

RELIGION & HIP HOP
RN 296 / AA 296



I think my **religion** is probably art. Everything comes out of some form of **creativity**.
—hip hop artist, Erykah Badu

Instructor: M. S. Guillory

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Office Hours: Wednesday, 2-3 (via Zoom), by appointment

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Course Description:

Religion and Hip Hop uses digital media studies to explore diverse religious expressions in hip hop culture. Through critical reading, community field trips, and hands-on technology usage, students will consider an often overlooked element in the study of hip hop culture, religion.

Course Objectives:

1. Use theories drawn from religious studies, media studies, and visual culture studies to analyze the diverse ways that religion appears in the artistic works of hip hop artists.
2. Gain a multidimensional understanding of the creative process through lenses of identity theory, Africana religious studies, digital religion, and media/cultural studies.
3. Construct arguments for this interconnection between religion and hip hop using video and music production, mobile application development, and techniques in Digital Visual Research.

4. Demonstrate students' working knowledge of the inner creative workings of hip hop through the production their own creative works.
5. Explore the unique challenges that researchers face when taking a cultural, digitally-based approach to the study of religion.

Course Assignments and Grading Criteria:

Exam 1 (25% of total grade): Non-comprehensive exam, covers material presented from January 25-February 24. Format includes the following: key terms and short answer questions. A brief overview of the exam will be given March 1.

Podcast Lyrical Analysis (20% of total grade): This project is an edited recording of your analysis of selected rap lyrics. Specifically, this analysis will engage religion, presented in the course as (1) a transmitter of belief systems; (2) a communicative link to the supernatural; (3) a means of answering existential questions; and (3) a creative medium for self-expression.

Digital Graffiti Piece (15% of total grade): Using a selected mobile application(s) you will create your own *digitized mural*. Again, as with the podcast assignment, you will be required to engage religion as considered throughout the course.

Exam 2 (30% of total grade): Non-comprehensive exam, covers material presented from March 22-April 28. Format includes the following: key terms and short answer questions.

Class Participation, Readings, and Attendance (10% of total grade): Attendance at all class sessions is necessary. This is a discussion-based class so participation and in-class exercises are also important elements in this course. Together, attendance and participation will account for 10% of your grade, although if you miss a substantial number of classes your grade is subject to further deduction.

Grading Scale:

A	94-100	C	74-76
A-	90-93	C-	70-73
B+	87-89	D+	67-69
B	84-86	D	64-66
B-	80-83	D-	60-63
C+	77-79	F	59/below

Academic Honesty Policy:

All course assignments and activities must be carried out in accordance with Boston University's Academic Conduct Code. Additional information about this policy can be found at <http://www.bu.edu/academics/policies/academic-conduct-code/>.

Pandemic Policy:

In accordance with university pandemic policy, classes may be switched to remote at short notice. *Please check Blackboard before each class session.* If you will miss class because you've tested positive for COVID-19, are ill/experiencing symptoms, or because of pandemic disruptions to your caregiving arrangements, please contact me directly. Audio lectures will be available to students who miss class because of pandemic related circumstances.

Religious Holidays:

Students are allowed to make up work missed because of a religious holiday. Please note that arrangements must be made in advance.

Required Texts:

- Monica Miller and Anthony B. Pinn, eds. *The Hip Hop and Religion Reader*.

Additional Readings:

All secondary readings are accessible via blackboard.

Course Weekly Schedule and Readings:

Please note: the instructor reserves the right to make appropriate changes to the syllabus. It is the student's responsibility to keep up to date with course information if absent from class. Readings should be done in advance of the class time listed, in preparation for class discussion that day.

Week 1: Introduction to Religion and Hip Hop Culture

1/20—Class Overview / Religion and Hip Hop Culture

Week 2: Defining the Terms

1/25—What is (Digital) Religion?

Reading: Guillory. "Religion and the Creative Quest for Self in the Art of Erykah Badu," pp. 11-23.

Reading: Campbell, *Digital Religion*, pp. 1-21

Reading: Johns. "Ethical Issues in the Study of Religion and New Media," pp. 238-250.

1/27—What is Hip Hop?

Reading: Rose. *Black Noise*, pp. 21-61.

Week 3: Religion, Hip Hop, and Creative Process

2/1—Religion and Rap Music: Bringing the Two Together

Reading: Pinn & Miller. *The Hip Hop and Religion Reader*, pp. 73-84; 234-243.

2/3—Religion, Hip Hop, and the Creative Process

Reading: Questlove. *Creative Quest*, pp. 18-46.

Reading: Winnicott. "Playing: Creativity Activity and the Search for Self," pp. 71-86.

Reading: Clay. "#NOWTHATSRELIGIONANDHIPHOP: Mapping the Terrain of Religion and Hip Hop in Cyberspace," pp. 87-95.

Week 4: Rap and Religion: Christianity & African American Islamic Traditions (AAIT)

2/8— Christianity and Rap Music: Friend or Foe?

Reading: Pinn & Miller. *The Hip Hop and Religion Reader*, pp. 263-287.

Music: Select Songs from Mahogany Jones and LaCrae.

2/10—AAIT and Rap Music (Jeta Luboteni)

Reading: Pinn & Miller. *The Hip Hop and Religion Reader*, pp. 167-182; 197-212.

Reading: Su'ad Abdul Khabeer. *Muslim Cool*, pp. 27-76.

Week 5: AAIT, continued & Africana Religion in the World of Hip Hop

2/15—AAIT and Rap Music, continued

Reading: Pinn & Miller. *The Hip Hop and Religion Reader*, pp. 167-182; 197-212.

Music: Select Songs from Rakim, Mos Def, and Njeri Earth.

2/17—Yoruba Religion, Rap Music, and the Internet

Reading: Pinn & Miller. *The Hip Hop and Religion Reader*, pp. 160-164; 392-406.

Reading: Henry. *Religion as Art*, pp. 179-188.

Music: Select Songs from OSHUN, Azealia Banks, Princess Nokia

Week 6: Witchcraft and Hip Hop Culture

2/22—Monday Schedule

2/24—Witchcraft and Identity Construction in Hip Hop

Reading: Brianna Suslovic, "Uplifting Tituba: Protecting Witches of Color Then and Now," <https://medium.com/witchesrise/uplifttituba-4c23d2ccba40>.

Reading: Olivia Haynes, "I'm Black and I'm a Witch: My Guide to Magick," <https://afropunk.com/2010/06/im-black-and-im-a-witch-my-guide-to-magick/>.

Reading: Zahra Dalilah, "#BlackGirlMagic: Reclaiming the Beliefs of the African Diaspora," <https://thequietus.com/articles/21947-princess-nokia-azealia-banks-witchcraft-black-identity>.

Week 7: Exam (covers week 2 through week 6)

3/1—Exam Review: Q & A Session (Guillory & Jeta Luboteni)

3/3—**Exam 1** (*Key Terms and Short Answer Questions*)

Week 8: (Hip Hop) Podcasting & Class Cypher

3/15—1-2-3s of Podcasting & Hip Hop in the World of Podcasting

Reading: Spinelli and Dann. *Podcasting: The Audio Media Revolution*, pp. 1-16; 125-148.

Reading: Castillo. "NPR Released an Explicit Podcast on Hip-Hop and Prison," <https://www.npr.org/sections/publiceditor/2020/11/25/937246187/npr-released-an-explicit-podcast-on-hip-hop-and-prison-heres-why-it-matters>.

Podcasts: Snoop Dogg's GGN, Louder Than a Riot, Your Choice

3/17—Class Cypher: Lyrical Analysis of Song for Podcast Segment

Reading: *To the Break of Dawn: A Freestyle on the Hip Hop Aesthetics*, pp. 107-138.

Week 9: Humanism, Existentialism, and Notions of Evil in Rap Music

3/22—Life's Questions: Existential Questions About Death

Reading: Pinn. *Noise and Spirit*, pp. 85-104.

Reading: Pinn. "Zombies in the Hood...Rap Music and the Structuring of Death," pp. 183-197.

Music: NoName's "Casket Pretty"

3/24—Rap and the Problem of Evil

Reading: Pinn & Miller. *The Hip Hop and Religion Reader*, pp. 129-139.

Music: Tyler the Creator and Flatbush Zombies

Week 10: Instrumentation and Religious Identity in Hip Hop Culture

3/29—Moving Beyond the Lyrics: The Art of Kendrick Lamar

Reading: Kendrick Lamar Interviews with *Complex*, *Rolling Stone*, *NPR*.

Reading: Guillory. “Blackness and the Negotiation of Binary Categories in Lamar’s *Section.80*”

Assignment Due: “Religion and Hip Hop” Podcast Entry

3/31—*Scratch: A Documentary of DJing*

Reading: *Grove Music: The Art and Culture of the Hip-Hop DJ*, pp. 14-69.

Week 11: Instrumentation, continued / Religiosity in Hip Hop Music Production

4/5—So, What’s Religious About Turntablism?

Reading: Pinn & Miller. *The Hip Hop and Religion Reader*, pp. 115-128.

Class Discussion: Grandmaster Flash, DJ Shortee, DJ Screw, & DJ Spooky

4/7—The Art of Hip Hop Music Production

Reading: Schloss. “Elements of Style: Aesthetics of Hip Hop Composition,” pp. 135-168.

Readings: *Rolling Stone*’s “WondaGurl aka Ebony Oshunrinde,”

<https://www.rollingstone.com/pro/features/wondagurl-future-25-1179520/>

Music: Selected Songs Produced by WondaGurl

Week 12: Religiosity in Hip Hop Video Production & Religiosity of Graffiti Art

4/12—The Art of Video Production

Reading: “Connections Among Music, Image, and Lyrics,” pp. 175-198.

4/14—“Writing” Religion into Hip Hop Culture

Reading: Castleman. “The Politics of Graffiti,” pp. 21-29.

Week 13: Fieldtrip & Embodiment in Hip Hop Culture

4/19—Fieldtrip: “Graffiti Alley” in Cambridge

Reading: Fenoglio. “Living on the Edge: My First Experience at Graffiti Alley,”

<https://www.bcheights.com/2018/03/18/living-on-the-edge-my-first-experience-at-graffiti-alley/>

Graffiti Alley Visuals: “Black Lives Matter Murals at Cambridge’s Graffiti Alley,” <https://gregcookland.com/wonderland/2020/06/19/black-lives-matter-graffiti-alley/>

4/21—The Practice of Tattooing in Hip Hop Culture

Reading: Schildkrout. “Inscribing the Body,” pp. 319-344.

Assignment Due: Graffiti Piece (upload to Blackboard by 5:00 pm EST)

Week 14: Materiality in Hip Hop Culture & The Globalization of Hip Hop Culture

4/26—Materiality in Hop Hop Culture: “The Jesus Piece”

Reading: Morgan. *Religion and Material Culture*, pp. 55-74.

Reading: Utey. *Rap and Religion*, pp. 49-67.

4/28—Religion, Hip Hop, and Globalization (Jeta Luboteni)

Reading: Morgan and Bennett. “Hip-Hop and the Global Imprint of a Black Cultural Form,” pp. 176-196.

Reading: CERCL Writing Collective. “Black Churches, Hip Hop, and Globalization,” pp. 161-180.

Week 15: Exam (covers week 9 through week 14)

5/3—**Exam 2** (*Key Terms and Short Answer Questions*)