HISTORY 341 – THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE:

SPACE AND PLACE IN AMERICAN MUSIC

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| Professor: Dr. Kyle Riismandel | Contact: [kriis@njit.edu/973-596-3379](mailto:kriis@njit.edu/973-596-3379) |
| Time: Monday, 6-9PM | Office Hours: Monday 3-5 |
| Classroom: Cullimore Hall 111 |  |

**Course Description:**

In this class, we will take an interdisciplinary approach to the study of space, place, and culture in late 20th century urban America. In particular, we will be focusing on the co-constitutive relationship of musical forms and scenes with their home cities.

Though we will be looking at individual scenes and distinct places, we will also consider the broader implications of representation particularly with regard to race, class and gender as well as formal and informal regulation and other relationships of power within space.

The course will be divided into four units:

Hip-hop in the South Bronx, 1976-1984

Hardcore punk in suburban Los Angeles, 1976-1984

Gangsta rap in Los Angeles, 1988-1994

Grunge in Seattle, 1988-1994

**Course Goals and Assessments**

**Students will:**

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| Understand the 'production' of urban space through the legal process, media narratives, and cultural representations | Lecture  Primary and Secondary Readings  Discussion  Exams  Paper Assignment |
| Understand the origins, histories, and repercussions of popular music scenes in American cities | Lecture  Primary and Secondary Readings  Discussion  Exams  Paper Assignment |
| Practice the skills necessary to analyze, discuss, and write about primary and secondary sources related to the study of American cities and American culture | Lecture  Primary and Secondary Readings  Discussion  Exams  Paper Assignment |

**COURSE TEXTS**All course readings are available via [moodle.njit.edu](http://moodle.njit.edu/). **Please bring all readings to class**. This course will also require you to sign-up for a free Spotify account. I will be posting playlists that will help form the basis for discussion and other assignments. You should follow my account - profriismandel. You can either download the app or go to play.spotify.com to register for an account.

**ASSIGNMENTS**

**YOU MUST COMPLETE ALL ASSIGNMENTS TO PASS THE COURSE. FAILURE TO DO SO WILL RESULT IN AN AUTOMATIC F.**

Listening Quizzes

These quizzes will test your knowledge of the important songs and artists studied throughout the semester. There will be one quiz for each unit.

Papers

You will complete two papers based on prompts distributed during the semester. These papers will ask you to think critically about the productions of space and power within in the places and communities we are studying.

Listening and Viewing Questions

These questions will be distributed for each section. They are designed to prepare your for discussion by thinking and writing about the issues at hand in each unit.

Class Participation:

Participation in the context of this course does not simply mean showing up to class. You are asked to be active in and engaged with class discussions. This means you have done the week’s work before coming to class *and* have thought about the issues and questions I have raised for the week. This also means that you should respect your fellow students and me. During class, this includes but is not limited to refraining from all non-class related activities such as side conversations, text and instant messaging, completing homework for other courses, sleeping, and surfing the Internet.

Your final grade will be calculated as follows:

Listening quizzes x 4 – 6% each

Papers x 2 – 22% each

Listening and Viewing Questions x 4 – 2.5% each

Participation – 22%

**Course Policies**

Attendance:

Students are expected to attend all course meetings on time unless receiving prior authorization.

Missing class will not only adversely affect your class participation grade, but there will be screenings in class that will only be offered during that class period so do your best to attend. If you accrue more than 5 unexcused absences, you will receive an F in this course. This policy refers to all absences, including missing class because you are ill or have a family emergency. However, if you miss class to attend an NJIT sponsored event, to observe a religious holiday, or documented illness such absences will be excused. For these absences to count as excused, you must receive permission from the instructor in advance or provide a doctor's note in the case of sickness.

Office hours/student appointments:

My office hours will be every Monday from 3-5 PM. I am also available to meet by appointment if students are unable to make it to my office during these times. Feel free to send me an email to set up a meeting if you’d like to talk to me. And please feel free to come by if you have any questions about course topics, assignments, or grades.

Academic dishonesty:

Students are expected to obey the NJIT honor code, and I will enforce this code to its fullest extent. For the tenets of the code or for clarification of what constitutes plagiarism or cheating, please consult: <http://www.njit.edu/academics/honorcode.php>.

Cell phones:

Students must turn off and stow their cell phones before class begins. Under no circumstances may students answer their phones, make calls, send text messages, or use their cell phone in any manner during class hours unless approved by me before class begins. If I see a student using a cell phone in class, I will at minimum mark that student absent for the class and reserve the right to ask the student to leave for the remainder of the class. I do not want to interrupt class to ask you to stop texting. It interrupts the flow of discussion, distracts other students, and will inevitably embarrass the texter.

Laptops and miscellaneous technology rules:

Students may use laptops in this course for class-related activities only. If I learn that students are using laptops for any other purpose, I will issue a laptop ban for this class. Students are also prohibited from listening to iPods or using any other device in this class that has not received prior authorization. Essentially, you are in class approximately 3 hours a week. Please be present and prepared when you are here. If you would rather text or surf the internet, please do not come to class.

Students with Disabilities or Special Needs:

Students who have disabilities or special needs should contact NJIT's Student Disability Services to help procure accommodations in completing coursework. The center can be found at <http://www.njit.edu/counseling/services/disabilities.php>.

**Course Schedule**

**January 27 - Week 1**

Introductions/Syllabus Review

The Production of Space

Secondary Source

Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, “Introduction”

<http://selforganizedseminar.files.wordpress.com/2011/07/lefebvre_produc>

tion\_space.pdf

**February 3 - Week 2**

The Production of Space, Part II: Electric Boogaloo

Secondary Source

Lawrence Grossberg, *We Gotta Get Outta This Place: Popular Conservatism and Popular Culture* pp. 37-57.

**Unit II: The South Bronx and Hip-Hop**

**February 10 - Week 3**

Lecture: The South Bronx and Urban Crisis

Secondary Sources

*The Bronx is Burning*, pp. Ch. 1

Evelyn Diaz Gomez, *The Bronx*, Ch. 7

**February 17 - Week 4**

Lecture: The Birth of Hip-Hop

Primary Sources

Spotify playlist “South Bronx and Early Hip-Hop”

Clips from early Hip-Hop music videos

Secondary Source

Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*, Ch. 2

**February 17 - Week 5**

Screening and Discussion

Primary Source

*Wild Style* (1982)

Secondary Source:

Joe Austin, *Taking the Train: How Graffiti Art Became an Urban Crisis in New York City*, 75-107.

**Unit II – Hardcore and the Suburbs of Los Angeles**

**February 24 - Week 6**

Lecture: Postwar Suburban Los Angeles

Primary Sources

Clips from *Dragnet* and Films Noir

Secondary Source

Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Los Suburban Angeles*, Chapter 6 and Epilogue

Early Hip-Hop Listening Test

**March 3 - Week 7**

Lecture: Punk and the Emergence of Hardcore

Primary Sources:

Spotify playlist “Hardcore Punk”

Secondary Source

*American Hardcore*, pp. 80-132

**March 10 - Week 8 – Producing the Suburb**

Screening and Discussion

Primary Source

*The Decline of Western Civilization* (1981)

Secondary Source

Dewar McLeod, *Kids of the Black Hole*, Ch. 1 and Ch. 5

Hardcore Listening Test

**SPRING BREAK MARCH 16-23**

**Unit III – Gangsta Rap and South Central Los Angeles**

**March 24 - Week 9**

Lecture: Deindustrial Los Angeles

Primary Sources

Clips from *The Killer of Sheep* (1977) and *Colors* (1985)

Secondary Source

Mike Davis, *City of Quartz*, Ch. 4 “Fortress LA”

**March 31 - Week 10**

Lecture: West Coast Hip-Hop and Gangsta Rap

Primary Sources

Spotify playlist “Gangsta Rap”

Nelson George, “Gangsta Attitude” and “Niggas With Attitude”

**April 7 - Week 11**

Screening and Discussion

Primary Sources

Gangsta Rap music video montage

Secondary Source

Eithne Quinn, *Nuthin’ but a “G” Thang: The Culture and Commerce of Gangsta Rap*, Ch. 4 “Straight Outta Compton: Ghetto Discourses and the Geographies of Gangsta”

**Gangsta Rap Listening Test**

**Unit IV – Seattle and Grunge**

**April 14 - Week 12**

Lecture: The History of Seattle and Its Environs

Primary Source:

Secondary Source

Experience Music Project, “Nirvana and the Rise of the Northwest   
Underground,” POP

Conference 2010

https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/nirvana-rise-northwest-underground/id431416237?i=92905054&mt=2

**April 21 - Week 13**

Primary Sources

Spotify playlist “Grunge”

Secondary Sources

Ryan Moore, *Smells Like Teen Spirit: Youth Culture and Social Crisis*, Ch. 4

“Young, Gifted, and Slack”

Michael Azzerrad, *Our Band Could Be Your Life*, Ch. 12 “Mudhoney”

**April 28 - Week 14**

Primary Source

*Hype!* (1996)

Secondary Source

Mark Yam, *Everybody Loves Our Town: An Oral History of Grunge*, pp. Chs. 3,

14, 26, 30, 31, and 46

**Grunge Listening Test**

**May 5 – Week 15**