

Music 81A

Survey of Rap and Hip Hop Music

Instructor: James "Ike" Minton

Time: TBA

Room: TBA

Credits: TBD by Music Department and / or others

Enrollment Limit: ? Never been offered as a course during the year. The first time offered during Summer Session 2017 had around 70 students - the cap should be pretty high

Prerequisites: None

Catalog Description:

Description – This course involves examination, evaluation, performance, and discussion of rap music and its relation to hip hop culture. We will look at three primary areas: historical periods of rap, aspects of performance practice, and lyrical content related to issues in contemporary society. We will engage in listening exercises, performances and presentations, and discuss the placement of rap in an academic setting. No prior musical knowledge is required.

Weekly Schedule: See Attached Spreadsheet

Grade Determination:

The final grade will be based on 3 primary factors: 1) 2 tests - a midterm (20%) and a final (30%); 2) 5-6 pop quizzes for attendance (20%); 3) no fewer than 2 writing assignments that engage with material from the course (30% total for both). With the instructor's permission, the student can opt to submit a prospectus and bibliography that outlines a college level project or presentation in lieu of the writing assignments.

Organization:

Each week will focus on a different decade of rap or topic related to artists and their content. They will include a short lecture with listening examples and content related to the period or topic discussed in that class. Topics can come from, but are not limited to, the following list: race, sex, gender, politics, cultural identity, technique, aesthetics or from the lyrics of an example mentioned in class.

Workload: Depending on familiarity with the material, students should expect to devote around 20 hours a week to listening, critical thinking about topics, discussions with fellow classmates, personal reflection, and practicing any potential performance material.

Offensive Material Disclaimer – Students should be told upfront that this class will engage in lyric material, imagery, and subject matter that some consider, racist, obscene, profane, sexist, misogynistic, homophobic, and offensive. There will not be an attempt to censor material as it is the instructor’s belief that while the body of work that is rap includes these things it is not limited to them. This class is not intended to offend anyone but rather to engage the material as the creators intended – uncensored.

Perception, Context, and the Nature of Obscene, Profane, Offensive

Rap and hip hop music directly confront topics that include but are not limited to race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexual orientation. Depending on the listener’s familiarity with the context of a rapper’s delivery, style, and thematic material there are a wide range of affects and effects that can be associated with what the listener is hearing. Topics, lyrics, artists, and even the entire genre of rap and hip hop have sometimes been labeled as derogatory, inflammatory, racist, misogynistic, sexist, homophobic, obscene, profane, offensive, and even immoral.

To many rap and hip hop practitioners and audiences, these themes and styles of delivery are nothing new; they are part of an aesthetic and a tradition that precedes them. As rap and hip hop continue to gain popularity in contemporary society, many audiences are unfamiliar with its thematic, stylistic, and aesthetic origins. Artists, and many times the entirety of an art form, are judged on a different set of aesthetics than those used by its practitioners to create the art, its content, and learn traditional approaches to aesthetics within the art form. Thus, it is no surprise that some of the aforementioned labels have emerged to describe the themes and content in rap and hip hop as well as its style of delivery. Notwithstanding this arguably misaligned aesthetic judgement, at times some of these labels can be accurate. One of the goals of this course is to challenge students to be aware of different sets of aesthetic criteria, particularly in art, and the epistemological constructs from where these criteria may emerge.