Ethnic Studies 128/Music 152:  
Hip Hop—The Politics of Culture  
Thursday 5:00-7:50pm, Peterson 102  
UCSD Spring 2015

Prof. Gabriel N. Mendes  
Office: Social Science Building 229  
Best way to contact me: gmendes@ucsd.edu. Please write “142” in the subject line.  
Phone: 858.822.5118  
Office hours: Tuesday 11:30-12:30 and Wednesday 1:30-3:00pm by appointment only. Please set a meeting time with me prior to arrival.

Course Overview

This course will examine how Hip Hop has become one of the most influential and manipulable forms of culture in U.S. society and even globally. Our exploration of the development of Hip Hop from a local “subculture” emerging in the South Bronx in the 1970s to a global culture with billion dollar currency will concentrate on the way Hip Hop has been experienced and interpreted by its practitioners, its students, and its critics. We will focus on the processes of production and consumption of Hip Hop culture, always with an eye towards Hip Hop’s aesthetic, political, and even existential dimensions. The key topics in the course derive from larger discussions of what America is and will be, and all of them revolve around the politics of identity & culture that characterize it.

Creating a learning environment: Only a portion of what you learn in this course will be from the instructor and the readings. Your classmates will play an instrumental role in your learning experience. In order for this class to be successful, you need to come to class prepared to share your ideas. The more involved you become, the more you will gain. Support your opinions with what you learned in the readings, prior discussion, and lecture. Listen carefully to others before you decide where you stand in relation to their argument and consider how to respond in a respectful and productive manner. Please also refer to UCSD’s Principles of Community, [http://www.vcba.ucsd.edu/principles.htm](http://www.vcba.ucsd.edu/principles.htm).

Logistics and Policies

You can reach me by email, in my office hours, or by appointment at any time during the quarter. I respond to students’ emails by 10am every weekday; I do not answer students’ emails on weekends.

I do not accept late assignments. In case of a medical/personal emergency, you must produce a doctor’s note or other documentation in order for an exception to be made.

Please complete the readings by Tuesday in the week they are assigned, and bring the text(s) we are covering that week to class.

**There are no computers allowed in this course.** In my experience at UCSD, computers have proven to be an obstacle rather than an aid to student learning and engagement. Please obtain a notebook and a several writing utensils that you enjoy using, as well as a highlighter for reviewing your notes.
Turn off phones and refrain from text messaging during class. If I notice you texting, I will ask you to leave the classroom and that will count as an absence.

This syllabus is subject to change; any changes will be announced well in advance in class or by email.

**Plagiarism and other Academic Misconduct:** Please refer to the guidelines from the Academic Integrity Office. If you cheat or plagiarize in this class, you will fail the course. [http://students.ucsd.edu/academics/academic-integrity/defining.html](http://students.ucsd.edu/academics/academic-integrity/defining.html)

**Grading and Course Requirements:**
- Attendance and Participation: 20%
- Two Critical Synthesis Reviews: 30%
- Final Research or Creative Project: 40%
- Final Project Presentation: 10%

**Attendance and Participation: 20%**
- Attendance and participation constitute a significant portion of your grade. Arrive to each class session on time and stay for its duration. Tardiness and absences will be noted and result in the lowering of your grade. You will be allowed one unexcused absence; any subsequent absence(s) requires a note from an official source or agency, i.e. a doctor.
- Active participation means thoughtful engagement in the readings/lectures, meaningful contributions to class discussions, and respectful collegiality toward your classmates and instructor.

**Critical Synthesis Reviews: 30%**
- You will write two brief papers (600-750 words) that offer a critical analysis of the week’s assigned reading. You will submit one of these papers prior to Sunday, April 26th at 7pm, satisfying the required paper for the 1st half of the course. Then you will submit a second paper prior to Sunday, May 24th at 7pm, thus satisfying the required paper for the 2nd half of the course. Detailed instructions will be provided to you in the 2nd session of our course.

**Final Paper or Project: 40%**
- You will choose between producing an original research paper (10pgs.) or a creative project (i.e. video/short story/play) that addresses a topic generated from the course reading material and/or lectures. You will submit a one-page paper/project description by 5pm Sunday, May 10th. I will post detailed instructions for the paper/project to TED.UCSD.EDU.

**Final Paper/Project Presentation: 10%**
- We will hold a special session for presentations during our allotted final exam time: Thursday, June 11th, 7:00-9:59pm. Students will do very brief presentations on their final paper/project. I will post detailed instructions for the presentation to TED.UCSD.EDU.

*****This course will have grader who is an Advanced Graduate Student in Ethnic
Studies who has demonstrated expertise in the subject matter of the course. The grader and instructor will alternate grading responsibility for each student’s work.*****

General Grading Standards:

A = Superior performance; meets assignment requirements, and demonstrates exceptional execution of those requirements (meaning that your work exceeds the ordinary effort and execution); reflects outstanding insight and depth; grammatically and stylistically excellent; would be considered a model example of assignment completion.

B = Good, solid performance; meets assignment requirements, and demonstrates competent execution of those requirements; reflects insight and depth; grammatically and stylistically strong; may have one or more problem areas.

C = Average performance; meets assignment requirements, minimally; grammatically and stylistically adequate; may have two or more problem areas; papers have more than two factual, typographical, or grammatical errors per page.

D = Below average performance; does not meet minimal assignment requirements; has several fundamental problem areas; has several errors throughout the paper.

F = Inferior performance; does not meet assignment requirements; not deserving of credit.

***If you are taking this course P/NP, you must take the quizzes, take the midterm, and submit a final paper, attend class and participate in order to get a passing grade***

And, the same goes for those enrolled for a letter grade.

REQUIRED TEXTS (Available at the UCSD Bookstore)

Listed in the order in which we’ll read them.


All other required reading will be posted to TED as PDF files.

Course Schedule (Subject to change, with advance notice):

*****(The key to making your way through the reading is time management. Obtain or generate a weekly calendar and block off at least 6 of the 128 hours in the week to devote to this course’s assigned reading.)*****

Week 1—April 2nd—“First Things First…”


• Viewing: Scratch (2001); Style Wars (1983); NY77: The Coolest Year in Hell (2007)

Week 2—April 9th—“The Original Repetitive…”


• Viewing: Copyright Criminals (2009)

Week 3—April 16th—“Let’s Take a Sec to Think Back”


• Viewing: Something from Nothing: The Art of Rap (2012)

Week 4—April 23rd—Goin’ Way Way Back to the Early Days…”


• Viewing: Rockers (1977); The Freshest Kids: The History of the B-Boy (2002); Beat This: A Hip Hop History (1984)

Week 5—April 30th—“It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back…”


• Viewing: Rhyme & Reason (1997)

Week 6—May 7th—“Straight Up Menace…”?


• Viewing: Boyz in the Hood, Fear of a Black Hat, 8 Mile, Hip Hop: Beyond Beats & Rhymes (2006)

Week 7—May 14th—The Ladies will kick it, the rhyme that is wicked…”


*****Special Guest Visit: Prof. Jillian Hernandez, 5:30-6:30pm*****

**Week 8—May 21st—*****Special Event*****

- "Black Studies Beyond Respectability Politics: A Conversation” –4pm-6pm
  Professors LaMonda Horton-Stallings (Indiana University), Samuel Roberts (Columbia University), and Jennifer Nash (George Washington University)
  Class will continue 6:15-7:00pm.


**Week 9—May 28th—“Worldwide…Worldwide…”


**Week 10—June 4th—Conclusion

Many students take an Ethnic Studies course because the topic is of great interest or because of a need to fulfill a social science, non-contiguous, or other college requirement. Often students have taken three or four classes out of interest yet do not realize how close they are to a major, a minor, or even a double major. An Ethnic Studies major is excellent preparation for a career in law, education, medicine, public health, social work, counseling, journalism, government and politics, international relations, and many other careers. If you would like information about the Ethnic Studies major or minor, please contact:

Daisy Rodríguez, Ethnic Studies Department Undergraduate Advisor
858-534-3277 or d1rodriguez@ucsd.edu or visit www.ethnicstudies.ucsd.edu