Illmatic, Hip-Hop and America
AFAM 154/FMS 112/SOC 159
Fall 2012
Monday 6-7:20p/Wed 6-8:50p
HG 1800

Professor: Sohail Daulatzai
Office/Hours: HG 2112/M 1-2:50pm (and by appt.)
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TA: Mary Schmitt
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Office/Hours: MW 4:45-5:45pm (and by appt.)

Course Description

With Nas’s landmark 1994 album Illmatic as our guide, this course will utilize film, video, documentary and music to explore the ways in which hip-hop culture has become a powerful tool to probe the larger American landscape. In doing so, we will use Illmatic as a lens to better understand hip-hop and not only the history that made it, but also the history that it made. So that while this course is about exploring hip-hop through Illmatic, it’s also about exploring America through Illmatic, offering us the possibility to explore the fertile ground and volatile minefield that surround it: the post-Civil Rights and Black Power era, the shifting sands of race and the emergence of the global economy, the guerilla artistry around media so central to hip-hop, the changing marketplace and hyper-commodification of the culture, questions around gender and sexuality, art and aesthetics, and also hip-hop’s enduring ability to speak truth to power.

Required Texts:

Born To Use Mics: Reading Nas’s Illmatic, Michael Eric Dyson and Sohail Daulatzai (eds).

Various articles: Be sure that your UCI affiliated email is active, as all the course readings will be posted to the course website and you will be notified of any changes and/or additions.

Course Requirements:

Midterm Exam – 30%
Final Exam – 30%
Weekly Messageboard Postings – 20%
Participation and Attendance (including random in class assignments) – 20%
**Heads Up:**
You are required to do all readings and must be prepared to discuss them on the day they are assigned. The course is based upon the idea that your participation and questions (including the weekly Messageboard posts) will guide much of our discussion of the readings and the screenings (if necessary), which will hopefully lead to a fuller and richer understanding of both. Your participation grade will be comprised of your involvement in the lecture as well as your performance on the random in-class assignments.

In order to prepare you for this, for every class meeting you are **REQUIRED** to post to the class Messageboard a thoughtful engagement with the readings for that particular lecture – meaning that no later than Monday at 5pm, you are required to submit a Messageboard response for the upcoming lecture later that evening, and no later than Wednesday at 5pm, you are required to submit a response for the lecture later that evening. These Messageboard postings are NOT to be summaries, but rather they should reflect your critical engagement with the ideas being expressed in the readings and any substantive questions/comments you may have about them.

Since there are no discussion sections for this course, attendance is **MANDATORY**. If you have more than one unexcused absence, your **final** grade will automatically drop 1/3 of a letter grade (e.g. B to a B-). For every additional unexcused absence, your final grade will drop another 1/3 of a letter grade. If you are going to miss class, please let Mary know as far in advance as possible. Only extenuating circumstances will be permitted and documentation must be provided upon request.

No incompletes will be given in this course and there will be no makeup exams. Note the date and times of the midterm and final exams.

Each student is held to the highest standards of academic honesty and to the University of California, Irvine policy in this regard. All students are urged to review this policy prior to completing any written assignment or exam for the course ([http://www.senate.uci.edu/9_IrvineManual/3ASMAappendices/Appendix08.html](http://www.senate.uci.edu/9_IrvineManual/3ASMAappendices/Appendix08.html))

Students with learning disabilities or special testing needs, should contact Disability Services within the first two weeks of class to make arrangements for support services.

Also, this course will include explicit material that may be offensive to some. If you are concerned about being subjected to such material, then it is recommended that you do not enroll in this course.
“Everybody sound the same, commercialize the game
  Reminiscing when it wasn’t all business
  They forgot where it started
  So we all gather here for the dearly departed…”
  - Nas, “Hip-Hop Is Dead”

“Is hip-hop just a euphemism for a new religion?
The soul music of the slave that the youth is missing?”
  - Kanye West, “Gorgeous”

“I’m like Che Guevara with bling on/I’m complex…”
  - Jay-Z, “Public Service Announcement”

“Can it be all so simple?”
  - Wu Tang Clan, “Can It Be All So Simple?”

Course Schedule

Rewind Selectah!!: Hip-Hop’s Roots and Routes

Week 1

October 1st

Readings: Dyson: “Prologue: What’s Beef?”; Daulatzai: “Illmatic: It Was Written” (BTUM); Common: “Foreword” (BTUM)

October 3rd

Screening: Cry of Jazz (Edward Bland, 1959)


Week 2

October 8th

October 10th

Screening: *Wild Style* (Charlie Ahearn, 1983)

Readings: Watkins: “Social Conservatism and the Culture Wars” (pp. 17-49); Kitwana: Ch. 1 (“The New Black Youth Culture”); Nama: “It Was Signified” (BTUM); Rivera, “New York Ricans”; Ahearn: “‘Genesis’: In the Hall of Mirrors” (BTUM);

Recommended: Bobbito the Barber: “Streets Disciple” (BTUM); Shecter: “The Second Coming” (BTUM).

Week 3

October 15th

Screening: *Bastards of the Party* (Cle Sloan, 2005) (SCREEN AT HOME); 60 Minutes


October 17th

Readings: Reinarman and Levine: “Crack Attack”; Gray, “Reaganism”; Daulatzai: “A Rebel To America: ‘N.Y. State of Mind’ After the Towers Fell” (BTUM); Dyson: “‘One Love,’ Two Brothers, Three Verses” (BTUM);

Week 4

October 22nd


October 24th


Screenings: *Style Wars* (Tony Silver, 1983) (excerpts) and *Copyright Criminals* (Benjamin Franzen and Kembrew McLeod, 2009) (excerpts)
Week 5

October 29th

October 31st
MIDTERM EXAM

Every Ghetto, Every City (and Beyond): Hip-Hop and the Politics of Identity

Week 6

November 5th
Readings: Peterson: “It’s Yours” (BTUM); Perry, “The Glorious Outlaw,” Light, “About A Salary or Reality?” (137-146);

November 7th
Readings: Hill: “Critical Pedagogy Comes at Halftime” (BTUM); Scott, “Domination and Arts of Resistance”

Week 7

November 12th
Screening: Hip-Hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes (Byron Hurt, 2006)
Readings: Dyson, “Cover Your Eyes As I Describe A Scene So Violent,” Sharples-Whiting, “Pimpin’ Ain’t Easy.”

November 14th

Week 8

November 19th
November 21st

Screening: 8 Mile (Curtis Hanson, 2002)


Week 9

November 26th

Screening: Slingshot Hip-Hop (Jackie Salloum, 2008)

Readings: Lipsitz, Dangerous Crossroads (Introduction); Mitchell: “Hip-Hop Outside the United States,” Fernandes: excerpts from Close to the Edge

November 28th

Screening: Bling: A Planet Rock (Raquel Cepeda, 2007), excerpts

Readings: Lipsitz: “Diasporic Noise: History, Hip Hop, and the Post-colonial Politics of Sound”; Daulatzai: “A Rebel To America” (revisited); more TBA.

Week 10

December 3rd


December 5th

Conclusions

Final Exam: TBA