Hip Hop: History, Artistry, Culture

Hip hop is a phenomenal success story. Created by African American and Latino youth in the devastated South Bronx of the 1970s, hip hop has become a predominant form of popular culture around the world. It has succeeded not just commercially but has also become a main conduit for personal, political, and cultural expression. Few art forms hold such deep meaning for so many people in the course of their everyday lives. Perhaps hip hop has prospered because it is so flexible: you can use it in so many different, even contradictory ways. For example, you can use rap music to kick-start a party, glorify violence, launch a social movement, make money, or declare your feelings. Performed by millionaires, rap is also the voice of the people. Created in many nations, it still relies on African American urban aesthetics.

In this class we will ponder the many uses and contradictions of hip hop, focusing primarily on rap music but also exploring dance and graffiti art. Are all the uses of hip hop legitimate, whether silly or serious, pro-social or anti-social, mass-marketed or made up on the spot? We will read *The Anthology of Rap*, *The Hip Hop Wars*, and articles on hip hop’s history, contexts, and political implications. Every class will include discussion of readings, themes, and issues; art appreciation and critique; and our own performances. In the hip hop spirit of do-it-yourself community arts, we will create and share our own raps, poetry, memoir, music, and visual arts. The class’s final project will include a rap battle and poetry slam. Students will also write two academic papers, 4 reflections on the readings, and 4 pieces of creative writing.

Assignments

**28% Reflections and Creative Writing**, due Weeks 3, 4, 6, and 8. This assignment has 2 parts: 1.) Reflection: From one paragraph to 1 page of your own analysis and observations of the week’s readings and, if you wish, of last week’s class discussion. You might want to include a question or topic for the upcoming class discussion. Your reflection must include at least one reference to a particular page or passage. 2.) Creative writing: 1-2 pages of creative writing in prose or poetry. Can include rap, spoken word poetry, fiction, memoir, journal entries, or letters.

**25% Paper I**, due Week 7. 3-4 pages, open topic, on the readings and materials of Weeks 2-6.

**25% Paper II**, due Week 10. 3-4 pages, open topic, on Weeks 7-8 and the course as a whole.

**15% Final Artistic Project**, due Week 9. Poetry, rap, music, or art created for the rap battle and poetry slam.

**7% Attendance and Participation.**
Materials for Reading and Viewing

Required Book: Adam Bradley and Andrew DuBois, editors, The Anthology of Rap. For outside students, The Anthology of Rap is for sale at the UO bookstore. For inside students, the book will be distributed in class.

Other Required Reading: Articles and Book Excerpts: For outside students, the other readings are on the ENG 410 Blackboard site under Course Documents. For inside students, photocopies of the other readings will be distributed in class.

Required Film Viewing: Wild Style, Rize, and Hip Hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes. Students are responsible for watching these 3 movies on their own time. For outside students, these films are on reserve in the Douglass Listening Room at Knight Library. For inside students, these films will be shown on OSP TV.

Policies

Writing Assignments: You’ll do lots of writing in this class. Each paper should appear in polished final-draft form. We expect you to devote at least 16 hours each to papers I and II and several hours to each reflection and creative writing. Prof. Wheeler is happy to read drafts and talk about ways to up your game as a writer.

Late Paper Policy: I accept only one late paper per term, so please use this option wisely. “On Time” means in class the day the paper is due. If you choose to turn in a paper late, you must notify me in person the week before the class session when the paper is due. Late papers are due the following class session, unless you arrange with me otherwise. I reserve the right to refuse an unnotified late paper or a second late paper.

Participation: Active classroom participation is crucial to Inside-Out classes. We appreciate and rely on your talking and listening in class. If problems interfere with your performance or attendance, please let Prof. Wheeler know immediately, or at least as soon as possible. I am no fan of mysterious disappearances, so keep me in the loop.

Disability: If you have a disability we are happy to accommodate you. Just let us know what you need, preferably a little bit before you need it.
Weekly Schedule

Week 1: Introduction

Week 2: Hip Hop Begins
Read: George, “Hip Hop’s Founding Fathers Speak the Truth” (first article from That’s the Joint!) Selections from Hager, Hip Hop; Rose, Black Noise; Experience Music Project, yes yes y’all; and Castleman, Getting Up

Week 3: The Old School
Read: The Anthology of Rap pages 1-37, 57-80, 112-7
Watch: Wild Style
Write: Reflection and Creative Writing #1

Week 4: The Golden Age and the Arrival of L.A. Hip Hop
Read: The Anthology of Rap pages 119-129, 145-181, 201-247
Selection from Inside the L.A. Riots
Write: Reflection and Creative Writing #2

Week 5: The Golden Age and the L.A. Underground
Read: The Anthology of Rap pages 248-312
Selection from Morgan, The Real Hip Hop
Watch: Rize

Week 6: The Ethical Issues of Mainstream Rap
Read: The Anthology of Rap pages 325-332, 363-380, 410-446, 459-481, 490-511
Watch: Hip Hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes
Write: Reflection and Creative Writing #3

Week 7: Tupac, Wu-Tang, and More Ethical Issues
Read: The Anthology of Rap pages 511-524, 532-556
Selection from Bogazianos, 5 Grams
Write: Paper I due.

Week 8: New Millennium Rap and International Hip Hop
Read: The Anthology of Rap pages 559-579, 582-9, 600-604, 632-668, 692-701, 705-713
Articles by Helenon and Henderson from The Vinyl Ain’t Final
Write: Reflection and Creative Writing #4

Week 9: Rap Battle and Poetry Slam
Week 10: Closing Ceremony
Write: Paper II due.