

Philosophy 191: Hip Hop Music, Spoken Word, and Philosophy
 Dr. Carol Moeller
 Moravian College
 Fall 2013

Class Meets: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10:20 - 11:30 a.m.
 Classroom: PPHAC 338
 Office: Comenius 110
 Office Hours: T, TH: 7:45 a.m. – 8:45 a.m.; T, TH 11:30-12:30, and by appointment.
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 (Please allow at least 24 for me to receive emails.)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

We will investigate how some Hip Hop music and Spoken Word works engage with classic Western philosophical themes and questions, including those of knowledge, metaphysics, ethics, love, and justice. How do some contribute to knowledge and some perpetuate injustice, sexism, and violence? How does Rakim relate to Augustine's arguments on God, Gil Scot-Heron to Kant on punishment, Lil' Kim to Sartre on "the objectifying gaze"? Students will be required to attend two spoken word workshops or performances, and to view and listen to material outside of class.

Required Text:

Darby, Derrick, and Tommie Shelby, ed., *Hip Hop and Philosophy: Rhyme 2 Reason*, Chicago, NY: Carus Publishing, 2005. This text may be supplemented with various primary source materials by: Augustine, Plato, Kant, Sartre, Hegel, Hume, Fanon, Hobbes, and others, as well as other readings.

The course will consist of dialogue with the texts and with each other. We must:

- a) do all the assigned readings carefully,
- b) read them numerous times in order to grasp them more deeply,
- c) engage deeply with the ideas, positions, arguments,
- d) ask how we might agree or disagree with points in readings and why,
- e) attend class and participate in class discussions, and
- f) through ongoing practice learn to read, write, and think in a philosophical manner.

"Philosophy" literally means "love of wisdom," when the word is translated from the Greek language. The principal aim of the course is to learn, to learn not only what philosophers have thought, but also how they have thought, with what methods and approaches. We seek to find strengths and weaknesses in their approaches, as well as in their views. We seek to discover, evaluate, and reflect critically upon our own views. It's not enough to have opinions; we must learn to examine our views for their adequacy, to give reasons for and against them. Doing all the assigned work is indispensable. The

readings are often not long, but they are deep. One learns philosophy by doing it: reading what philosophers have written, following their lines of thought, asking our own questions of the texts and of each other, and thinking critically about their ~ and our ~ ways of thinking about the world. One cannot learn how to do philosophy just by listening to anyone else talk about it or by reading what they have written.

We learn it mostly by doing it – just as we must learn by doing when we learn to play a sport or to play a musical instrument.

Readings: Before each class meeting, read and reflect upon everything assigned for class.

Fair warning: there is no way to master the material except by doing lots of reading, discussing, and reflecting upon the material.

Seeing Me: If you have any trouble with any of the material, come see me. Don't wait.

Come to my office hours. If you cannot make these, let me know and we can set up another time to meet. Try to identify what your specific difficulties are, e.g., motivation, interest, reading comprehension, note taking, writing, quiz and test-taking skills, philosophical reasoning. I can best help you get on track by seeing where in particular you are facing challenges. If you need to get something to me, leave it at my office.

INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the course, students should achieve the following outcomes:

- 1) To be familiar with and understand some important questions of philosophy.
- 2) To explore how Spoken Word and Hip Hop traditions explore many philosophical questions.
- 3) To relate these art forms and philosophy to questions of identity, race, and gender.
- 4) To develop greater facility in reading, writing, thinking, and speaking about these topics.
- 5) To strengthen critical reflection upon one's own views and those common in one's culture (as well as cultures of others), but particularly one's own (which we sometimes take for granted like a fish does the water around it).
- 6) To increase knowledge of and analytical ability at how such issues as gender, race, class, and sexuality relate and compound questions.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

20	Exam 1
20	Exam 2
20	Exam 3
20	5-6 Page Essay
2.5	Presentation on Readings (5-10 minute overview of reading)
2.5	Presentation of self-selected relevant music, video, or spoken word piece
5	Five 1-2 Page Reading Responses (see note *below)
5	Attending at least one spoken word workshop or performance
5	Participation in class, including writing
100	Total Possible Points

Attendance and Participation: Attendance is required, as is actual participation, not simply

being a warm body in the room. Unexcused absences (beyond one) will detract from your final grade, pushing your course average ~ and final grade – down by .5 points per miss from the course average. For example, if you have 3 unexcused absences (which would be 2 beyond the 1 "freebie" allowed); your final average will be lowered by 2 x .5, which equals 1. If your grade would otherwise be an 80.1 (B -), it will become a 79.1 (C +). If the final score remains right on the borderline between two letter grades, your participation level will be taken into account (as opposed to simply attendance).

Four Exams (20

points each): These will cover material from the text and from class, and it will also go beyond those to ask you to apply these ideas and skills further. (In other words, you will need to go beyond mastery of the written and verbal material from class)

Essay (20 points): 5-6 double-

spaced pages on topic selected from those I distribute, or your own proposed topic with my written approval.

Use a complete bibliography and references, according to MLA, Chicago, or another standard style. Come see me (well in advance of the deadline) for any help, and for feedback on outlines and/or drafts of your essay.

*Reading Responses:

Five 1-2 page reading response essays: reflective papers on the readings for the class meeting at which you hand it in. That is, the essay should be about your reaction to the readings, not a review or extension of the class discussion. I would suggest you try to do a reading response every week, so that unexpected life issues or other coursework won't interfere with your completing all five essays. These essays are for your benefit, to practice engaging critically with the readings; they will not be graded except for Pass/Fail, simply marked for credit toward your assigned total of 5.

Presentation: Students will sign up for a section of reading to present in class. In this presentation of about 5-10 minutes (on assigned class days), you should provide an overview of the main points of the readings for that day explained in your own words (though you may point to sections of the text for clarification and support). Offer your own overviews, analyses, questions, and responses to them.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

The rules of academic integrity for Moravian College must be followed. Please take them seriously. Any suspicion of violations will be actively pursued. Moravian College standards on academic integrity and plagiarism are available in *Academic Honesty at Moravian College*, available from the Office of the Dean of the College (in Colonial Hall, first floor).

Plagiarism is very serious, resulting in automatic failure on the relevant assignment, even if the action is unintentional, such as the failure to cite the source of paraphrased ideas. We will discuss these issues on particular assignments, such as essays. For more information on these policies, please see the student handbook, the professor, or the academic dean's office.

For this course, the following pointers may be helpful. Follow instructions on graded assignments, doing your own work unless the assignment is explicitly given as a group project or as allowing for open-book work. In doing essays, be sure to give references and credit for any ideas which are not entirely your own. That is, when quoting or

paraphrasing or even referring to the idea(s) of another, cite the source. If you are not sure whether a reference is required, give a reference anyway. If in doubt, err on the side of overly generous reference giving, and consult with the professor for guidance.

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Disabilities /Learning Disabilities

Students with disabilities/learning disabilities should contact the Learning Services Office as soon as possible to arrange for any necessary accommodations. Official authorization is necessary for accommodation eligibility.

Potential Syllabus Changes

This syllabus is subject to change at the professor's notice.

Further Note on Grading

As in other courses, grading is at the professional judgment of the professor. For example, there may be an element of discretion in how much partial credit is given to a response. You may appeal grades to the department chair, Dr. Cantens, and to the Dean's Office. Grading and academic integrity policies for this course are in accordance with Moravian College standards, as expressed in the Catalog (p. 43). Please note the following about grading.

Grading scheme: 97-100=A+ 93-96.9=A 90-92.9=A- 87-89.9=B+ 83-86.9=B 80-82.9=B- 77-79.9=C+ 73-76.9=C 70-72.9=C- 67-69.9=D+ 63-66.9=D 60-62.9=D- 0-59.9=F

A (4.00 points) and A- (3.67): "These grades indicate achievement of the highest caliber. They involve expectations of independent work, original thinking, and the ability to acquire and effectively use knowledge."

B+ (3.33), B (3.00), and B- (2.67): "These grades indicate higher than average achievement. Evidence of independent work and original thinking is expected."

C+ (2.33), C (2.00), and C- (1.67): "These grades are given when the student has devoted a reasonable amount of time, effort, and attention to the work of the course, and has satisfied the following criteria: familiarity with the content of the course, familiarity with the methods of study of the course, and active participation in the work of the class."

D+ (1.33), D (1.00), and D- (0.67): "These grades indicate unsatisfactory work, below the standard expected by the College. They indicate work which in one or more important aspects falls below the average expected of students for graduation. The work is, however, sufficient to be credited for graduation, if balanced by superior work in other courses."

F (0.00): "This indicates failure."

Class Participation Guidelines

- Speak from experience and avoid generalizing about groups of people.
- Respect confidentiality (do not share personal information shared in class outside of the class).
- No blaming or scapegoating.
- Keep the focus on your own learning.
- Share "airtime." Allow time and space for others to participate.
- Listen to and respect different experiences and perspectives.

Phil 191 Reading Schedule: Readings are to be done prior to that day's class

These readings will be supplemented with other readings, music, videos, and spoken word pieces and performances assigned for inside and outside of class.

Tuesday August 27	First Day
Thursday, August 29	West, "Foreword," Darby and Shelby, "From Rhyme to Reason: This Shit Ain't Easy"

I. Da Mysteries: God, Love, and Knowledge

Tuesday, September 3	Track 1 Darby, "Yo! It Ain't No Mystery: Who Is God?"; St. Augustine
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Thursday, September 5	Track 2 Shelby, "Ain't (Just) 'bout da Booty: Funky Reflections on Love"; Plato
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Tuesday, September 10	Track 3 Green, "'You Perceive with Your Mind': Knowledge and Perception"; Descartes
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II. What's Beef: Ruminations on Violence

Thursday, September 12	Track 4 Pittman, "Y'all Niggaz Better Recognize": Hip Hop's Dialectical Struggle for Recognition"; Hegel
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Tuesday, September 17	Track 5 Shusterman, "Rap Aesthetics: Violence and the Art of Keeping It Real"; Dewey
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Thursday, September 19	Track 6 James, "F**k the Police [State]": Rap, Warfare, and the Leviathan"; Hobbes
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Tuesday, September 24	Further Discussion
Thursday, September 26	Exam 1

III. That's How I'm Livin': Authenticity, Blackness, and Sexuality

Tuesday, October 1	Track 7 Taylor, "Does Hip Hop Belong to Me? The Philosophy of Race and Culture"
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Thursday, October 3	Track 8 Gines, "'Queen Bees and Big Pimps'; Sex and Sexuality in Hip Hop"
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Tuesday, October 8	No Class, Fall Break
Thursday, October 10	Track 9 Gordon, "Grown Folks' Business: The Problem of Maturity in Hip Hop"; Alain Locke

Tuesday, October 15	Track 10 Thompson, "Knowwhatumsayin? How Hip-Hop Lyrics Mean"
Thursday, October 17	Track 11 McGrath and Tilahun, "Girl Got 99 Problems: Is Hip Hop One?"; J.L. Austin, Mill, Kant
Tuesday, October 22	Track 12 Corlett, "'For All My Niggaz and Bitches': Ethics Epithets"; Mill
Thursday, October 24	Further Discussion
Tuesday, October 29	Exam 2
<i>V. Fight the Power: Political Philosophy 'n the Hood</i>	
Thursday, October 31	Track 13 Lawson, "Microphone Commandos: Rap Music and Political Philosophy"; John Locke
Tuesday, November 5	Track 14 McPherson, "Halfway Revolution: From That Gangsta Hobbes to Radical Liberals"; Hobbes
Thursday, November 7	ESSAY DUE
	Track 15 Kelly, "Criminal-Justice Minded: Retribution, Punishment, and Authority," Bentham
Tuesday, November 12	Track 16 Roberts, "Getting' Dis'd and Gettin' Paid: Rectifying Injustice"
Thursday, November 14	Morgan "After...Word! The Philosophy of the Hip-Hop Battle"
Tuesday, November 19	Sheftall (Xerox)
Thursday, November 21	Dyson (Xerox)
Tuesday, November 26	No Class
Thursday, November 28	No Class
Tuesday, December 3	West (Xerox)
Thursday, December 5	Further Discussion
Friday, December 13: 1:30	FINAL EXAM

PEDAGOGY DEVELOPMENT

“Alternative” Assignments: Support, Rigor, and Grading

In addition to graded and ungraded writing and presentations, I have worked with students doing “alternative” ways of showing what they are learning, including creative arts projects (such as painting, drawing, photography, music, video, poetry, and fiction and non-fiction writing) as well as original website development. Generally I have required them to write at least a brief essay making explicit the philosophical meaning of the work. I have received incredible work, in which students have clearly poured their hearts, gifts, and intellects. I have also received work that is not particularly strong or rigorous. I have struggled with how to support and grade such work. Similarly, I have required collaborative work, with similar challenges. Even with individual presentations and with informal writing, I have yet to develop the types of support guidelines and grading rubrics that I use for formal essay writing. I would like to spend time developing such guidelines, following up with books and online resources I have already begun to explore. Having begun to do some collaborative writing with colleagues, I would like to explore how to use such technologies to promote student collaborative work.

I have also seen how students are often better writers in the context of social media (such as Facebook) than in formal papers. I would like to find innovative ways to build upon that confidence and ease some have rather than simply despairing at the lack of facility so many have with formal essays. I would like to play with at least small ways to help them bridge from realms in which they are comfortable expressing themselves to those which show rigor and formality required in academic and professional contexts.

My new course “Hip Hop Music, Spoken Word, and Philosophy” is an ideal site for such exploration. I need to explore more music and video resources, and students will be exposed to a whole range of expression, with current artists in dialogue with the canon of Western philosophy.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

I teach philosophy as a conversation in which students and I are a part. I work to help them take themselves seriously as thinkers. As an undergraduate student of bell hooks (author of *Teaching to Transgress*), I was introduced to “radical pedagogy” early on, particularly in the tradition of Paulo Freire. With each class, I follow Freire in critiquing “the banking model of education” (in which students are expected to parrot back information, etc.) as opposed to “education for liberation” (in which students are thinking for themselves, working to transform themselves and the world). How does Freire’s model apply to students in the 21st century at Moravian College in the digital era?

“The teacher is of course an artist, but being an artist does not mean that he or she can make the profile, can shape the students. What the educator does in teaching is to make it possible for the students to become themselves.”

— Paulo Freire, *We Make the Road by Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change*

What does it mean to “make it possible for the students to become themselves” at Moravian today? My challenges as a professor include being willing to meet students as they are. Moravian students in 2013 are very different from me and other students of bell hooks at Oberlin College in the 1980’s. I sometimes despair about weaknesses I perceive in many current students, such as difficulties with reading, writing, critical thinking, speaking up, taking strong positions, giving reasons for their views, and valuing learning for its own sake. I would like to better appreciate my students worlds, strengths, skills, and motivations, to build upon them and bridge from what they are comfortable with to what they need to learn as undergraduates and their whole lives.

RESOURCES

I have recently discovered Dr. Andrea Lundsford, Emeriti professor of English and director of the writing center at Stanford University. She has written a great deal on collaborative writing, on “Students 2.0” in the digital age, in using wikispaces and social media – even gaming – to work with contemporary students. She has a number of books, such as *Writing Together: Collaboration in Theory and Practice* (with Lisa Ede) Writing Together: Collaboration in Theory and Practice (Bedford/St. Martin's, 2011). Starting with leads she gave in workshops at Lehigh University, I will explore some of the resources Lundsford has developed. She is currently teaching a new course called Writing 2.0: The Art of the Digital Essay.

TIMETABLE

I will not be teaching this summer and have no other specific commitments.

I plan to have a primary focus upon this pedagogical project during the ten weeks from Monday May 20 to Friday July 26.

May 20 – May 26	Revise preliminary bibliography and plans for pedagogy project.
May 27 – June 9	Investigate music and videos for Hip Hop Music, Spoken Word, and Philosophy course, work them into syllabus and course plans for required and recommended assignments, building from <i>Hip Hop and Philosophy</i> (Darby and Shelby) resources.
June 10 – June 23	Review notes from Lundsford workshop, read her article on “digital essays 2.0,” draft initial notes for student assignments on technologies and writing
June 24 – July 7	Review notes from Lundsford workshop on collaborative writing specifically, read her book on collaborative writing, draft initial notes for student assignments on collaborative writing
July 8 – July 14	Do online research and draft guidelines and rubrics for presentations
July 15 – July 21	Do online research and draft guidelines and rubrics for creative and other “alternative assignments”
July 22 – July 26	Consolidate resources, draft presentation of findings for CAT workshop