

## HIP HOP AND POLITICAL THEORY

Instructor: Dr. Neil Roberts  
Williams College  
Mon/Th, 2:35-3:50 PM  
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Fall 2013  
AFR207.01/PSCI212.01  
Office hours: Tu, 12:30-2:30 PM  
& Wed by appointment  
Hollander Hall 213, x4772

### Course description:

This course is an introduction into the theoretical underpinnings of the genesis and evolution of hip hop, a late modern phenomenon whose forms are routinely referred to as a movement, a culture, a music, and a politics. Since its emergence in the South Bronx during the 1970s, what constitutes the organizing definitions and philosophical bulwarks of hip hop are often underexplored. The course illuminates such submerged, neglected, and contested bodies of knowledge by focusing on eight concepts: justice, rights, recognition, freedom, equality, power, democracy, and love. Through these principles, students are able to address how we frame questions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, authenticity, the public sphere, incarceration, and globalization. Our meetings consider the popular and the underground, the originally forged and the remixed, the utility of nomenclature bifurcating conscious and radical hip hop on the one hand and alternative modes following the logic of neoconservatism and neoliberalism on the other, examining throughout the interplay among language, aesthetics, and form. We investigate as well whether hip hop in the United States and around the world is intrinsically a political, anti-political, or neutral force in the realm of politics. Written texts, lyrical thought, breaking, film, music videos, and guest lectures by rappers, R&B singers, DJs, academics, and graffiti artists are interwoven in assignments and in-class discussions. Through these mediums and select experiential education opportunities outside the classroom, students have an opportunity to render evaluations on the political theory of hip hop between past and future.

### Course requirements:

Participants are expected to attend class regularly and complete the readings listed on the course syllabus. I will generally begin each class summarizing briefly the previous session's main points, and shall proceed to lecture for a portion of time about the current day's topic. This is a lecture course that also incorporates valuable classroom conversation. As such, you should be prepared to engage in full class discussion, close textual examinations, and small group activities.

The following requirements serve as the basis for course evaluation:

- (1) Attendance **(10%)**
- (2) Participation **(20%)**: includes (a) one weekly reading e-post to Glow prior to class; and (b) contributions to class discussions and activities.
- (3) Two 5-7 -page essays **(40%)**
- (4) One 10-page Final Paper or Final Project **(30%)**