to the creative process of Hip-Hop music?

3. Describing Connectivity: A cornerstone of this class is Hip-Hop’s often fraught relationship with ideals of social, cultural, and economic liberation. We will engage in cultural topics related to gender, race, class, and sexuality; hip-hop’s position with regard to American myths of entrepreneurialism and success; and live experiences of rap and DJ culture, from block parties to music festivals. The class will explore the interconnectivity of hip-hop music and culture with mainstream American society in order to recognize how much they are one in the same. Who owns Hip Hop music and culture? Who gets to assign Hip Hop its value?

4. Identifying Context: Hip-Hop music birthed itself from a legacy of uniquely African American roots. From West African ring dance and its evolutionary formats that have been utilized as tools to escape various forms of historical oppression to exhibiting creativity and celebration, rap music and hip-hop culture are original expressions of the urban Afrodiasporic American community. We will consider the expansion of these dynamic expressions from which hip-hop emerged, while considering local, national, and international contexts. How have these multiple contexts shaped hip-hop’s development?

Email Communication:

Please address any class questions in person after class if possible. For email communication, you must email us *that week* if there are any issues related to needs within the class or other topics. Again, due to my rigorous out of class schedule, addressing needs in person after class would be the most effective means for communication: This will make sure we can address class logistics in a timely fashion.

In-Class Policy:

This course is being offered in an in-person modality, with online resources incorporated into the class utilizing Brightspace. Fully online and hybrid alternatives will not be considered unless we are presented with a directive from the offices of Student Health or Student Affairs. **If on any day you feel ill, please stay home.** In that case, please review the available material on Brightspace and contact your in-class student contacts for notes to stay updated on class topics. Hybrid options via Zoom are not available. Most assignments will happen in-class; failure to be present and in contact with classmates can impact your grade.

Language Statement:

Each student is accorded a right to free speech and expression, but language should respect our academic setting and diverse cohort. Though they may be common in contemporary music, epithets and slang rooted in racial, gender and sexual identity should be recognized as contextual to the individuals who choose to use them. Language that intentionally diminishes others based upon race, gender, sexual identity or other protected groups is not tolerated. We speak with the intent to add value to the class and one another: Speech that lacks this type of service for any human is not tolerated.

USC technology rental program

We realize that attending classes may require access to technology that not all students possess. If you need resources to successfully participate in your classes, such as a laptop or internet hotspot, you may be eligible for the university's equipment rental program. To apply, please [submit an application](#).

USC Technology Support Links:

[Brightspace help for students](#)

[Software available to USC Campus](#)

Course Requirements:

Please note: The Brightspace website will contain additional readings and other course-related materials and announcements.

Please review Brightspace weekly during the semester.

Grading:

You will be graded on the following items:

- 1 group research essay – Hip-Hop culture: **worth 20%**
- 1 creative reflection project – music, production, lyricism & content: **worth 20%**
- 1 listening spotlight – **10% total**
- 1 live event review – **10% total**
- Class Discussions & Assignments — **20% total** during class, activities will require presence and participation
- Homework Journals – **20% total** – brief responses will be due at the end of each week, consisting of standout points for each student

Attendance / Participation

1. Students are permitted a total of FIVE (5) absences (excused or unexcused) for the semester without a grade penalty. In case of absence, it is your responsibility to find out about assignments and prepare accordingly. You are expected to remain in contact with cohorts to find out about any missed work outside of Brightspace. Students may also contact the instructor with questions; however, the instructor reserves the right to limit office-hour advising in the instance of excessive absences. Please note: If you miss more than five classes, your grade WILL BE negatively impacted seeing that I do not accept late work.
2. If you become persistently sick or have other personal problems that interfere with this course, please contact me so that we may address the situation together.
3. In the case of religious observances or official travel for USC athletics: Notify us at least one week in advance and preferably at the start of the semester.

Grading is as follows:

90-100% = A

80-89% = B

70-79% = C

60-69% = D

below 60 = F

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

Technology and in-class conduct

You may use laptop computers or tablets for note-taking during lecture, and for accessing internet resources related to the class, but please refrain from e-mail, texting, social media, and other electronic activities that are unrelated to class. Especially in larger classes, this can be distracting. Non-class-related electronic activity during lecture may result in limiting your use of computers or a grade penalty. Please silence all phones and devices during class. Overall, technology is a tool to aid learning in our class; treat the class and everyone in it with respect by maintaining focus on the course and its materials during instruction.

Schedule and Assignments:

(Note: all reading assignments should be completed *by* the date listed, not after)

Special events are tentative dates for now; will update syllabus once dates are confirmed.

Due to my rigorous out of class schedule, late work will not be accepted. To keep up on assignments:

(1) Attend class regularly

(2) Keep weekly contact with classmates

(3) Check Brightspace consistently and

(4) Communicate possible discrepancies as soon as possible, preferably after class or via email.

Special Note: Hip-Hop is a living culture and community. Relatable current events arising in hip-hop and Cultural Curators will be interwoven into the course curriculum throughout the semester.

UNIT I: Hip-Hop Origins/History

Week 1: “So just let me introduce myself” (Humpty Dance, Shock G 1990)

Tuesday, January 14: Introductions, Syllabus review, Scope of class through unique lens

Thursday, January 16: Hip-Hop Studies & History

Reading:

“50 years of Hip-Hop: Exploring the Informative Influence of Hip-Hop on the Field of Social Work,”
Socialwork.columbia.edu, August 25, 2023.


[50 years of Hip-Hop: Exploring the Transformative Influence of Hip-Hop on the Field of Social Work](#)

Week 2: From P Funk to G Funk


Tuesday, January 21: 1520 Sedgwick Avenue; August 11, 1973

((Success has many fathers, but failure is an orphan. — Wayne Vaughn))

The Lox “Let’s Start Rap Over”:

 [Let’s Start Rap Over \(feat. Carl Thomas\)](#)

The Birth of Hip Hop:

 [The Birth of Hip Hop](#)

Thursday, January 23: Where You Think You Got Your Funk From?

Cultural Curator Guest Speaker: Musical historical data for how hip-hop sounds and why

Week 3: Early Urban East & West Coast

Tuesday, January 28: Hip-Hop, Afrodiasporic American & The Bronx

Reading:

Tricia Rose, “All Aboard the Night Train: Flow Layering and Rupture in Postindustrial New York,” in *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*. (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), **read 34-47, 47-61.**

[Rap Music and Black Culture in - Contemporary America](#)

Thursday, January 30: KDAY unites Black & Brown youth of LA

Reading:

[1580 KDAY — AND THE BEAT GOES ON. \[Never Before Published Full Draft. A... | by Brian Coleman | Medium](#)

Week 4: “I am a collaboration of generations before me.” (I Am, Wyann Vaughn 2008)

Tuesday, February 4: “The South got somethin’ to say” (Andre 3000 of Outkast, Source Awards 1995)

▶ Outkast winning Best New Rap Group at the Source Awards 1995

PICK HIP HOP CULTURAL RESEARCH GROUP

Thursday, February 6: “You could find The Abstract listenin’ to hip-hop/My pops used to say it reminded him of bebop”
(QTip of A Tribe Called Quest, Excursions 1991)

Cultural Curator Guest Speaker: Correlating Jazz and Hip-Hop

[A Tribe Called Quest – Excursions Lyrics](#)

UNIT 2: Hip-Hop & Cultural Identity

Week 5: Where you from. Homeboy?

Tuesday, February 11: Early Rap & Identity

Listening Spotlight 1:

▶ The Sugarhill Gang - Rapper's Delight (Official Video)

[Sugarhill Gang – Rapper's Delight Lyrics](#)

Listening Spotlight 2:

▶ N.W.A. - Straight Outta Compton (Official Music Video)

[N.W.A – Straight Outta Compton Lyrics](#)

Listening Spotlight 3:

▶ Geto Boys - Mind Playing Tricks On Me (Official Video) [Explicit]

[Geto Boys – Mind Playing Tricks on Me Lyrics](#)

Thursday, February 13: Poetry and Lyrical Identity

Reading:

📖 Vocabulary: Poetics of Hip Hop

▶ Poetic Literary Devices in Hip Hop

Nas, Kendrick, Rapsody, Common

Week 6: When I move you move (just like that) (Ludacris, *Stand Up* 2003)

Tuesday, February 18: Hip-Hop Dance & What It Says About You

Reading:

[The Miseducation of Hip-Hop dance](#) (E. Moncel Durden, Assistant Professor of Practice USC)

Thursday, February 20: Battle Zone & Tommy the Clown

[MEET TOMMY](#)

▶ Rize (2005) - Trailer

Week 7: Identity through Sound

Tuesday, February 25: Bringing It All Together

Discussion:

- What makes a song sound commercial: How did Hip Hop go Pop?
- What's a regional sound and who disapproves?

Thursday, February 27: Hip Hop, Compton & Culture

Culture Curator Guest Speaker: The importance of pushing positivity in Hip Hop messaging

📺 Kendrick Lamar - The Heart Part 5

[Kendrick Lamar – The Heart Part 5 Lyrics | Genius Lyrics](#)

[Step into the Yard 🏠🔪 ep. 53](#)

HIP HOP CULTURE GROUP ESSAYS DUE – Friday, February 28 – by 11:59 p.m.

Week 8: And that's the Culture.... (Kendrick Lamar, The Heart Pt. 5 2022)

Tuesday, March 4: HIP HOP CULTURE GROUP PRESENTATIONS

Thursday, March 6: HIP HOP REFLECTIONS

UNIT 3: Collaboration and Activism

Week 9: It Ain't a Hit 'til Nate Dogg spit! (Ice Cube, Gangsta Nation 2003)

Tuesday, March 11: The Posse Cut & Supergroups

Reading: [At 50, how Hip Hop went from subculture to the mainstream - University of California Press](#)

📺 A Tribe Called Quest - Scenario (Official HD Video)

[A Tribe Called Quest – Scenario Lyrics | Genius Lyrics](#)

📺 MOUNT WESTMORE – Big Subwoofer (Official Music Video)

[Snoop Dogg, Ice Cube, E-40, and Too \\$hort Are A Super Group For Graying Rap Fans](#)

[Damani Nkosi Bonus Track Posse Cut](#)

Thursday, March 13: The Importance of Features

Cultural Curator Guest Speaker: The importance of features & collaborations in Hip Hop music

📺 Intentions (featuring Chachi) | The Pollyseeds

[Terrace Martin Talks New Jazz Supergroup, Producing for Herbie Hancock](#)

📺 Lucy Pearl - Dance Tonight (Official Video)

📺 Complexion (A Zulu Love)

[Interview: Rapsody Details Her Feature on Kendrick Lamar's 'To Pimp a Butterfly' Album | Complex](#)

SPRING BREAK MARCH 16 - 23

Week 10: Fight the Power! (Public Enemy, 1990)

Tuesday, March 25: Political Rap, Protest, and Activism

Reading:

[Hip Hop & Activism, Rashad Grove for BET 2023](#)

📺 Self Destruction

[The Stop the Violence Movement – Self Destruction Lyrics](#)

📺 Public Enemy - Fight The Power (Official Music Video)

[Public Enemy – Fight the Power Lyrics](#)

📺 YG & Nipsey Hussle "FDT (Fuck Donald Trump)" (WSHH Exclusive - Official Music Video)

[YG – FDT Lyrics](#)

Thursday, March 27: R&B Features' perfect match with Hip Hop Music

In-class Group Assignment: Song composition relies on three key components: Melody, words and music.

Research rap songs with which you identify based on the melody of a singing feature (even outside of R&B). Choose the best match of song with hip-hop to present to the class. Be prepared to explain what makes the marriage of song and lyricism appealing (e.g. harmonics, cadence, chord progression, sample, melody, etc.).

Week 11: Hood Politics (Kendrick Lamar, TPAB 2015)

Tuesday, April 1: "Democrips & Rebloodicans" (Kendrick Lamar, TPAB 2015)

Discussion: Describe how you saw Hip Hop used in 2024's election. What did you see? How did it make you feel?

LISTENING SPOTLIGHT DUE BY 11:59 p.m.

Thursday, April 3: Hip Hop American Storytellers

Reading:

[17 of Hip Hop's most vivid storytellers](#)

Loren Kajikawa, "Eminem's 'My Name is': Signifying Whiteness, Rearticulating Race." *Journal of the Society for American Music* 3, no. 3 (2009): 341-363. [Signifying Whiteness...](#)

[ABOUT | FEMME IT FORWARD](#)

UNIT 4: Hip-Hop Membership Worldwide

Week 12: Who owns the Culture?

Tuesday, April 8: Hip Hop Owned Outlets with Global Reach

[I still love H.E.R. - Hip Hop Blog](#)

[Revolt TV](#)

[Raise It Up Wy — Wyann Vaughn](#)

📺 The Joe Budden Podcast Episode 753 | The Bleepless Pod – Great Hip Hop question:

Has Hip Hop done more harm than good

Thursday, April 10: Hip Hop Outlets with Global Reach

[The Breakfast Club | iHeart](#)

[Angie Martinez IRL | iHeart
The Source Magazine](#)

Week 13: Where my ladies at?

Tuesday, April 15: Lyrical Ladies

Reading:

[May, Claudia Taylor & Francis Group Cultural studies \(London, England\), 2013-07, Vol.27 \(4\), p.611-649](#)

- ▶ Little Simz - Boss (Official Video)
- ▶ Ill Camille: NPR Music Tiny Desk Concert
- ▶ Latto - Georgia Peach (Official Video)
- ▶ Rapsody: 3:AM/Green Eyes ft. Erykah Badu | The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon

Thursday, April 17: Party Girls

Cultural Curator Guest Speaker: What women in Hip-Hop represent—what “they’re” sellin’ ‘n’ ain’t tellin’

Week 14: Hip Hop Films & Music Videos

Tuesday, April 22: Hip Hop Film/Videos & Cultural Impact

Reading:

[Boyz N The Hood: A Colonial Analysis Nadell, James Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Journal of black studies, 1995-03, Vol.25 \(4\), p.447-464](#)

Boyz N the Hood
Friday
Paid in Full
Belly
Straight Outta Compton

Thursday, April 24: THANKSGIVING

Week 15: Internet Culture

Tuesday, April 29: Clip Culture

Discussion: How do we address Hip Hop clip culture with the skills and scope learned from class?

- How do we humanize what we see?
- What can we critically analyze?
- What can we determine from the content presented?
- How does this piece of conversation connect to its fuller story?
- Under what context was the content created?
- Who owns the outlet?
- What is the purpose for what we see?
- Who is paying for the content?
- Am I the target audience? If not, then who is?

Thursday, May 1: Guest Performance by Cultural Curator

FINAL CREATIVE REFLECTIVE PROJECT (Music, Production, Lyricism, Content): Due Thursday, May 8 (by 9 p.m.)

Sharing course material regulations: USC has a policy that prohibits sharing of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment.

SCampus Section 11.12(B)

Distribution or use of notes or recordings based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study is a violation of the USC Student Conduct Code. This includes, but is not limited to, providing materials for distribution by services publishing class notes. This restriction on unauthorized use also applies to all information, which had been distributed to students or in any way had been displayed for use in relationship to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the Internet or via any other media. (See Section C.1 Class Notes Policy).

USC technology rental program

We realize that attending classes online and completing coursework remotely requires access to technology that not all students possess. If you need resources to successfully participate in your classes, such as a laptop or internet hotspot, you may be eligible for the university's equipment rental program. To apply, please [submit an application](#). The Student Basic Needs team will contact all applicants in early August and distribute equipment to eligible applicants prior to the start of the fall semester.

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 Part B, Section 11, "Behavior Violating University Standards" policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on [Research and Scholarship Misconduct](#).

Students and Disability Accommodations:

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as

possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at osas.usc.edu. You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at osasfrontdesk@usc.edu.

Support Systems:

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call

studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call

suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press "0" after hours – 24/7 on call

studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX (EEO-TIX) - (213) 740-5086

eeotix.usc.edu

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298

usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care_report

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) - (213) 740-0776

osas.usc.edu

OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

USC Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 821-4710

campussupport.usc.edu

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion - (213) 740-2101

diversity.usc.edu

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu, emergency.usc.edu

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu

Non-emergency assistance or information.

Office of the Ombuds - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)

ombuds.usc.edu

A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice - (323) 442-3340 or otfp@med.usc.edu

chan.usc.edu/otfp

Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.