



HIP HOP CULTURE: COMMUNITY, IDENTITY, AND GLOBALIZATION

Seminar Leader: **Ben Tso**

House Leader: **Lillie Tsunashima**

Course Description

Since its beginnings in the late 20th century, hip-hop culture has grown from the local music of African-American communities into a pervasive cultural aesthetic representing larger and more heterogeneous audience. Hip hop has given a voice to the voiceless. It has spread from its origins in a community of marginalized African-Americans in the Bronx to Asian-American immigrants spitting lyrics about the struggle of assimilation and expectations. In this seminar we will look specifically at hip hop culture as a community. Through our analysis of hip hop culture, we will question our usual definition of “community”. How can an artistic aesthetic such as hip hop function as a community in the same way as nations, towns, schools, and churches? On the last day of the seminar, students will create and rap their own lyrics that convey themes of hip hop discussed in class in the context of their life.

Schedule

Day 1: *Introduction to Sociological Concepts and Hip Hop History*

- We begin the seminar with an introduction to sociological concepts that will build the foundation of the seminar. We define concepts such as community, self-identity, and subcultures/counterculture.
- We look at hip hop culture as a “community” that was created by the marginalized African Americans in the Bronx during the 1970s. Through history, we look at how hip-hop culture became a cultural aesthetic that empowered these marginalized people - a community for the outsiders in society.
- We conclude the first day by looking at the globalization of hip-hop and how it has rapidly spread across the the globe.

Day 2: *Hip Hop Today: Minorities and Immigrants*

- We branch off of day 1 by focusing on how contemporary hip-hop has provided a platform for the voices of marginalized minorities as well as a platform for the construction of self-identity. We begin by looking at one of the most famous artists in the game and his renowned track: Notorious B.I.G’s “Juicy”. Here, we will analyze parts of his lyrics and see how the song captures not only the context of his struggle in the ghettos of New York but also how it empowers both himself and his listeners.
- Flash-forward a decade, transitioning from this, we look at Eddie Huang’s short interview clip and see the parallels of his experience. For Eddie Huang, a



Taiwanese-American immigrant child, he struggled to find an identity within an America that seemed to “erase” Asian-Americans from pop-culture and popular media. Eddie found solace in hip-hop because it was a voice for the oppressed and he saw his own experiences connect with hip-hop lyrics.

- Finally, we look at another song, DumbFoundDead’s 24KTOWN, as a direct example of an immigrant hip-hop artist. How do we see the themes of community, marginalization, and identity in this song, by a Korean-American immigrant?

Day 3: *Hip Hop Tomorrow and Implications*

- Popular criticism points out that hip-hop has transitioned from being less about counter-culture and resistance to more about drugs and sex. Yet, the hip-hop community is still vibrant and increasingly growing. What is drawing people in? We look at the video “Black Lifestyle in Japan”, and see that hip-hop does not only appeal to marginalized minorities, but even for majority groups to escape racial and national identities.
- We look into the movie *ROCK THE PLANET*, which will be released this coming October. The movie explains the relationship between hip-hop culture and politics. At first these two seem very far apart conceptually; however, hip-hop ideology can be linked with many political principles. By examining the songs of Deli, a Japanese hip-hop singer, we focus on Japan’s current sociopolitical environment, especially in light of the tragedy of 3.11, and see how hip hop culture and politics relate to each other.

Day 4: *Presentations: Rap About Yourself!*

We finish the seminar off by presenting individually written raps (see next section). We will recap the seminar by revisiting day 1’s question of “what is a community?” How has our conception of a community changed and what has remained the same?

Final Exercise

Each student will prepare and present their own raps. After each presentation, we will discuss and see how it conveyed themes such as self-identity, struggles, hope, marginalization, and resistance in a personal context. After presentations are finished, we will recap the seminar by revisiting day 1’s question of “what is a community?” How has our conception of a community changed and what has remained the same?

Seminar Assignments and Readings

- Jeff Chang’s “It’s a Hop Hop World”
<http://foreignpolicy.com/2009/10/12/its-a-hip-hop-world/>
- DumbFoundDead’s 24KTOWN <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vZFRIV9G9eg>



- Lyrics: <http://genius.com/Dumbfoundead-24ktown-lyrics>
- “Black Lifestyle” in Japan https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Qe4AZRkFYE
- Eddie Huang: “Asian Americans Have Been Erased From Pop Culture”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PQsh58gghog>
- Notorious B.I.G’s “Juicy” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_JZom_gVfuw
 - Lyrics: <http://genius.com/The-notorious-big-juicy-lyrics>

Message from the House Leader

Hello, everyone! My name is Lillie/ Riri Tsunashima, I am a sophomore at McGill University in Canada, majoring in International Development Studies. However, I am currently taking a gap year, living in China/ Tianjing to study Chinese language. I was born and raised in Tokyo until the age of 15, and I spent my high school in an International school in Singapore. My hobbies are travelling, exploring new places, food, and cultures, listening to music, singing and I absolutely enjoy taking a walk when the weather is nice. Personally, I did not know about Hip-hop so much before; however, when I look at Hip-hop culture in depth, I realized that their philosophy could relate to the world we are living and learned how the society is created, specifically establishing a community and identity. By learning Hip-hop culture, I hope that you guys can start thinking about your own identity and community. I am very much looking forward meeting you all in Komatsu this summer! If you have any questions feel free to ask me via email.

Message from the Seminar Leader

What’s up everyone! My name is Ben and I am beyond excited to come to Komatsu and to meet you all this summer. First, a little about myself: I am from Marlton, New Jersey and I will be a sophomore at Princeton University this fall. I have not declared a major yet, but I will most likely be majoring in Economics. As you can tell from the topic of this seminar, I love hip-hop. Growing up, some of most memorable moments include listening to a Lupe Fiasco album with my brother and C-walking (a form of hip-hop dance) with my friends at the park. Besides listening to music and hip-hop dancing, I also enjoy running and video games. One thing I love to do when I travel is to discover new places and sceneries while running. That being said, I hope this seminar will make you look at not only hip hop but also art and culture in a deeper and more analytical way. If you have any questions about the music/videos/reading or just want to chat, feel free to e-mail me. See you soon!