

Special Topics in African American Literature: OutKast and the Rise of the Hip Hop South

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Course Description

In 1995, Atlanta, GA, duo OutKast attended the Source Hip Hop Awards, where they won the award for best new duo. Mostly attended by bicoastal rappers and hip hop enthusiasts, OutKast was booed off the stage. OutKast member Andre Benjamin, clearly frustrated, emphatically declared what is now known as the rallying cry for young black southerners: “the South got something to say.”

For this course, we will use OutKast’s body of work as a case study questioning how we recognize race and identity in the American South after the civil rights movement. Using a variety of post-civil rights era texts including film, fiction, criticism, and music, students will interrogate OutKast’s music as the foundation of what the instructor theorizes as “the hip hop South,” the southern black social-cultural landscape in place over the last twenty-five years.

Course Objectives

1. To develop and utilize a multidisciplinary critical framework to successfully engage with conversations revolving around contemporary identity politics and (southern) popular culture
2. To challenge students to engage with unfamiliar texts, cultural expressions, and language in order to learn how to be socially and culturally sensitive and aware of modes of expression outside of their own experiences.
3. To develop research and writing skills to create and/or improve one’s scholarly voice and others via the following assignments:
 - Critical listening journal
 - Nerdy hip hop review

****Explicit Content Statement**** **(courtesy: Dr. Treva B. Lindsey)**

Over the course of the semester students will be introduced to texts that may be explicit in nature (i.e., cursing, sexual content). Students should be fully aware that these types of texts, though believed offensive, should still be discussed with respect to the opinions of peers, the instructor, and creator of the text in question.

Required Texts and Materials:

Laymon, Kiese *Long Division*

Robinson, Zandria F. *This Ain’t Chicago*

Ward, Jesmyn *Where the Line Bleeds*

Jones, Tayari *Leaving Atlanta*

Hobson, Maurice *The Legend of the Black Mecca: Politics and Class in the Making of Modern Atlanta*

Bradley, Regina *Boondock Kollage: Stories from the Hip Hop South*

Select readings

Select OutKast Discography:

Southernplayalisticadillacmuzik (1994)

ATLiens (1996)

Aquemini (1998)

Stankonia (2000)

Speakerboxxx/The Love Below (2003)

Select Course Assignments

Critical Listening Journal

The student is required to keep a running journal discussing assigned listening exercises. These entries will help the student prepare for meetings with the instructor as well as prepare for the nerdy hip hop review. Students will bring their journals with them to class where they will be sporadically graded by the instructor. While there is no word count for these journals, they are a great way to engage more deeply with the musical texts being analyzed in the class that day.

Some questions include but are not limited to:

- What stands out beyond the lyricism of the musical text? What do I hear? What catches my attention? How does what the track(s) sound like impact the story/narrative being read?
- What is distinctively southern about the musical text?
- If this is my first time listening to this musical text, what state of mind does it put me in? If this is not my first time listening to this musical text, what has changed/caught my attention since the first time I heard the work?

Nerdy Hip Hop Review

Using a critical lens, the student will theorize the significance of how hip hop impacts negotiations of race, identity, gender, or class in the post-civil rights American South. The student's nerdy hip hop review must contain the following elements:

- MINIMUM of 2,500 words; MAXIMUM of 3,000 words
 - Demonstrated mastery of course material, ability to apply it to an original argument
 - You must include a MINIMUM of two (2) critical secondary sources to support developing argument from outside required course readings
 - A nuanced discussion of southern hip hop influences
 - Student should use music in tandem with literary and cultural texts discussed in and outside of class (if applicable).

Week by Week Schedule*
***Subject to change with advanced notice**

UNIT 1: F.I.L.A.

**OutKast Albums: *Southernplayalisticadillacmuzik* (1994)
ATLiens (1996)**

Week 1:

Opening discussion: “Who is OutKast and what the hell is the hip hop South?”

Week 2:

Zandria Robinson, *This Ain't Chicago*, “Introduction”; Zandria Robinson and Marcus Hunter, *Chocolate Cities*, “Everywhere below Canada;” Maurice Hobson, *Legend of the Black Mecca*, “Introduction”

Week 3: CRITICAL LISTENING DAY

OutKasted Conversations #18: Fredara M. Hadley, Ph.D.; Frannie Kelley, “OutKast and Atlanta;” Hobson, “Building Black Atlanta”; OutKasted Conversations #6: Charlie Braxton

Playlist:

Album—*Southernplayalisticadillacmuzik*

Brick—“Ain't Gonna Hurt Nobody,” “Dazz”

Parliament— “Flash Light,” “One Nation under a Groove,” “P-Funk,” “Maggot Brain”

Bootsy Collins—“I'd Rather Be with You”

Cameo—“Shake Your Pants”

Week 4:

Michelle Hite, “Andre’s Dread”; Tayari Jones, *Leaving Atlanta* (Part 1)

Week 5:

Hobson, “The Sorrow of a City”; Toni Cade Bambara, *Those Bones Are Not My Child*, Prologue

Week 6:

Jones, *Leaving Atlanta* (Part 2 and Part 3)

Week 7: CRITICAL LISTENING DAY

Ytasha Womack, “Evolution of a Space Cadet”; Deji Bryce Olukotun, “Utopian and Dystopian Visions of Afrofuturism”; OutKasted Conversations #33: Ytasha Womack

Playlist:

Album—*ATLiens*

Sun Ra—“We Travel the Space Ways”

Fela Kuti—“Zombie”

Lil Wayne—“Phone Home”

Erykah Badu—“Cain't Use My Phone”

Earth, Wind, and Fire—“Fantasy”

UNIT 2: Da Art of Storytellig'
OutKast Album: *Aquemini* (1998)

Week 8:

Kiese Laymon, "How Hip Hop Stole My Southern Black Boy" AND "How to Slowly Kill Yourself and Others in America"; Kiese Laymon and Regina Bradley: "The South STILL Got Something to Say"

Week 9: CRITICAL LISTENING DAY

Laymon, *Long Division* "One Sentence"—"Eyes Have It"

Playlist:

Album—*Aquemini*

Goodie Mob—"Black Ice"

Society of Soul—"Blac Mermaid"

OutKast—"In Due Time"

Janelle Monae—"Q.U.E.E.N."

Week 10:

Laymon, *Long Division*, "And a Way"—end of book; Jesmyn Ward, "Cold Current" AND "No Mercy in Motion" (D2L)

Week 11: CRITICAL LISTENING DAY

Ward, *Where the Line Bleeds* (1–7); Regina Bradley, "Trap or Die" (D2L)

Playlist:

Album: T.I., *Trap Muzik*

UGK—"Pocket Full of Stones"

Jeezy—"Trap Star" and "Gangsta Music"

Mista—"Blackberry Molasses"

Pastor Troy—"Vica Versa"

Backbone—"Lord Have Mercy"

8Ball and MJG—"Paid Dues"

Week 12:

Ward, *Where the Line Bleeds* (8-14)

Week 13: NO CLASS—SPRING BREAK

UNIT 3: The Place from Which All Funky Things Come...
OutKast Albums: *Stankonia* (2000) and
***Speakerboxxx/The Love Below* (2003)**

Week 14: CRITICAL LISTENING DAY

Robinson, "Southern Is the New Black"; Bradley, *Boondock Kollage*, "Intentions," "Splish-Splash," and "The Apothecary"

Album: *Stankonia*

Secondary Playlist:

Big Boi—"General Patton"

Killer Mike—"Reakshon"

Missy Elliot—"Get Ur Freak On"

Dungeon Family—"Trans DF Express"

Cool Breeze—"Watch for the Hook"

Week 15: CRITICAL LISTENING DAY

Bradley, "Beautiful Ones," "Skin Carnival," and "As Above So Below;" OutKasted

Conversations #4: Treva Lindsey (D2L); OutKasted Conversations #17: Mychal Denzel Smith

(D2L); Robinson, "Belles, Guls, and Country Boys"

Playlist:

Albums: *Speakerboxxx/The Love Below*

Prince—"If I Was Your Girlfriend"

Prince—"Computer Blue"

Big K.R.I.T.—"Mt. Olympus"

Kendrick Lamar—"Lust"

Childish Gambino—"3005"

Week 16:

Lee, Gavin Godfrey, and Rodney Carmichael, "Straight Outta Stankonia"; Hobson, "All Black
Everythingang: Aesthetics, Anecdotes, and FX's *Atlanta*"

Atlanta Episodes:

"The Big Bang"

"B.A.N."

"Juneteenth"

"The Jacket"