

**Instructor:** Leon Lee  
**Email:** [leonlee@sandiego.edu](mailto:leonlee@sandiego.edu)  
**Office Hours:**  
Via Zoom by appointment  
**Official Class Times:**  
Wednesday, 6:00–8:50pm Pacific



(Artwork by C-Ray Art)

*Truth will never start out popular in a world more concerned with marketability than righteousness. It will initially suffer ridicule and even violence – yet ultimately it is undeniable. All of humanity is living in a dream world, but suffering real consequences.*

–Ms. Lauryn Hill

## Ethnic Studies 494: Hip-Hop and the Politics of Culture



### Course Description

This course engages the politics of Black popular culture through Hip-Hop. We will focus on Hip-Hop not simply as a musical genre, but as a cultural and political movement. In particular, we will examine what makes Hip-Hop a manipulable cultural form—as it often treads simultaneously on terrains of subversion from and incorporation into oppressive societal structures.

We will interrogate Hip-Hop's representation as an oppositional culture and the politics of its mainstream popularity. Is Hip-Hop an effective medium for resistance? Or has it succumbed to national and international corporate interests?

Using theoretical frameworks set forth by scholars of Cultural Studies and Ethnic Studies, our exploration into the history and development of Hip-Hop will concentrate on the various ways Hip-Hop has been experienced, interpreted and produced by its practitioners, consumers and observers.

### **Majoring or Minor in Ethnic Studies at UCSD**

Interested in a career in law, public policy, medicine, journalism, education, public health, social work, international relations, community organizing, urban planning, and other socially-engaged careers? Ethnic Studies is an interdisciplinary field of study that allows students to critically examine the complex dynamics of race and ethnicity in the United States. Being an Ethnic Studies major or minor equips you with a range of significant skills, including critical thinking, data analysis and argumentation, community building and assessment, and compassionate social engagement. Whether you are taking this course for a graduation requirement, personal interest, or curiosity, we invite you to explore the possibilities of an Ethnic Studies major or minor. For more information, please contact your professor or visit us at the Department of Ethnic Studies located in Maher 210. You may be closer to an Ethnic Studies major, minor, or double major than you realize!

### **GRADE BREAKDOWN**

Attendance and Participation = 10%	Social Media Art Project = 15%
Weekly Discussion Posts = 15% (+ up to 3% extra credit)	Final Critical Reflection Paper = 25%
Midterm Essay = 25%	
Hip-Hop Art Share = 10%	Total = up to 103%

### **ASSIGNMENTS OVERVIEW**

#### **Weekly Discussion Posts**

Students will submit short critical reflections on the weekly texts and themes in the [Discussion Board](#) section on Blackboard.

Your discussion posts should:

- 1) Briefly summarize the main arguments from that week, and raise questions or issues about the readings
- 2) Draw connections across the texts. Explain why you think these texts are assigned in the same week. How are they in conversation with each other? How do they connect with other course materials?
- 3) They are to be analysis-driven, and not opinion-driven. This means properly deploying the theoretical frameworks from the class and citing evidence to form your reflections.
- 4) Include at least one **discussion question** at the end of your reflection. Discussion questions should be generative and encourage deeper pondering of the texts. If desired, students can choose to begin their reflection post by responding to another student's discussion question. However, the same engagement with the course texts should be demonstrated, and a discussion question is still required at the end of the reflection.
- 5) Be approximately 200-300 words

Discussion posts will be due on Blackboard by Wednesday 5:00pm Pacific on Weeks 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9 and 10. Note that there are **8** opportunities to write discussion posts, of which **you are only required to write 5**.

Each post will be worth 3% and will be graded as P/NP based on their thoughtfulness and completion of all the above mentioned requirements. You are welcomed to write additional reflection posts, which may either replace a previous post that scored NP, or serve as 1% extra credit for each additional post. This equals a total of **3% possible extra credit** so long as all of the posts meet the above requirements.

### **Hip-Hop Art Share**

Share on Blackboard a piece of Hip-Hop art that inspires or speaks to you in some way. It can be a song, a video, an image, etc. Write a short description of the artist(s) and the artifact and give an analysis of the political stakes. In other words, what kind of message does it invoke for you and why is it important? Cite at least 2 academic articles from the course in your analysis. 500-800 words

### **Midterm Essay**

Prompt will be distributed on Week 6. You will be assessed based on the level of critical engagement with the course materials. This will be a formal academic essay so please format accordingly. You will be required to cite at least 4 academic articles from the course in your analysis. 1000-1500 words

### **Social Media Art Project**

Using whatever tools at their disposal, students will produce a Hip-Hop inspired video art project that will be posted on a social media platform of their choosing. It can be a recording of something you perform, a music video, vlog, animation, or anything of the sort. The possibilities are virtually endless. It should be at least approximately one-minute or longer. The piece should invoke some kind of message that relates back to the course materials and discussions. The method of delivering this message and its shape and form can be explicit or abstract. It can be intricately produced or unedited. Just be *intentional* with your creative choices. Be specific in your mind the message you want to get across, as well as how and why you're going to do it, as you will have to explain these decisions in the Critical Reflection Paper.

### **Final Critical Reflection Paper**

The Critical Reflection Paper will unpack their video project in relation to themes from the course. In addition to explicitly laying out your intentions behind the video art project, you will be required to draw specific connections to your reflections of the course as a whole. You will be assessed based on the level of critical engagement with the course materials. This will be a formal academic essay so please format accordingly. You will be required to cite at least 6 academic articles from the course in your analysis. 1500-2000 words

\*Further instructions for assignments will be distributed and discussed later in the semester.

## **POLICIES AND EXPECTATIONS**

### **Attendance & Participation Policy**

Unless otherwise specified, we will meet for this course weekly on Wednesdays at 6:00pm Pacific via Zoom. This course demands your active engagement and participation. You need to be present—in every sense of the world—in order to participate. You may miss **2** classes without it affecting your grade. Note that simply showing up in itself will not guarantee full participation credit. Students will be assessed based on participation, respectfulness and readiness.

### **Expectations for Student Participation in Zoom classes**

- **Be punctual and prepared.** You are responsible for completing each week's content before our Wednesday discussions.
- **Ensure hardware and software are functioning prior to class session.** Test all technology (including camera/video, Wi-Fi, etc.) *before* class.
- **Technical support:** Faculty do not provide technical support. If needed, students are expected to seek out technical support prior to class.
- **Be attentive/be present.** Please show respect by remaining attentive and engaged throughout the entire video session.

- **Step up, Step back.** Participating does not only mean speaking, it also requires active listening. Listen to *really listen*—do not listen just to respond. It is possible to dominate a conversation by speaking too much. If you feel like you've been taking over a discussion, step back and try to invite others to take the floor. If you do not like speaking in class, try to challenge yourself to do so. Do your best to contribute to the discussion while also showing encouragement and support for your peers.
- **Mute notifications on all devices.**
- Students are to adhere to the USD Code of Conduct at all times: <https://www.sandiego.edu/conduct/the-code/rules-of-conduct.php>

## ACCOMMODATIONS

If you need any accommodation for disability, illness or any other reason, please let the instructor and the Disability and Learning Difference Resource Center (DLDRC) know as soon as possible. We will make all reasonable efforts to accommodate you. The DLDRC is available at [disabilityservices@sandiego.edu](mailto:disabilityservices@sandiego.edu) or (619) 260-4655.

Due to the remote format of this course, access to technology and internet will be imperative to your success. There are monetary grants being offered to USD students to help support students with their technological needs: Please contact Cynthia Villis at [villis@sandiego.edu](mailto:villis@sandiego.edu) or (619) 260-4680.

If extenuating circumstances arise due to illness, please let the instructor know as soon as you are able to. Please prioritize your health and we will make all reasonable efforts to accommodate you.

## COURSE CALENDAR

In addition to the texts listed on the syllabus, I will post on Blackboard a variety of educational media that will be relevant to each week's topics and readings. This will include a compilation of videos, podcasts, films, or other media, as well as original content that I will produce. They will vary in format and length, so please give yourself ample time to view them, and to troubleshoot any technical issues that may arise. I will do my best to make all of the additional content available by the end of the day on Mondays. Please check Blackboard regularly for updates.

W	DATE	TOPIC	TEXTS / MEDIA	ASSIGNMENTS
1	8/19	Overview and Expectations	Thoroughly review the syllabus	
2	8/26	What is Hip-Hop and why is it political?	Watch: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "SIEI: The Foundation", <i>Hip-Hop Evolution</i> (2016- ) available on Netflix</li> </ul> Read: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kandice Chuh, "Politics", <i>Keywords for American Cultural Studies, Second Edition</i></li> <li>• Roderick Ferguson, "Race"</li> <li>• Jeff Chang, "Necropolis: The Bronx and the Politics of Abandonment", <i>Can't Stop Won't Stop</i></li> <li>• Rebecca Laurence, "40 years on from the party where hip hop was born", available @</li> </ul>	Discussion Post #1 due on Blackboard by Wednesday, 5:00pm Pacific

			<a href="https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20130809-the-party-where-hip-hop-was-born">https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20130809-the-party-where-hip-hop-was-born</a>	
3	9/2	Hip-Hop is a Black Cultural Form	<p>Watch:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“S1E2: The Underground to the Mainstream”, <i>Hip-Hop Evolution</i> (2016- ) available on Netflix</li> </ul> <p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Imani Perry, “Hip Hop’s Mama: Originalism and Identity in the Music”</li> <li>R. Scott Heath, “TRUE HEADS: Historicizing the Hip_Hip ‘Nation’ in Context”</li> <li>Marcyliena Morgan &amp; Dionne Bennett, “Hip-Hop and the Global Imprint of a Black Cultural Form”</li> <li>Deena Zaru and Lakeia Brown, “Hip-hop has been standing up for Black lives for decades: 15 songs and why they matter”, available @ <a href="https://abcnews.go.com/Entertainment/hip-hop-standing-black-lives-decades-15-songs/story?id=71195591">https://abcnews.go.com/Entertainment/hip-hop-standing-black-lives-decades-15-songs/story?id=71195591</a></li> </ul>	Discussion Post #2 due on Blackboard by Wednesday, 5:00pm Pacific
4	9/9	Politics of Black Representation	<p>Watch</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“S1E3: The New Guard”, <i>Hip-Hop Evolution</i> (2016- ) available on Netflix</li> </ul> <p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cornel West, “The New Cultural Politics of Difference”</li> <li>Stuart Hall, “What Is This ‘Black’ in Black Popular Culture?”</li> <li>Richard Schur, “Authentic Black Cool? / Branding and Trademarks in Contemporary African American Culture”</li> </ul>	Discussion Post #3 due on Blackboard by Wednesday, 5:00pm Pacific
5	9/16	Cultural Appropriation Discourse	<p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Baruti N. Kopano, “Soul Thieves: White America and the Appropriation of Hip Hop and Black Culture”</li> <li>Imani Kai Johnson, “Black Culture Without Black People / Hip-Hop Dance Beyond Appropriation Discourse”</li> <li>*Ede Yu, “How Hip-Hop Dance Groups Have Helped Asian Americans Find Belonging”, available @ <a href="https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/ne8yxg/how-hip-hop-dance-groups-have-helped-asian-americans-find-belonging">https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/ne8yxg/how-hip-hop-dance-groups-have-helped-asian-americans-find-belonging</a></li> </ul> <p><i>*Note that this is a multimedia article. Please also watch the videos in the article.</i></p>	Discussion Post #4 due on Blackboard by Wednesday, 5:00pm Pacific

6	9/23	Multicultural and Transnational Hip-Hop	<p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Antonio T. Tiongson, “The African Americanization of Hip-Hop”</li> <li>• Melissa Castillo-Garsow, “‘Yo soy Hip Hop’: Transnationalism and Authenticity in Mexican New York</li> <li>• Sunaina Maira, “‘We Ain’t Missing’: Palestinian Hip-Hop—A Transnational Youth Movement”</li> </ul> <p>Watch:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Palestine Underground   Hip Hop, Trap and Techno Documentary   Boiler Room”, available @ <a href="https://youtu.be/M-R8S7QwOlg">https://youtu.be/M-R8S7QwOlg</a></li> <li>• “Hip Hop in Cambodia   Tiny Toones Organization”, available @ <a href="https://youtu.be/-HYR5nP3-c0">https://youtu.be/-HYR5nP3-c0</a></li> <li>• “US” by Ruby Ibarra feat. Rocky Rivera, Klassy &amp; Faith Santilla, available @ <a href="https://youtu.be/AUfNeCozJBw">https://youtu.be/AUfNeCozJBw</a></li> </ul>	<p>Discussion Post #5 due on Blackboard by Wednesday, 5:00pm Pacific</p> <p>Midterm Prompt distributed</p>
7	9/30	<b>Midterm</b>		
8	10/7	Hip-Hop Feminisms	<p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aisha Durham, Brittney C. Cooper, and Susana M. Morris, “The Stage Hip-Hop Feminism Built: A New Directions Essay”</li> <li>• Donyale R. Griffin Padgett, Cheryl D. Jenkins and Dale Anderson, “Imag[e]ining Hip-Hop Femininity: CONTENTIONS, CONTRADICTIONS, AND CONTRIBUTIONS”</li> <li>• Shoniqua Roach, “Black Respectable Currency: Reading Black Feminism and Sexuality in Contemporary Performance”</li> </ul>	<p>Discussion Post #6 due on Blackboard by Wednesday, 5:00pm Pacific</p>
9	10/14	Queer Feminist Pedagogies	<p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jillian Hernandez, “Carnal teachings: raunch aesthetics as queer feminist pedagogies in Yo! Majesty’s hip hop practice”</li> <li>• Bettina L. Love, “A Ratchet Lens: Black Queer Youth, Agency, Hip Hop, and the Black Ratchet Imagination”</li> <li>• Sherri Williams, “Cardi B: <i>Love &amp; Hip Hop</i>’s unlikely feminist hero”</li> </ul> <p>Watch:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Cardi B, Megan Thee Stallion and Hip-hop Feminism, Explained   Unpack That”, available @ <a href="https://youtu.be/N04gwDEKCKE">https://youtu.be/N04gwDEKCKE</a></li> </ul>	<p>Discussion Post #7 due on Blackboard by Wednesday, 5:00pm Pacific</p>



10	10/21	Generation Gaps	<p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dart Adams, “Hip-Hop Turns 40”, available @ <a href="https://www.npr.org/sections/therecord/2013/08/11/211115072/hip-hop-at-40-is-a-shell-of-its-younger-self">https://www.npr.org/sections/therecord/2013/08/11/211115072/hip-hop-at-40-is-a-shell-of-its-younger-self</a></li> <li>Alison Winch, “Does Feminism Have a Generational Gap? Blogging, millennials and the hip hop generation”</li> <li>bell hooks, “Moving Beyond Pain”, available @ <a href="http://www.bellhooksinstitute.com/blog/2016/5/9/moving-beyond-pain">http://www.bellhooksinstitute.com/blog/2016/5/9/moving-beyond-pain</a></li> <li>Stereo Williams, “How Hip-Hop’s Generation Gap Became a War for Its Soul”, available @ <a href="https://www.thedailybeast.com/how-hip-hops-generation-gap-became-a-war-for-its-soul-6">https://www.thedailybeast.com/how-hip-hops-generation-gap-became-a-war-for-its-soul-6</a></li> </ul> <p>Watch:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Rap’s Generation Gap”, available @ <a href="https://youtu.be/-ourkOxf1KE">https://youtu.be/-ourkOxf1KE</a></li> <li>“Lil Yachty Battles With Joe Budden and DJ Akademiks   Everyday Struggle”, available @ <a href="https://youtu.be/hmjlA4LSaN4">https://youtu.be/hmjlA4LSaN4</a></li> </ul>	Discussion Post #8 due on Blackboard by Wednesday, 5:00pm Pacific
11	10/28	Hip-Hop Futures	<p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Greg Tate, “How Black Lives Matter Changed Hip-Hop and R&amp;B”, available @ <a href="https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-news/how-blacklivesmatter-changed-hip-hop-and-rb-in-2015-61161/">https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-news/how-blacklivesmatter-changed-hip-hop-and-rb-in-2015-61161/</a></li> <li>“Black Lives Matter Protesters March To Rap Songs By Local Heroes”, <i>NPR All Things Considered</i>, available @ <a href="https://www.npr.org/2020/07/10/889842715/black-lives-matter-protesters-march-to-rap-songs-by-local-heroes">https://www.npr.org/2020/07/10/889842715/black-lives-matter-protesters-march-to-rap-songs-by-local-heroes</a></li> <li>Taryn Finley, “The Era Of One Queen In Hip-Hop Is Over”, available @ <a href="https://www.huffpost.com/entry/hip-hop-queens-nicki-minaj-cardi-b_n_5dfbf0afe4b05b08bab25690">https://www.huffpost.com/entry/hip-hop-queens-nicki-minaj-cardi-b_n_5dfbf0afe4b05b08bab25690</a></li> </ul>	Hip-Hop Art Shares
12	11/4	<b>Social Media Art Projects due</b>		
13	11/11	Course Reflections	TBA	
14	11/16-20	<b>Final Critical Reflection paper due 11/18, 10:00pm Pacific</b>		