

GYC201HoganCOM102
Social Justice Assignment
(Music in Context: Gangsta Rap and the LA riots)

I will use this essay assignment in a COM102 course, where writing with sources and researching are main course objectives. I am developing a COM102 class around the theme of music, which is how this assignment will relate to the others in the semester. This particular assignment emphasizes the intersection between music and social justice, using the 1992 LA riots and gangsta rap as a specific case study. For example, here are some of the essay prompts:

Were gangsta rappers simply troublemakers or did their work have artistic merit? Or both? Does art have a duty to be good for society? Alternatively, is art *better* if it promotes a public good?

In a recent profile by the *New Yorker*, hip hop artist Questlove stated that “black music has always thrived in adversity. The worse the social conditions, the better it gets: gospel came out of slavery, the blues out of the Great Depression, soul and doo-wop out of the civil rights movement. Hopelessness brings the best of art.” Explore this statement, connecting it to the specific context of gangsta rap and the LA riots.

Students will need to research the social conditions in which the music was made and examine how the music both reflected and influenced those social conditions. I will use this assignment in my next COM102 section, probably somewhere towards the end of the semester because it involves rather complicated research components involving primary and secondary sources as well as textual analysis.

This assignment addresses the following major course concepts and content outcomes:

Major Course Concepts

1. Recognize that "texts" can take a variety of forms and still be subject to similar types of rigorous analysis.
2. Work with many kinds of texts, such as primary research, literary works, visuals, or Internet-based texts.
3. Employ various methods for thinking critically about a text, such as interpretation, analysis and synthesis.

Course Content Outcomes

1. Critical Reading and Thinking

- 1.1 Create connections among texts discussed and other texts.
- 1.2 Analyze a writer's stylistic choices, such as the perspective or tone adopted for a particular audience and purpose.

2. Source-Based Writing

- 2.1 Construct an argument based on a text or texts.
- 2.2 Develop strategies for reaching more than one type of audience in a piece of writing.
- 2.3 Select source material (library, print, digital, or fieldwork-based) appropriate to a writing project's purpose and audience.
- 2.4 Integrate research material from multiple sources into a piece of writing while maintaining one's own voice.
- 2.5 Demonstrate ethical awareness in writing by incorporating and documenting source material responsibly according to a guidelines system (MLA, APA).

2.6 Correctly document sources through appropriate in-text citations and a Works Cited page.

2.7 Move beyond managing correctness in writing and toward making deliberate choices about stylistic elements such as clarity, concision, cohesion, and emphasis.

2.8 Demonstrate skill at the stylistic aspects of integrating sources, such as employing a variety of transitional effects or integrating a quote into the grammatical structure of a sentence.

Students will receive a letter grade for their final essays based on how well they satisfy the following criteria:

1. Grammar and Mechanics
2. Stylistic Choices
 - examples, vivid details, anecdotes, transitions
3. Substance of the Essay
 - knowledge of the subject, strength of analysis, providing context, originality of thought
4. Use of Sources
 - choosing appropriate sources, introducing each clearly, maintaining one's own voice amidst other sources, proper citations throughout

Here is the actual assignment:

Music in Context:
Gangsta Rap and the LA riots

Popular music both reflects and influences the particular historical, cultural, political, economic, and geographic contexts in which it is produced.

For this essay, we will focus on the relationship between gangsta rap and the Los Angeles riots of 1992. Your essay must explore the role gangsta rap played during the riots and its legacy in the culture and music of contemporary America. However, it is not enough to simply tell the history of the LA riots or of gangsta rap. Instead, you must use this premise – gangsta rap and the LA riots – to explore some larger theme or issue raised in at least one of the questions below.

You must choose *how* you want to approach this subject (ie. your *angle*). You can write it as a persuasive or informative essay or as critical review of the genre or from any other perspective. Therefore, you must have a thesis statement that clearly indicates your angle as well as your main points. As always, remember to give context (ex. Who and what were the significant rappers, albums, songs? How was gangsta rap perceived at the time from a variety of perspectives?).

Here are some ideas to help you find an angle:

- What elements of gangsta rap were typical of hip hop generally and what things made it distinct from other forms of hip hop and rap?
- What stylistic influence did gangsta rap have on the hip hop and rap that came after it?

- How much did gangsta rap function as a sort of release for pent-up anger in the black community and/or how much did it provoke violence during the riots?
- What lessons can we draw about censorship and violent imagery in music?
- Were gangsta rappers simply troublemakers or did their work have artistic merit? Or both? Does art have a duty to be good for society? Alternatively, is art *better* if it promotes a public good?
- It is estimated that 70-75% of hip hop albums are purchased by white consumers. What made gangsta rap so appealing to white audiences?
- How important is authenticity in hip hop? How is it understood by artists and audiences alike? What makes a rapper authentic or a specific song/album authentic?
- Why do most hip hop musical artists not use their own names? Where did this practice come from? What is the importance of names in hip hop culture? How did the practice of creating new names and personas influence hip hop culture?
- In a recent profile by the *New Yorker*, hip hop artist Questlove stated that “black music has always thrived in adversity. The worse the social conditions, the better it gets: gospel came out of slavery, the blues out of the Great Depression, soul and doo-wop out of the civil rights movement. Hopelessness brings the best of art.” Explore this statement, connecting it to the specific context of gangsta rap and the LA riots.
- Questlove also stated that “Hip hop swallowed black music whole. It subsumed every part of its history, then spat it out in samples and rhymes.” Address this statement by exploring the practice of sampling in hip hop generally and gangsta rap specifically.

Your research must include a combination of primary and secondary sources – *at least five in total*. Use MLA format for both in-text citations and your Works Cited page. There is a 1,500 word minimum (2,000 maximum) for this essay, and it is worth 20% of the total grade.