2014

324-01D Religion and Hip Hop

Adam Clark

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THEO 324: Religion and Hip Hop  
Xavier University, Thursday Evening, Fall 2014

Professor: Dr. Adam Clark  
Office Hours: Hinkle 307
Time: Thursday 5:30- 9:15pm Smith G30  
Mailbox: Hinkle Hall #60
Phone: 745-3233  
Email: clarkadam@xavier.edu

Course Description

This course explores ethical and religious interpretations of hip hop culture. Special attention will be given to its dominant moral claim “Life is not about being good or bad, it’s about being real.” The construction of authenticity will be a guiding interpretative tool of the course as we explore the narrative origins of Hip Hop and analyze the public debates of critics and defenders of Hip Hop over its ethical content. This course will also explore how normative understandings of the religious function in Hip Hop and how hip hop, as an oppositional culture, critiques and reconfigures traditional modes of being religious. The oppositional interpretative frameworks within Hip Hop culture not only applies to the religious (and theological) but also to the anthropological (i.e. human person.) In this vein, this course examines how hip hop counters the politics of respectability rereads racial, cultural and gendered scripts.

Course Objectives

The aim of this course is to:

1) Familiarize students with the origins of Hip Hop
2) Help students understand and participate in some of the key public debates over the ethical veracity of Hip Hop culture
3) Offer an introductory understanding of how Hip Hop affirms, critique and reconfigures normative understandings of the “religious”
4) Explore how notions of authenticity (Keeping it real) are constructed in Hip Hop
5) Examine how constructs of race, gender and sexuality in Hip Hop challenge the politics of respectability
**Class attendance and participation:** Traditionally, it takes 16 weeks to earn 3 to 4 credit hours at Xavier. In a Weekend degree and half semester course, you have the opportunity to earn the same credit hours in only 8 (really 6) weeks. When you miss more than one class (or you come late/leave early on multiple occasions) you’re saying that you deserve in 6 (really 4) weeks what most Xavier students work to earn in 16. **You are allowed one absence per semester in an 8 week term.**

**You will not receive credit for the course if you have more than one absence. Exceptions are granted only under grave circumstances usually medical and at the discretion of the instructor.** Attendance will be taken at the beginning of class. Late arrivals should see the professor after class. Two late arrivals or early absences will count as an absence.

If you are forced to miss class, let your professor know ahead of time, if possible. You are responsible for what occurred during class (including syllabus changes, handouts, films, etc.) and making up missed material. Absence from a test, quiz, or presentation will only be permitted for grave circumstances and at the discretion of the instructor.

This is an unplugged classroom! No lap tops, cell phones or electronic devices are to be used during class as they can distract from engagement with class discussion. Electronic devices are only to be used during student presentations.

**Students must check their XAVIER email regularly**

Important notifications in cases of emergency and updates about course material, assignments, etc. will be sent via Xavier, not private, email. Make sure you direct all Canvas notifications to your Xavier email address.

**Academic reflection papers:** You will be required to type a 1-2 page single-spaced response to the readings on designated weeks. Your response should restate the author’s main idea in your own words and answer the weekly reflection question. **Your reflection papers will be assessed on the quality of engagement with the assigned readings.** Ask yourself, how well have you identified, discussed and articulated the thesis and arguments of the authors? Have I effectively responded to the reflection question? It is strongly recommended that you purchase a separate notebook for note taking when you do homework assignments. Write down your responses to the readings and formulate questions to bring to class. You will not receive a letter grade on these responses. Instead you will receive a credit (CR), (CR+), (CR-), no credit (NC) or a credit with distinction (CD).

**Late policy on papers:** Please submit hard copy of papers each Thursday at the end of class. Late papers are penalized ½ grade per day.
**GROUP PRESENTATIONS:** Each student will be asked to sign up for an in-class presentation. These presentations are to be 30 minutes long and should be informative and creative. The informative requirement of the presentation is satisfied by providing a cogent exposition of the assigned readings and highlighting the author(s) main arguments and concerns. The creative element is accomplished by selecting a contemporary social issue and placing it in dialogue with the major theme of the week. This should be done with the intent of making the academic issues “come alive” for your classmates. In addition, each group must provide discussion questions for the class based on the readings.

**Criteria for evaluation**

You will be evaluated by 1) **Content:** How well did your group understand analyze and discuss the assigned readings 2) **Communication and Engagement:** How well did your group communicate significant issues and engage the class? Is your presentation interactive? Did you provoke class members to ask questions and become interested in the material? 3) **Visual Aids:** What was the quality of your visual aids and how well did they illustrate the assigned readings. **You will be required to turn in PowerPoint or visual aid.**

**GRADING:**

45% = 3 Weekly Reflection Papers (15% each)
40% = Final Exam
15% = Group Presentations and overall Preparation

**Required Texts**

All readings are on Canvas. Open Canvas, go to the module tab on the left, press tab and the readings will appear.
Course Schedule

October 23

Introduction and Overview

Old Skool: The Origins of Hip Hop

October 30
Michael Eric Dyson, “The Culture of Hip Hop” (401-410) in *The Michael Eric Dyson Reader*

Tricia Rose, “Voices from the Margins: Rap Music and Contemporary Black Cultural Production” (1-20) in *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black*

Matt Miller, Rap’s Dirty South: From Subculture to Popular Culture in *That’s The Joint: The Hip Hop Studies Reader* (270-293) in *That’s The Joint: The Hip Hop Studies Reader*

Errol Henderson, Black Nationalism and Rap Music

Davarian Baldwin, Black Empires and White Desires the Spatial Politics of Identity in the Age of Hip Hop (229-246) in *That’s The Joint: The Hip Hop Studies Reader*

Academic Reflection Question: Give an account of the origins of Hip Hop in the North and South?

Hip Hop and Cultural Wars

November 6
Readings from Tricia Rose, *The Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk about when We Talk about Hip Hop and Why it Matters.*

Rose, Introduction (1-29)
Rose, Hip Hop Causes Violence (33-60)
Rose, Hip Hop Reflects Black Dysfunctional Ghetto Culture (60-74)
Rose, Hip Hop Hurts Black People (75-94)
Rose, Just Keeping It Real (133-147)
Rose, There are Bitches and Hoes (167-185)
Rose, Six Guiding Principles for Progressive Creativity, Constitution and Community in Hip Hop and Beyond (261-273)

Academic Reflection Question: Choose one of the debates above, for example, Does Hip Hop Cause Violence, discuss the author’s arguments and assess the strengths or weakness of her reasoning?
Religious Studies and The Interpretation of Hip Hop

November 13

Monica Miller, And The Word became Flesh: Hip Hop Culture and the (In)coherence of Religion (71-96) in Religion and Hip Hop


Mark Lewis Taylor, Bringing Noise, Conjuring Spirit: Rap as Spiritual Practice (107-130) in Noise and Spirit: The Religious and Spiritual Sensibilities of Rap Music

Academic Reflection Question: According to Anthony Pinn, how do Tupac and Snoop Dog challenge traditional interpretations of religion?

It Takes A Nation of Millions to Hold us Back: The Problem of Authenticity in Hip Hop

November 20


Jeffrey Ogbar, Real Niggas: Race, Ethnicity, and the Construction of Authenticity in Hip Hop (37-71) in Hip Hop Revolution

RAT Judy, On the Question of Nigga Authenticity (103-115) in That's The Joint: The Hip Hop Studies Reader

Robin D G Kelly, Lookin for the Real Nigga: Social Scientist Construct the Ghetto (135-152) in That's The Joint: The Hip Hop Studies Reader

November 27

NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING BREAK
Ladies First: Gender and Sexuality in Hip Hop

December 4
Shane Lee, Flipping the Sexual Script: The Social Construction of Sexuality (1-9) in Erotic Revolutionaries: Black Women, Sexuality and Popular Culture
Imani Perry, The Venus Hip Hop and The Pink Ghetto: Negotiating Spaces for Women (155-190) in Prophets of the Hood
Katherin Gines, Queen Bees and Big Pimps: Sex and Sexuality in Hip Hop in (92-104) Hip Hop and Philosophy

Gangsta’s God

December 11
Readings from Ebony Utley in Religion and Rap: Understanding the Gangsta’s God
Ebony Utley: Introduction: Understanding the Gangsta’s God (1-9)
Ebony Utley, The Jesus Piece (49-67)
Ebony Utley, Dealing with the Devil (69-92)
Ebony Utley, Godly Power (93-109)
Ebony Utley, The Rap on Rap and Religion (111-136)
*Study Questions for Final Exam will be distributed

December 18
In Class Final Exam--Bring Blue or Green Book.