

ENGL 6090 Hip Hop's Literature
Professor J. Saffold

Course Description: Hip Hop's Literature considers the cultural spread of a youth expressive movement turned billion-dollar global industry through a prism of contemporary African American literature. Focusing novels like *The Coldest Winter Ever* and *Flyy Girl* and seminal historical texts like *Can't Stop, Won't Stop*, this course will chart how hip hop used raps on wax and print narratives to illuminate the plight of urban America while charting new directions in Black cultural expression that revolutionized entertainment and the arts. We will consider how hip hop catalyzed technological advances in sound and streaming media. This course will also take up important theoretical debates such as the pairing of feminism and hip hop to help students understand the ways hip hop created and defined American culture. Our explorations will ask students to consider how the historiographical "schools" of Hip Hop were conversant with the social, political, and economic concerns of the late twentieth century and the early twenty-first century.

Course Objectives:

Generally, this course seeks to:

- Establish a literary history in hip hop
- Explore the intersections of African American literature, American popular culture, and digital technologies
- Pioneer twenty-first century techniques in Afro-digital storytelling
- Provide non-traditional writing assignments geared towards improving digital writing skills

Specifically, at the end of this course, students should:

- Have a nuanced understanding of the major themes and concepts in hip hop literature
- Gain familiarity with how to create data visualizations based on literature data
- Have a mastery of basic webhosting skills.
- Produce complex written arguments with multi-modal media evidence
- Know the new approaches and trends in literature studies

Course Assignments:

Class Participation (10%)

This class is primarily discussion based, making class participation and active involvement paramount. Students will receive a participation credit for every class meeting. Class discussions are meant to move us closer to the text. When contributing to the discussion be sure to have a thoughtful contributive comment that is grounded in the text. Class participation constitutes contributing to discussions in session and completing all in-class assignments.

Weekly Discussion Questions (10%)

Each week, course participants will prepare **3-5 questions** based on the week's reading to help guide class discussion. These questions are designed to spark critical conversations and therefore should be well conceived and substantive. Students are encouraged to reference (and share via hyperlink) any additional resources that may have helped generate the question or have proven useful to the course. If the question is in reference to a specific passage, please provide a parenthetical quote or text citation information along with the question.

Questions are due each Monday by 5pm. No late question submissions will be accepted.

Open Text Diary- (20%)

This class will be exploratory by necessity. We will be reading and researching in a little-known niche of African American literature. As you read and research for class keep an open diary of what you find, how you feel, what you think, and what you wonder. This is space for you to document what you find pertinent. You are encouraged to read and comment on each other's diaries.

Hype Williams Effect Project (50%):

This semester we will complete a group project on Hype Williams' career as a music video director. We will consider if Hype Williams' unique directorial style effected how hip hop was able to crossover into mainstream American music. Specifically, we will build a dataset in Microsoft excel, cataloguing all (or as many as possible) songs of Williams' music directing career. We are seeking to know if there is a correlation between Williams' directorial choices and the popularity and success of different kinds of songs.

Throughout the semester, students will be introduced to a host of digital humanities tools and strategies to aid in completing the project. Students are responsible for assigning and delegating work (a task manager role may prove prudent). A peer evaluation will be provided for each part submission to ensure all students are actively and equitably contributing to the project.

Students will present the final project to a panel of Black Digital Humanities and Hip Hop Studies experts from the wider academic community. The panel of experts will provide the project team with guidance on how to strengthen the project, which is to be incorporated into the final project submission.

- Hype Effect Project Plan (Due March 2) 10%
- Hype Effect Project—Part I (Due March 16) 20%
- Hype Effect Project—Part II (March 30) 20%
- Hype Effect Project—Part III (Apr. 22) 20%
- Hype Effect Presentation (May 11) 10%
- Final Hype Effect Project (Due May 14) 30%

University of New Orleans Grading Scale

A: 90-100
B: 80-89
C: 70-79
D: 60-69
E: 59-0

Required Texts:

Black Noise by Tricia Rose
Flyy Girl by Omar Tyree
The Coldest Winter Ever by Sister Souljah
G-Spot by Noire
When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost: A Hip Hop Feminist Breaks it Down by Joan Morgan
Confessions of a Video Vixen by Karrin Steffans
True to the Game by Teri Woods

Academic Honesty

Any instances of academic dishonesty will be addressed according to the University's Academic Honesty Policy (See <https://www.uno.edu/media/15321> for additional information). Academic dishonesty includes but is not limited to:

- *Cheating*- intentional use or attempted use of trickery, artifice, deception, breach of confidence, fraud and/or misrepresentation of one's academic work
- *Fabrication*- intentional and unauthorized falsification and/or invention of any information or citation in any academic exercise
- *Plagiarism*- knowingly representing the words or ideas of another as one's own work in any academic exercise. This includes submitting without citation, in whole or in part, prewritten term papers of another or the research of another, including but not limited to commercial vendors who sell or distribute such materials
- *Facilitating dishonesty*- knowingly helping or attempting to help another commit an act of academic dishonesty, including substituting for another in an examination, or allowing others to represent as their own one's papers, reports, or academic works

Reading Schedule

Unit I—Hip Hop: a History

Feb. 4 Welcome and Syllabus Review
Can't Stop, Won't Stop by Jeff Chang

Feb. 11 *Black Noise* by Tricia Rose

Feb. 18 **Mardi Gras (No Class)**

Feb. 25 *Flyy Girl* by Omar Tyree (early class dismissal day)
Hype Effect Project Plan Due

Unit II—Hip Hop Goes Mainstream

Mar. 4 *The Coldest Winter Ever* by Sister Souljah

Mar. 11 *G-Spot* by Noire
Hype Effect Project—Part I Due

Mar. 18 Excerpts from *A Rose That Grew From Concrete* by Tupac Shakur and *Decoded* by Jay-Z
Hype Effect Project—Part III Due

Mar. 25 Watch *Juice*; *Belly*; or *Brown Sugar* (student selection)
Hype Effect Project—Part II Due

Unit III—Black Women’s Hip Hop

Apr. 1 Selfcare week (No assigned work, please use this time to check on your well being)

Apr. 8 *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost: A Hip Hop Feminist Breaks it Down* by Joan Morgan

Apr. 15 *Confessions of a Video Vixen* by Karrin Steffans

Apr. 22 Excerpts from *Nobody’s Supposed to Know*, select episodes of *Trapped in the Closet*, watch *Surviving R. Kelly*

Apr. 29 *True to the Game* by Teri Woods

May 6 **Hype Effect Project Presentation**

Final Project Due May 14, 2021