

This is my third* time teaching this course. There are still some things that I'm trying to improve upon, but the overall content is solid. The first obstacle is getting students to realize that a course about hip hop isn't just arguing about the Top 5 rappers of All Time or getting to the bottom of who killed Tupac and Biggie. I try to include some of that here and there, as well, but hip hop studies is a legitimate field that can play in the big leagues. Looking forward to the term.

*I have taught the course twice before and this journal will focus on offerings 3-6.



RAP, RESISTANCE & RELIGION

CULS 3310



CULS 3310 (01) – Rap, Resistance, and Religion – Winter 2018
Mondays 4:30pm-7:00pm, SAC 501

Instructor: Michael McGuire
e-mail: michael.mcguire@msvu.ca

Office: SAC 344 (B)
Office Hours: by appointment

Rap, Resistance, and Religion will examine contemporary debates around religion through the lens of hip hop culture, including how religious traditions are expressed through hip hop; how hip hop functions as a religious system in its own right; and how hip hop has changed the way religion is depicted and viewed in popular culture.



Warning: This course will examine content that may be considered offensive. This includes language that is profane, misogynistic, homophobic, and racially charged. This content does not reflect the values/opinions of the instructor/university and is presented for purely academic purposes.

I wasn't sure that I should add this. It seems gimmicky and, though it does evoke a bit of rebelliousness, it also foregrounds the idea that the content of this course can be difficult, so I included it.

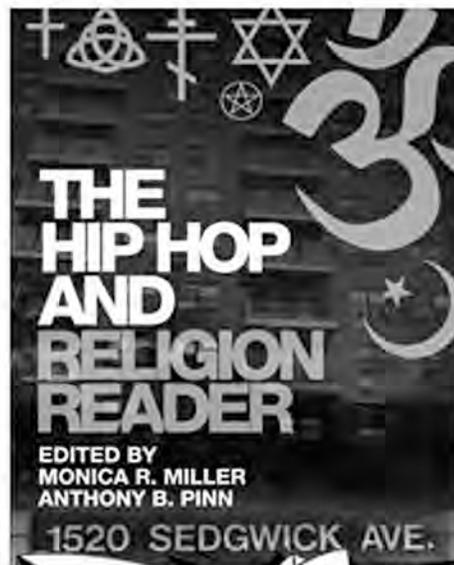
Admittedly, this is not an easy text. Nor is it a cheap one. Miller and Pinn are the two foundational scholars in the field of hip hop and religion, and there is a bit of an inside baseball feel to the text. Some of it can be a bit dense, and for students coming at this course as an elective because they like hip hop, it can be a bit daunting. It's necessary, though, to draw out the concepts because they form the whole theoretical lens we're using to interpret and discuss hip hop culture. Further, as this is my third time using the text, I continue to be frustrated by the chapters on Christianity and hip hop. The authors' tone is oddly condescending toward hip hop. I may need to find a different text, but there aren't (m)any available.

Course Text:
Miller, Monica R and Anthony B., Pinn, eds.
The Hip Hop and Religion Reader.
New York, NY:Routledge, 2015.

The textbook is available through the MSVU Bookstore.

Students are not required to purchase the albums for the second half of the course, but it is their responsibility to acquire a copy to listen to, either physical (CD, vinyl) or digital (Youtube, iTunes, Spotify), through whatever means they have available. Please let your instructor know if you have difficulty finding an album.

Knowing full-well that students expect to listen to rap music in a course about hip hop, I include 'readings' of playlists or albums to give them a chance to hear some of what we are talking about in a way that conforms to their own musical listening habits. Unlike a traditional text-based article, these 'readings' can be consumed passively and still gives students an impression of the content being discussed in class.



Graffiti styling & font for hip hop aesthetic

moodle

Moodle login: <http://moodlelive.msvu.ca>

Moodle Student Guide:

<http://moodlelive.msvu.ca/mod/resource/view.php?id=34234>

Technical Help: If you require assistance with Moodle and/or Elluminate Live, please first contact Distance Learning:

Monday-Friday, 8 a.m. – 4 p.m. (AST), (902) 457-6717;
First week of term only, additional help is available
Monday-Friday, 4p.m. – 8:30 p.m. (AST), (902) 457-5067;

For after-hour emergencies, please contact the Mount Switchboard: (902) 457-6788;

Email: online@msvu.ca



RAKIM

Legendary rapper who helped to grow rap lyrics from simple rhymes into complex rhyme schemes!

I am definitely getting better at using Moodle to manage the course. I've been focusing on making it look and function like a website from the student side, but have since learned that I can make it just as slick on my end with the built-in tools.

This time around, instead of alternating between 'theory days' where we focus on the text and 'music days' where we look at artists who exemplify what we've learned about (even though some music is played on 'theory day', as well), I'm going to try doing book work in the first half of the course and analytical work in the second half. Still trying to find the right balance, as the alternating method sometimes meant getting into content that we hadn't yet learned to contextualize and process. I hope that this front-loaded approach will nail down the theory before we get Introduction down to analysis. I've also asked the students to write weekly reflections to encourage reading the text.

Need to devote a whole class to hip hop history. The brief overview we've been doing isn't giving enough background to students who aren't already somewhat familiar.

Situating Religion and Hip Hop

Reading: No one seems terribly excited about doing readings.

Part I - Setting the Context, Framing the Discussion

(p. 7 - 62) Students are all sitting on the edges of the classroom. Will have to do something about that. Hinders discussion.

Finding Religion in Hip Hop Culture

Reading: Again, few did the readings. It's important that they do,

Part II - What's the Religion in Hip Hop? because without that context (p. 63-98) the things I'm saying in class must seem quite disjointed.

Hip Hop and Islam

Reading:

Part IV - Hip Hop and Religious Traditions (Islam) and origins of some well known hip hop slang/tropes. Engagement!

Limiting examinations of formal religious expression to Islam and Christianity feels... limited.

Hip Hop and Christianity

Reading: Students agree the section from text on Christianity is flawed.

Part IV - Hip Hop and Religious Traditions (Christianity) Heavy bias.

(p. 234 - 301) Need to find alternative readings, but if we drop this, then the rest of the text may not be worth keeping.

Hip Hop Is Something You Live

Reading: Nixed this class because we are a week behind and the

Part V - Hip Hop As Religion concepts can be folded into later classes.

(p. 375 - 420) *Very few questions about the Mixtape assignment due next week.*

JANUARY 8

JANUARY 15

JANUARY 22

Missed a week due to illness.

JANUARY 29

FEBRUARY 5

FEBRUARY 12

SUPREME ALPHABET

A: Allah	N: In or Now Nation
B: Be or Born	O: Cypher
C: Cee (See)	P: Power
D: Divine	Q: Queen
E: Equality	R: Rule or Ruler
F: Father	S: Self, Savior
G: God	T: Truth or Square
H: He or Her	U: You, Universe, and U-N-I-Verse
I: I or Islam	V: Victory
J: Justice	W: Wisdom (Woman)
K: King or Kingdom	X: Unknown
L: Love Hell or Right	Y: Why
M: Master	Z: Zig-Zag-Zig

SUPREME MATHEMATICS

1 - Knowledge
 2 - Wisdom
 3 - Understanding
 4 - Culture/Freedom
 5 - Power/Refinement
 6 - Equality
 7 - God
 8 - Build/Destroy
 9 - Born
 0 - Cipher



gods & earths

Probably extraneous, but we talk about these concepts in class and students have always scrambled to write them down, so I figured I'd put them here for reference.

This is from the Nation of Gods and Earths, an offshoot of the Nation of Islam. It is a gnostic tradition, and they use these 'Supreme Sciences' to break down concepts and reveal the true nature of the universe.

Feeling much better about the theory up front approach, as we actually have a theoretical framework for analysis in the second half. I typed up a one-sheet that summarizes the pertinent concepts and the kinds of questions we should be asking as we get into part two of the course.

FEBRUARY 26

Mistape assignment due today! Sadly, only one student opted to make a proper mistape! The rest wrote papers.



Brother Ali
All The Beauty In This Whole Life
2017

Mos Def
Black On Both Sides
1999



Went well, but are these two artists really the best representatives for Islam in hip hop?



Kanye Day!

Always an interesting discussion. Kanye continues to be divisive, but he is essential to the course.

MARCH 5

Kanye West
Yeezus
2013

Kanye West
The Life of Pablo
2016



MARCH 12

Chance is kind of boring, but wears religion on his sleeve. Need to bring KL's To Pimp A Butterfly back, but keep Damn. as well.



Chance the Rapper
Coloring Book
2016

Kendrick Lamar
Damn.
2017



Truth be told, I am not a fan of Chance the Rapper.



Rapsody sort of worked, Cyhi didn't. Overestimated the need to have new albums included. Scratch this.

MARCH 19

Rapsody
Laila's Wisdom
2017

Cyhi the Prynce
No Dope on Sundays
2017



Overall, I'm feeling like the department wants me to lean into the religion side of the course, but I feel like I'm stretching to make that the focus throughout. Instead of treating resistance as a function of religious expression, I think I'm going to shift the focus toward a broader view of resistance as it will allow me to do less cherry-picking for content and more teaching about actual hip hop culture.

The review for this course was made easy by the creation of the document I passed out after we completed the first half. Since we spent the last several weeks actually analyzing content, everyone was well acquainted with the kind of work they had to do for the final exam. I'm trying to think of a way to teach those concepts more directly, without having to wade through some of the denser readings. That may not be possible as there are so few resources in this new field. Will investigate.

MARCH 21

Course review and take-home exam will be provided.

The final exam gave students a choice between four albums (each representing one of the major themes of the course) and asked them to do a thorough analysis of the content using the kinds of methods we developed in class.

APRIL 9

Take Home Exam Due by 11:59pm.
typo!



assignments

Participation	10
Reflections	30
Mixtape	30
Final Exam	30

Need a better rubric for participation.

*Need to rethink all of this.
Feels stale and perfunctory.*

ongoing

ongoing *There has to be a better way to get students into the text. That's where*

February 26 *al the theory is!*

April 9

See over =>

It's difficult to break away from a banking model of education when dealing with course content that is unfamiliar to most students and texts that can be dry and impenetrable despite the popularity of their subject matter. In-class discussions usually revert to the same students engaging week after week while others hide in the back of the room. I want to do something different, but need to figure out how to do that without sacrificing the academic rigor of the existing course content.



participation

Value: 10 pts

Should it be for attendance? Active participation? I'm never sure what to make of it, but know it needs to be included.

Seems like an easy 10 points, but where is the value in it?.

Per MSVU regulations, attendance of all classes is mandatory. An attendance sheet will be passed around at the beginning of class. Missing more than three (3) classes will result in the forfeiture of your participation points.

This course deals in complex issues, and completing weekly readings is essential to understanding in-class discussions. Do the readings, come prepared, and join the discussion.

Outright begging them to read at this point.



reflections

Value: 30 pts Due Date: Ongoing Length: approx. 300 words

Above: Public Enemy.

Throughout the course, you must submit a reflection on each week's assigned readings and in-class discussions. There are 11 weeks in the course, and you must submit at least 10 reflections. Half of the course has musical 'readings', so those reflections double as practice for the final exam. Your reflections should be critical reflections on your experience with the course and its content, not summaries of what was discussed. What is something you learned? What do you think about it? What do you want to learn more about? How does it help you to understand the connections between rap, resistance, and religion?

These reflections must be uploaded or posted to Moodle by Friday of each week at 11:59pm. Submission links are found in each course module.

I don't like reflections. I might in a class with fewer students, but it is currently too much to give meaningful feedback to, and the assignment feels like it is less about a learning outcomes and more about text engagement. While that's valuable, and vital to getting the fundamental concepts of the course, I'd like to find a different way to go about it, a different path to the outcomes. I'll have to look into what the regulations are about assignments.