


Chapter 2

With a Mic in My Hand: Introducing Hip-Hop Feminism and Black Women's Digital Communications at an HBCU

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ABSTRACT

Hip-hop pedagogy is an impactful branch of culturally responsive pedagogy in today's humanities classrooms. As the founding theorist of culturally responsive teaching, Dr. Gloria Ladsen-Billings, regarding hip-hop pedagogy stated, "Hip-hop can be an important cultural vehicle for connecting with new century students... the anthropologist in me believes that it is important to know as much about a culture with which you work as possible." Dr. Joan Morgan first coined the term hip-hop feminism, which she defined in her notable memoir, When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost: A Hip-Hop Feminist Breaks It Down. This chapter highlights how a humanities professor at an HBCU taught an online English course that was focused on hip-hop feminism and Black women's digital communications in hip-hop culture from past to present. This chapter has implications for online teaching, hip-hop pedagogy, teaching college English, culturally responsive pedagogy, and student writing.

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INTRODUCTION

Hip-hop has now been an energetic performance, communications, political, visual, and unifying artistic force in youth culture for decades, dating back to its founding at 1520 Sedwick Avenue, in the Bronx by DJ Kool Herc on August 11, 1973. Early hip-hop “heads” and culture buffs know the classic hip-hop songs that helped to set off the now 50-year cultural phenomenon from rap songs such as Sugar Hill Gang’s “Rappers Delight,” Whodini’s “Five Minutes of Funk,” Roxanne Shante’s “Roxanne’s Revenge,” and among many others of hip-hop’s greats – Boogie Down Production/KRS-1’s “My Philosophy.” Love (2016) asserts that hip-hop is shaped by racial segregation, economic oppression, and a “long history of black cultural subversion and social critiques in music...a tangle of some of the most complex social, cultural, and political issues” (Rose, 1994). With the 50th anniversary of hip-hop taking place in the current year of 2023, reflecting on what the youth of the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens, New York created, and teaching a recent college course for students who participate in hip-hop culture, it was important to bring contemporary themes, artists, and scholarly voices to the forefront of the courses’ curriculum. Introducing hip-hop culture in the classroom is not a new pedagogy. Jenkins (2023) reports that Howard University became the first university in and HBCU in 1991 to offer a hip-hop course for its students and institutions from Harvard and Duke University to New York University followed suit.

The author taught a Special Topics English course titled “Hip-hop Women” as an online course, accessible through Blackboard Learn for HBCU college students during the Fall of 2022. The curriculum fused hip-hop feminism with Black women’s digital communications as a pathway for culturally responsive pedagogy within the humanities. The author believed that the focus on hip-hop feminism would produce critical discussions amongst students in the course, in addition to student responses in writing that were likely to reveal personal, community, and global connections to the material on hip-hop women that we covered.

Despite post pandemic enrollment decreasing among students for in person classes, the course saw full enrollment of students in both sections of over 18 or more students in each for the online - 15 week courses. The purpose of the course, was to introduce students to literature, scholarship, multimedia, and art which reflects the contributions of women (she/her/hers) in the culture of hip-hop, with a hip-hop/Black feminist lens on scholarship, literature, performance, lyricism, and digital pop culture media.

Textbooks and digital readings from the genres of poetry, creative nonfiction, scholarship, and hip-hop lyricism, were utilized to provide students with the reading exploration they are used to having in most English and humanities courses. According to Pardede (2019), digital reading requires students to “locate, access, and manipulate

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