

**UWS 21A-1
Rap Music
Fall 2015**

Instructor: Conley Wouters
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Classroom: TBD
Meeting Time: 5-5:50 p.m.
Office Hours: Tuesday 1-3 p.m.

“Speech is my hammer, bang the world into shape”
-Mos Def, “Hip Hop,” 1999

There’s a paradox at the heart of hip-hop’s unequaled pop music-ascension over the last thirty years: how did a such self-referential genre, one that often defines itself against mainstream culture, come to be one of the most visible, dominant, and widespread forms of popular music? Rappers depend largely on recursive references to themselves and to their musical precursors, and sample-heavy tracks are only a small part of this persistent self-consciousness. Borrowed lyrics, recycled hooks, and constant reconfigurations of featured artists all contribute to the ostensibly closed loop that is contemporary hip-hop.

This course will examine hip-hop by analyzing classic albums such as *The Blueprint* by Jay-Z and *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*, as well contemporary records that advance generic tradition by way of experimentation and deconstruction, like Kanye West’s *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy* or Kendrick Lamar’s *good kid, M.A.A.D city*. We’ll try to understand how hip-hop evolved from a geographically and structurally specific subculture and musical genre to one of the predominant producers of mainstream American culture. In addition to close readings of songs and lyrics, we’ll look at critical and theoretical readings on both hip-hop and African-American culture by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Michael Eric Dyson, and bell hooks to help us grapple with some of the music’s persistent thematic and formal concerns.

This is a University Writing Seminar, so students will learn how to draft, revise, and edit college-level essays. The primary goal of the class is to equip students with the analytical and mechanical skills that are necessary to excel in university writing.

Required Texts

Adam Bradley, *Book of Rhymes: The Poetics of Hip-Hop* (available in the Brandeis Bookstore)

Michael Eric Dyson, *Know What I Mean?: Reflections on Hip Hop* (online access)

Write Now!, a collection of Brandeis student essays (available in the Brandeis Bookstore)

Diana Hacker, *A Writer's Reference*, 6th Ed. (available in the Brandeis Bookstore)

Please Note: In order to fully participate in discussion, you will need to bring hard copies of course readings to class on the days which they are assigned.

Some readings will be available through the course website on LATTE; in this case, please either print out a copy of the essay, or bring your laptop to class.

Overview of Assignments

Essay #1: Close Reading

In this 5-6 page essay, you will create a close reading of one the songs we've studied in class.

Essay #2: Lens Analysis

In this 6-8 page essay, you will use a secondary critical/theoretical text (which I will supply) in order to deepen our understanding of a primary text.

Essay #3: Research Essay

In this 9-10 page essay, you will conduct independent research in order to show how and why an entire album works to pose, address, and/or amplify contemporary social or political questions.

Course Portfolio

At the end of the semester, you will collect and turn in the work you have completed during the course, including all drafts and pre-draft assignments. These should be presented in a folder or binder, and arranged in chronological order. In an accompanying 3-4 page review, you will evaluate your own writing, reflecting on both your successes and areas of potential future growth.

Graded Evaluation

Attendance & Participation	10%
Close Reading Essay	20%
Lens Essay	25%
Research Essay	35%
Exercises, Activities, and Portfolio	10%

Note: In addition to the overall quality of your papers, you will be graded on the amount of improvement displayed in your writing through the course of the semester. The goal of this class is

not just to give you a chance to demonstrate what you already know how to do, but to significantly improve your writing.

Classroom Expectations

Attendance: Coming to class regularly is a basic expectation for this course. You are allowed three absences. In accordance with University policy, I will notify your academic dean after three absences, regardless of the reason for those absences. Additionally, each subsequent absence after the third will lower your final grade by 1/3 (e.g. a B becomes a B-); and missing more than six classes will result in automatic failure. Please note: this policy does not distinguish between “excused” and “unexcused” absences; regardless of the reason, all absences count the same. The Dean’s Office will deal with any extenuating circumstances.

Participation: This course operates under the assumption that writing takes place in a community. Although much of your work may be conducted privately, your writing will be a product of class discussions and the resulting exchange of ideas. Your participation is vital to the intellectual life of our course. Please come to class prepared to fully participate in discussions and activities. Participation includes contributing your thoughts and questions about assigned readings, as well as engaging with the ideas of others. Please note that attendance does not correspond to full participation credit. Your grade will be based on your active contribution to our intellectual endeavors. Additionally, note that tardiness impedes your ability to participate. Habitual tardiness will negatively affect your participation grade.

Conferences: Three times during the semester, we will meet in my office for 15 minute conferences. These will be one-on-one discussions designed to give you detailed and personalized feedback from me on your writing and projects. Sign-up sheets will be distributed in class. As these conferences replace the third weekly hour of class, attendance is mandatory. A missed conference will count as an absence. Please bring all relevant materials to your conference—including drafts, comments, revisions, outlines, and key sources—as well as a set of concerns that you want to deal with. You are always welcome to meet with me beyond these conferences during my office hours or by appointment.

Peer Review Workshops: Peer review constitutes a key part of the course trajectory. We will workshop at least three times during the semester (once for each essay), generally during the class after you pass in a rough draft. Peer Review activities may vary from unit to unit, and will be announced in class prior to the workshop date. Bring three (3) copies of your rough draft on the day that it is due: One for me, one for yourself, and one for your reviewer. Peer Review will count towards the Exercises and Activities portion of your grade. We will discuss strategies for commenting on drafts in class.

Essay Guidelines: Each of your 3 essays will require several pre-drafts and one revision. All assignments should be typed in 12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced, with 1-inch margins. Your last name and a page number should occupy the header or footer of each page after the

first. All citations must be in either MLA format or Chicago Style format (see *A Writer's Reference*). Each draft must be accompanied by a cover letter, in which you will explain the goals of your paper and reflect on your writing and revision process. Please do your best to write complete rough drafts; work done in the rough draft will pay off in the revision. All assignments must be submitted in hard copy form. I do not accept electronic submissions except in cases of emergency.

Portfolio: Collect all relevant course materials (workshop notes, exercises, drafts, feedback, revisions, etc.) for your portfolio. You may want to purchase a folder now in order to make your organizational task easier at the semester's end.

Late Work/Extensions: Extensions will not be granted unless there are extreme, extenuating circumstances. Late drafts (rough or final) will result in a lower grade; papers will lose 1/3 of a letter grade for every day they are late (i.e. a B paper becomes a B-). If it is absolutely necessary to turn a paper in late, please see me as soon as possible to negotiate an extension. In general, I will not grant extensions without at least 48 hours notice. If you take advantage of the Writing Center, you may hand in a completed Reward Form in place of your final draft (and only the final draft) for a single class period extension. All other assignments, including pre-drafts and rough drafts should be completed on the scheduled due date; failure to do so will affect the "Peer Reviews, Workshops, Exercises" portion of your grade.

Writing Center: Here at Brandeis, you have an excellent (and free) resource available to you. The Writing Center offers one-on-one writing tutorials with trained and experienced consultants, some of whom are teaching UWS themselves. Visit <http://www.brandeis.edu/programs/writing/writingcenter/> to get a better idea of what the Writing Center offers or to sign up for an appointment. When you visit, you may have your consultant fill out a Writing Center Reward Form, which will earn you a class period extension on the final draft of any paper (only one extension per paper).

Academic Integrity: It is critical that the work you present is original and that, when you use outside sources you cite them appropriately. Plagiarism is a serious offense; instances of alleged dishonesty will be forwarded to the Student Judicial System, and may carry severe consequences. We will discuss proper source documentation in class, and the Brandeis policy on academic integrity is available in section 3 of the *Rights and Responsibilities Handbook* (available at <http://www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/sdc/rr/>). If you have any questions or concerns about citation, plagiarism, or academic standards of originality, please ask; I am happy to discuss these standards.

Subject Matter: This class deals with explicit content. In order for this to be an effective, comfortably productive intellectual environment, we should expect to sometimes encounter sexually explicit language and pervasive language that might understandably make us uncomfortable, not to mention the misogynistic and homophobic language that unfortunately abounds throughout the genre of rap. If any of the subject matter, or the way that subject matter is handled in

class, ever makes you uncomfortable, talk to me outside of class, either in person or via email, so we can address the problem together.

Online Resources: All songs are available to stream online. Good places to look include YouTube, and free streaming services such as Spotify or Apple Music. Some albums will be available in hard copy format in the Brandeis Library. If you ever have any trouble locating a reliable copy of a song, let me know and I'll make sure to get one to you. Any songs we listen to during class will be provided by me, so you only need to worry about bring your books. Genius.com is a good resource for lyrics, but it's a crowdsourced site so, like Wikipedia, it is not an academic source.

If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me. Further information is available at the Disabilities Resources website (<http://www.brandeis.edu/disability>).

Again, feel free to visit me during office hours or by appointment to talk about any aspect of the course, your work, or other academic matters.

Composition Outcomes

Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing

- Use writing and discussion to work through and interpret complex ideas from readings and other texts (e.g., visual, musical, verbal)
- Critically analyze their own and others' choices regarding language and form (e.g., in student texts or formally published texts)
- Engage in multiple modes of inquiry using text (e.g., field research, library-based inquiry, web searching)
- Incorporate significant research (as above) into writing that engages a question and/or topic and uses it as a central theme for a substantive, research-based essay
- Use writing to support interpretations of text, and understand that there are multiple interpretations of text
- Consider and express the relationship of their own ideas to the ideas of others

Processes

- Use written, visual, and/or experience-based texts as tools to develop ideas for writing
- Understand that writing takes place through recurring processes of invention, revision, and editing
- Develop successful, flexible strategies for their own writing through the processes of invention, revision, and editing
- Experience and understand the collaborative and social aspects of writing processes

- Learn to critique their own and others' work
- Be reflective about their writing processes

Knowledge of Conventions

- Understand the conventions of particular genres of writing
- Use conventions associated with a range of dialects, particularly standardized written English (but not necessarily limited to it)
- Recognize and address patterns in their writing that unintentionally diverge from patterns expected by their audience/s
- Practice using academic citational systems (MLA or APA) for documenting work

Course Schedule

Subject to revision with advance notice

Unit 1: Close Reading; Locating Subjectivity.

Songs

Jay-Z, "December 4th."

Kanye West, "Through the Wire."

Notorious B.I.G, "I Got a Story to Tell."

Kendrick Lamar, "King Kunta."

Week 1

Thu 27 Aug Introduction to course and Brandeis writing program. Distribute Close Reading assignment.

Week 2

Tue 1 Sep Reading: Bradley, pp. 165 – 174.
 Writing: —.
 Soundtrack: Jay-Z, "December 4th." Kendrick Lamar, "King Kunta."
 In-class: Creating a thesis; Thesis and motive. Close reading.

Thur 3 Sep Reading: —
 Writing: Pre-draft 1.1
 Soundtrack: —

In-class: Evidence and analysis.

Week 3

Tue 8 Sep Reading: Bradley, TBD.
Writing: Pre-Draft 1.2
Soundtrack: Kanye West, “Through the Wire.”
In-class: Structuring an essay; transitions. Constructing effective paragraphs.

Thur 10 Sep NO CLASS (Brandeis Monday)

Week 4

CONFERENCES THIS WEEK

Tue 15 Sep NO CLASS

Thur 17 Sep Reading: bell hooks, “Postmodern Blackness.”
Writing: First draft, Essay 1.
Soundtrack: Notorious B.I.G, “I Got a Story to Tell.”
In-class: Peer review.

Unit 2: Texts as Lenses—“Postmodern Blackness”

Songs

Talib Kweli, “For Women.”
Outkast, “Return of the ‘G.’”
Lil Kim, “Suck My Dick.”
Nicki Minaj, “Did It On Em.”
Jay Electronica, “Exhibit C.”
Azealia Banks, “212.”

Week 5

Tue 22 Sep Reading: bell hooks, “Postmodern Blackness” (finish)
Writing: Peer Review.
Soundtrack: Jay Electronica, “Exhibit C.” Talib Kweli, “For Women.”
In-class: Introduction to the lens essay. Hacker, C1. Works cited.

Thu 24 Sep Reading: bell hooks, continued
Writing: **Essay 1.**
Soundtrack: Outkast, “Return of the ‘G.’”
In-class: hooks. Lens essay. “Return of the ‘G.’” “Exhibit C.”

Week 6

Tue 29 Sep Reading: Bradley
Writing: Predraft 2.1
Soundtrack: Lil Kim, “Suck My Dick.” Nicki Minaj, “Did It On Em.”
In-class: Lens exercises. Review hooks.

Thu 1 Oct Reading: —
Writing: Predraft 2.2
Soundtrack: Azealia Banks, “212.”
In-class: Passive/active voice continued. Active verbs.

Week 7

CONFERENCES THIS WEEK

Tue 6 Oct Reading: Bradley, “Wordplay,” continued.
Writing: —
Soundtrack: Eminem, Big Sean, Royce Da 5’9”, Danny Brown, Dej Loaf,
and Trick Trick, “Detroit Vs. Everybody.”
Writing: —
In-class: Lens exercises.

Thu 8 Oct Reading: —
Writing: First draft, Essay 2.
Soundtrack: —
In-class: Discuss lens essay.

Week 8

Tue 13 Oct Reading: Dyson, “Track 4: Violence, Machismo, Sexism, and Homopho-
bia.
Writing: —

Soundtrack: Talib Kweli, “For Women.” Jay-Z, “Girls, Girls, Girls.”
In-class: Writing Exercises

Thu 15 Oct Reading: Bradley pp.30 – 57.
 Stelmanis, “Why is Violence Against Women Excusable if It’s ‘Art’?”
 Writing: Peer Review
 Soundtrack: —
 In-class: Peer Review

Unit 3: Research Essays

Albums

Lauryn Hill, *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill* (1996)
Kanye West, *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy* (2010)
Kendrick Lamar, *good kid m.A.A.d city* (2012)
Nicki Minaj, *The Pinkprint* (2014)

Songs

Chance the Rapper, “Paranoia”
Drake, “Back to Back” and “Charged Up”
Nas, “N.Y. State of Mind”
Run the Jewels, “Close Your Eyes (And Count to Fuck)”
Ab-Soul f/Danny Brown, “Terrorist Threats.”
Kanye West, “Hell of a Life.”
Nicki Minaj, “Feelin Myself.”
Kendrick Lamar, “Sing About Me, I’m Dying of Thirst”

Week 9

Tue 20 Oct Reading: Bradley, 57–70. Morrison, “Playing in the Dark.”
 Writing: Peer Review.
 Soundtrack: Chance the Rapper, “Paranoia.”
 In-class: Introduction to the research essay.

Thu 22 Oct Reading: Morrison, “Playing in the Dark.”
 Writing: **Lens essay due.**
 Soundtrack: Run the Jewels, “Close Your Eyes (And Count to
 Fuck)”
 In-class: Writing exercises, Hacker. Approaches to college-level research.

Week 11

Tue 27 Oct LIBRARY SESSION in Goldfarb Library.

Thu 29 Oct Reading: *The Signifying Monkey*, Henry Louis Gates, Jr.
Writing: —.
Soundtrack:
In-class: Writing exercises, Hacker.

Week 12

Tue 3 Nov Reading: Bradley, pp. 100 – 121.
Writing: Pre-Draft 3.1: Research Proposal
Soundtrack: Nas, “N.Y. State of Mind.”
In-class: Structure and organization.

Thu 5 Nov Reading: *The Signifying Monkey*, Henry Louis Gates, Jr.
Writing: —
Soundtrack: Drake, “Charged Up,” “Back to Back.”
In-class: Writing exercises.

Week 13

Tue 10 Nov Reading: Bradley, 121 – 145.
Writing: Pre-Draft 3.2: Annotated Bibliography.
Soundtrack: Ab-Soul f/Danny Brown, “Terrorist Threats.”
In-class: Evidence and analysis.

Thu 12 Nov Reading: Dyson, 61-81.
Writing: —
Soundtrack: Kanye West, “Hell of a Life.”
In-Class: Metaphor and simile.

Week 14

Tue 17 Nov Reading: Bradley, 145 – 155.
 Writing: First draft and cover letter due.
 Soundtrack: Lauryn Hill, “Everything is Everything.”
 In-class: Reflection - first draft.

Thu 19 Nov Reading: “When the Lights Shut Off: Kendrick Lamar and the Decline of
the Black Blues Narrative.” Rachel Kaadzi Ghansah.
 Writing: Pre-Draft 3.2: Annotated Bibliography.
 Soundtrack: Kendrick Lamar, “Sing About Me, I’m Dying of Thirst”
 In-class: Peer Review

Week 15

CONFERENCES THIS WEEK

Tue 24 Nov In-class: Peer Review

Thu 26 Nov NO CLASS

Week 16

Tue 1 Dec Reading: Bradley, 155-170.
 Writing: Portfolios.
 Soundtrack: —
 In-class: Portfolios.

Thu 3 Dec Reading: —
 Writing: —
 Soundtrack: —
 In-class: Presentations

Week 17

Tue 8 Dec Reading: —
 Writing: —
 Soundtrack: —
 In-class: Presentations

Thu 10 Dec **Essay 3 due in my mailbox.**