AAAS 155B
HIP HOP HISTORY AND CULTURE

Brandeis University
Fall 2020

Synchronous Meeting Days and Times
Monday/Wednesday 10:00am-11:30am (EST)

Zoom Link
https://brandeis.zoom.us/j/93259229151 (also available on LATTE)

Instructor
Professor Chad Williams
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Office Hours: Thursday, 10:00am-12:00pm, by appointment

Course Assistants
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

From its birth in South Bronx of New York in the early 1970s, hip hop has today become a defining feature of American and global culture in the 21st century. The current influence of hip hop is undeniable, as it in various ways permeates every aspect of social, political, economic and cultural life in the United States and beyond. Yet hip hop remains a subject of at times fierce contention and misunderstanding. This course aims to provide an overview of the history of hip hop and critical examination of its ongoing evolution. We will use hip hop as a lens to examine the history of African Americans, the United States and the broader African diaspora from the 1960s to the present. Our focus will be on key historical developments and debates that have shaped the ongoing evolution of hip hop culture.

LEARNING GOALS

- Understand the evolution of hip hop in the context of late 20th and early 21st century United States, African American and African diaspora history.
- Develop an ability to think critically about key issues and debates that have and continue to shape hip hop culture.
- Critically analyze and historically contextualize audio and visual sources related to hip hop.
REMOTE LEARNING AND INSTRUCTION

This class is a remote instruction course. It consists of a combination of *synchronous* (live) class meetings and *asynchronous* (offline) work.

Synchronous class meetings will be conducted on Zoom. Additional information about Zoom and frequently asked questions can found [here](#).

All asynchronous work will be conducted on LATTE. LATTE (Learning and Technology Teaching Environment) is the Brandeis learning management system that enables Brandeis faculty members and students to engage in online education. You can access LATTE [here](#) by using your UNET ID and password.

**Technology Requirements:**
- A Zoom enabled computer with webcam and microphone
- Word processing software (such as Microsoft Word or Google Drive) to complete assignments
- Stable WIFI connection for class meetings and access to required readings and videos
- Access to the Brandeis University Library webpage and resources

Please inform me as soon as possible if you have any trouble meeting these technological requirements. Students with financial needs can should contact [Student Financial Services](#) to discuss options for assistance.

Synchronous class sessions will not be recorded as a matter of privacy. During synchronous class sessions students must not engage in recording of any kind, including screen shots. I will make any PowerPower presentations available on the course LATTE site.

Brandeis, like all colleges and universities, has undergone an abrupt shift to remote learning and reliance on various digital technologies for classroom instruction. This has been accompanied by expectations, for students and faculty alike, to learn, utilize, and ideally master certain digital literacy skills. The AAAS department recognizes that technology and digital literacy are not race-neutral, and that remote learning can reinforce both personal and systemic existing inequities along various lines of experience and identity. We are committed to an ethical pedagogical approach to these issues that centers the circumstances and needs of each individual in the class, as well as our collective well being.
Required Readings

We will be reading the following books:


*Can’t Stop Won’t Stop* is the only book you are required to purchase. The other books are accessible in electronic format through the Brandeis University Library. While I certainly encourage you to purchase the other books, you are not required to do so. If you are having difficulty purchasing course materials, please make an appointment with your Student Financial Services or Academic Services advisor to discuss possible funding options and/or textbook alternatives.

All assigned articles and essays will be made accessible on LATTE either as PDFs or links to the electronic version.

You are expected to complete all readings and assignments on time as indicated on the course schedule.

Course Playlist

In addition to the required readings, each class you will have five assigned songs/videos to listen/view from our course playlist. YouTube links to the songs and videos for each class can be accessed on the course LATTE site.

Cypher Groups

Whether in the form of an MC freestyle or breakdance battle, the “cypher” is a central feature of hip hop. Invoking the “ring-shout” and other traditions in African diasporic culture, the cypher is characterized by group interaction, individual performance, improvisation, creative confrontation and constructive accountability. The cypher is also an intellectual space for critical thinking.

The class will be divided into “cypher” discussion groups. You will have the same cypher group for the full semester. Your cypher will serve as an opportunity to have synchronous in-class discussions, share thoughts in asynchronous discussion boards, and get peer feedback on your research projects.
**Reading Reflections and Discussions**

Within your cyphers and using the course LATTE discussion board, you will have the opportunity to reflect, question and discuss the assigned readings and playlist selections. These are your thoughts, ideas and expressions and therefore, respecting the inherent individuality of hip hop, do not need to adhere to specific guidelines. You may pose questions; share personal thoughts; offer in depth analysis; make informed critiques. However, your posts must be on topic and designed to generate continued discussion.

Your posts will be graded on a “full credit,” “partial credit,” and “zero credit” basis.

*Full credit:* Direct engagement with and citation of the assigned readings and/or playlist selections. Clear demonstration of critical thought.

*Partial credit:* Partial engagement with and citation of the assigned readings and/or playlist.

*Zero credit:* No submission.

**Your submissions are due by 10:00pm before our next class.**

Additionally, by **Friday** of each week you are required to submit *at least one response* to the post of one of your cypher group members. These responses should reflect your serious engagement with the issues, questions and subject matter and be respectful.

**Hip-Hop Album Research Paper**

This research paper will be based on your analysis and historical contextualization of a specific hip hop record released *before* the year 2000. A list—by no means exhaustive—of potential albums to choose from is available on the course LATTE site. After choosing a record, your research must address the background of the artist, the historical context in which the record was produced, and its significance in the broader context of hip hop history. A detailed explanation of the research paper, including scaffolded deadlines, will be posted on LATTE.

**Final Exam**

The take-home final exam will consist of a number of short answer essays. The final exam will be comprehensive. The exam questions will be posted on LATTE on **December 2**. The exam is due by **December 15 by 8:00pm (EST)** on LATTE. *Late exams will not be accepted.*

**Grading Breakdown**

- Weekly Discussion Board Cyphers: 25%
- Research Paper: 25%
- Final Exam: 30%
- Class Engagement: 20%
EXPECTATIONS, ETHICS AND UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Attendance and Class Engagement

Attendance is mandatory. I will take attendance at the beginning of each synchronous class meeting. If you cannot avoid missing a class, you must inform me in advance and provide a valid reason for your absence (i.e.: sickness or injury, family emergency). Repeated unexcused absences will result in a reduction of your class engagement grade. Class engagement will consist of participation in synchronous class meetings, in class cypher discussions and posting in the LATTE cypher discussion board.

During synchronous class meetings you are encouraged to have your camera on. However, you may choose to mute it for privacy or technological reasons.

The faculty of the AAAS department are committed to ensuring that the academic rigor and intellectual vitality that characterize our curriculum are coupled with a flexible and compassionate approach to teaching and learning amidst the Covid 19 global pandemic. We recognize that this health crisis has disproportionately impacted Black and Latinx communities. Staying healthy and safe is the first priority during this challenging time. If you encounter extenuating circumstances that will impact your ability to attend class or deliver your work by the stated due date please contact me ahead of time. I will make every effort to accommodate reasonable need-based requests for missed classes or classwork.

Weekly Time Commitment

This is a Four-Credit Course (with three hours of class-time per week). Success in this 4 credit hour course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings, papers, discussion sections, preparation for exams, etc.).

Communication

Please check your Brandeis e-mail regularly for announcements and any updates regarding assignments and course meetings. I will respond to your emails within 24 hours—with the exception of e-mails received over the weekend, which I will respond to by the end of the day on Monday.

I strongly encourage you to take advantage of my designated office hours to discuss any course related issues with me. A sign-up page will be available on LATTE to schedule a 15-minute appointment. You may also email to schedule an appointment outside of my designated office hours, although my time and availability will be limited. Our course assistants will hold regular office hours as well.
**Academic Integrity**

Every member of the University community is expected to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. A student shall not submit work that is falsified or is not the result of the student's own effort. Infringement of academic honesty by a student subjects that student to serious penalties, which may include failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension from the University or other sanctions (see section 20 of R&R). Please consult Brandeis University Rights and Responsibilities for all policies and procedures related to academic integrity. Students may be required to submit work to TurnItIn.com software to verify originality. A student who is in doubt regarding standards of academic honesty as they apply to a specific course or assignment should consult the faculty member responsible for that course or assignment before submitting the work. Allegations of alleged academic dishonesty will be forwarded to the Department of Student Rights and Community Standards. Citation and research assistance can be found at Brandeis Library Guides - Citing Sources (https://guides.library.brandeis.edu/c.php?g=301723).

**Accommodations**

Brandeis seeks to welcome and include all students. If you are a student who needs accommodations as outlined in an accommodations letter, I want to support you. **In order to provide test accommodations, I need the letter more than 48 hours in advance.** I want to provide your accommodations, but cannot do so retroactively. If you have questions about documenting a disability or requesting accommodations, please contact Student Accessibility Support (SAS https://www.brandeis.edu/accessibility/) at 781-736-3470 or access@brandeis.edu.
# COURSE SCHEDULE

## Key Calendar Dates

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<tr>
<th>September 7:</th>
<th>Labor Day--No Class</th>
<th>November 3:</th>
<th>Election Day</th>
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<td>September 28:</td>
<td>Yom Kippur--No Class</td>
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## August 26:
**Introductions**

Readings: Ta-Nehisi Coates, “In Defense of a Loaded Word”

## August 31:
**Black Culture and Hip Hop’s Roots**


*Playlist:* Brikama Griots; Bessie Smith, “Sugar in My Bowl”; Thelonious Monk, “Straight No Chaser” (Documentary clip); Bill Withers, “Ain’t No Sunshine”

**Cypher Track:** Cab Calloway and the Nicolas Brothers, “Jumpin’ Jive”

## September 2:
**Sounds and Words of Black Cultural Nationalism**

*Readings:* Reiland Rabaka, “I’m Black and I’m Proud!: From the Black Arts Movement and Blaxploitation Films to the Conscious and Commercial Rap of the Hip Hop Generation,” in *Hip Hop’s Inheritance: From the Harlem Renaissance to the Hip Hop Feminist Movement*


**Watch:** Hustlers Convention

**Cypher Track:** “Hustlers Convention (Lightening Rod Sport)”

## September 9:
**New York and the Urban Crisis**

*Readings:* Can’t Stop Won’t Stop, 1


**Watch:** Flyin’ Cut Sleeves
Cypher Track: Ghetto Brothers, “Power”

September 10: The Birth of Hip Hop

Readings: Can’t Stop Won’t Stop, 2-4; Raquel Rivera, “Enter the New York Ricans” in New York Ricans from the Hip Hop Zone


Cypher Track: James Brown, “Give It Up Turn It Loose”

September 14: DJing and MCing


Cypher Track: Black Thought and Method Man freestyle

Assignment: Write (and spit!) your own verse

September 16: Graffiti and B-Boying/Girling

Readings: Can’t Stop Won’t Stop, 6; Margo Thompson, “Subway Writers” in American Graffiti; Jorge “Popmaster Fabel” Pabon, “Physical Graffiti: The History of Hip Hop Dance”


Cypher Track: James Brown, “Super Bad” Soul Train Live

Assignment: Share your graffiti piece

September 21: The Crossover

Readings: Can’t Stop Won’t Stop, 7-8

Cypher Track: Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, “The Message”

September 23: Birth of the Hip Hop Industry

Readings: Can’t Stop Won’t Stop, 9-10


Watch: Krush Groove

Cypher Track: Run-DMC ft. Aerosmith, “Walk This Way”

September 30: Hip Hop, Politics and Culture in the Reagan/Bush Era

Readings: Can’t Stop Won’t Stop, 11-13


Cypher Track: Public Enemy, “Black Steel in the Hour of Chaos”

October 5: Los Angeles and the Birth of “Gangsta Rap”

Readings: Can’t Stop Won’t Stop, 14; Robin D. G. Kelley, “Kickin’ Reality, Kickin’ Ballistics: ‘Gangsta Rap’ and Postindustrial Los Angeles,” in Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class


Cypher Track: N.W.A., “Fuck the Police”

October 7: Hip Hop and the Culture Wars

Readings: Can’t Stop Won’t Stop, ch. 15-16; Dirty South, ch. 1-2; Bakari Kitwana, “Young, Don’t Give a Fuck and Black: Black Gangster Films” in The Hip-Hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis in African-American Culture


Cypher Track: Dr. Dre, “Nuthin But A G Thang”
October 12: Region, Space and Hip Hop’s Expansion

Readings: Dirty South, ch. 3-7; Murray Foreman, “‘Represent’: Race, Space, and Place in Rap Music”;


Cypher Track: OutKast, “Player’s Ball”

October 14: Authenticity, Commercialization and the Color-line

Readings: Can’t Stop Won’t Stop, 18-19; Kembrew McLeod, “Authenticity Within Hip Hop and Other Cultures Threatened With Assimilation”


Cypher Track: Wu-Tang Clan, “Can It Be All So Simple”

October 19: Tupac, Biggie and Hip-Hop at a Crossroads

Readings: Dream Hampton, “Hell Raiser” in And It Don’t Stop; Cheo Coker, “Chronicle of a Death Foretold” in And It Don’t Stop; That’s the Joint!, 12


Cypher Tracks: 2Pac, “So Many Tears”; Notorious B.I.G., “Suicidal Thoughts”

October 21: Manhood, Masculinity and Misogyny

Readings: Michael Eric Dyson and Byron Hurt, “‘Cover Your Eyes as I Describe a Scene So Violent’: Violence, Machismo, Sexism, and Homophobia”; Joel Penny, “‘We Don't Wear Tight Clothes’: Gay Panic and Queer Style in Contemporary Hip Hop”; Dirty South, ch. 8

Watch: Hip Hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes


Cypher Track: Nelly, “Tip Drill”

October 26: Black Women, Sexuality and Power

*Playlist:* Foxy Brown ft. Dru Hill, “Big Bad Mama”; Missy Elliott, “The Rain (Supa Dupa Fly); Da Brat “Give It 2 You”; Bahamadia, “Uknowhowwedo”

*Cypher Track:* Lil’ Kim ft. Puff Daddy, “No Time”

**October 28:**  
**Hip Hop and Black Feminism—Tracy Sharpley-Whiting visit**


*Playlist:* Lauryn Hill, “Doo Wop (That Thing); Trina ft. Tweet, “No Panties”; Eve, “Gotta Man”

**November 2:**  
**Corporate Reconstruction of Hip Hop**

*Readings:* *The Hip Hop Wars*, Part One; *Dirty South*, ch. 9-10; Christopher Holmes Smith, “ ‘I Don’t Like to Dream About Getting Paid’: Representations of Social Mobility and the Emergence of the Hip Hop Mogul”


*Cypher Track:* Eminem, “Real Slim Shady”

**November 4:**  
**Nostalgia and Hip Hop’s Identity Crisis**

*Readings:* *The Hip Hop Wars*, Part Two; *Dirty South*, 12-14


*Cypher Track:* Missy Elliott, “Gossip Folks”

**November 9:**  
**Global Hip Hop**


Cypher Track: Booba, “DKR”

November 11: Hip Hop in the Age of Obama


Watch: Made in America

Cypher Track: Jay-Z and Kanye West, “Otis”

November 16: Hip Hop and the #BlackLivesMatter Moment


Cypher Track: Kendrick Lamar, “Alright”

November 18: Trappin’ and Soundclouding

Readings: Dirty South, ch. 16; “The Rowdy World of Rap’s New Underground”


Cypher Track: Juice WRLD, “Wishing Well”

November 30: Hip Hop’s Present and Future

Readings: Coates, “I’m Not Black, I’m Kanye”; Damon Young, “Why (Some) Men Seem to be So Bothered by Cardi B’s ‘WAP,’ Explained”


Cypher Track: Rapsody, “Oprah”

December 2: Mic Drop