

# **SYLLABUS—MHL 494/598: Special Topics Hamilton, Hip-Hop, and Musical Theater**

**Semester:** Spring 2019

**Meetings:** Tuesdays, Thursdays 9:00-10:15, Tempe MUSIC W117

**Instructor:** Christopher J. Wells

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**Office Hours:** Tuesdays 10:30-11:30am, Wednesdays 2pm-3pm

## **Course Overview and Objectives:**

Lin-Manuel Miranda's *Hamilton* is arguably the most significant production in 21<sup>st</sup> century American musical theater. Its innovative blending of hip-hop and other contemporary musical genres with historical subject matter has both connected with a broad audience and drawn criticism for commercialism and appropriation. The show's enthusiastic fans subscribe to range of political ideologies, and its political messages have been labeled both subversive on the one hand and reactionary on the other. In this course, we will explore *Hamilton* in substantial depth with a focus on drawing deep connections between its musical and lyrical content, its plot, and the histories of hip-hop and American musical theater upon which it draws. We will also investigate the production's specific impact within specific technological, historical, and sociopolitical conjuncture of the United States in the 2010s.

**Learning Outcomes:** By the end of this course, you will be able to:

—Contextualize *Hamilton* within the histories and aesthetic traditions of both hip-hop and American musical theater.

—Explicate connections between race, ethnicity, other forms of identity, and the sonic and lyrical content of *Hamilton* as well its import in contemporary sociopolitical contexts.

—Produce interpretive arguments about musical sound, both in written and oral form, regarding the intersections between musical sound, lyrics, identity, visual media, and contemporary sociopolitical contexts.

—Create original artistic work inspired by the subject matter, style, and compositional process behind *Hamilton*.

## **Technology Policy:**

I encourage you to use whatever technological devices you are most comfortable with for taking notes, referring to assigned readings, and performing other tasks relevant to participating in class. I also expect you to conduct yourselves as responsible, respectful adults and refrain from using the internet during class for any purpose that will distract your attention and inhibit your full participation. In addition, you may not upload any material to Blackboard that is not your original work without proper compliance with applicable copyright laws. I may remove material on the grounds of suspected copyright infringement.



**Disability Accommodations Policy:**

Before formally requesting specific accommodation for a disability, students must be registered with the Disability Resource Center (DRC) and submit appropriate documentation to the professor from the DRC. That said, I strive to provide the best support possible for students with disabilities and/or differences, and I encourage you to discuss any issues and/or barriers you may face in this class with me as early in the semester as possible.

**Academic Integrity Policy:**

Students are expected to abide by ASU's [Student Academic Integrity Policy](#). Any infractions will be addressed in accordance with this policy. Responses to instances of threatening behavior will be guided by *Student Services Manual*, [SSM 104-02](#). If you have questions or concerns about proper documentation of sources or other issues of academic integrity, you are encouraged to discuss them with me during my office hours.

**Absence Policy:**

Each student is allotted ***Two Unexcused Absences***. Each further unexcused absence will result in a ***Two-Point Reduction*** to your ***Final Grade*** for the course. Additional absences for illness, personal emergencies, school commitments, religious observations, etc. should be discussed with me in advance. Additional absences for illness, personal emergencies, school commitments, religious observations, etc. should be discussed with me in advance. All absence accommodations required by university policies will be granted (see [ACD 304-02](#) "Missed Classes Due to University-Sanctioned Activities" and [ACD 304-04](#) "Accommodation for Religious Practices.") Other requests for excused absences will be granted at my discretion.

**Late Work Policy:**

Your assignments will be penalized a full letter grade for each day they are late (a "day" here means full 24-hour increments after the deadline such that a paper that 3 hours late = 1 day late, 31 hours late = 2 days late, etc.) No work will be accepted more than 72 hours after the deadline.

**Course Content Note:**

This course will deal with issues of race, gender, sexuality, and violence that may be disturbing to, or deemed offensive by, some students. Assigned musical recordings and multimedia also contain foul language, including race- and gender-related slurs, and graphic, potentially offensive and disturbing imagery. While some discomfort is unavoidable given the nature of the course's subject matter, it is important that all students feel safe both in class and in their preparation for course meetings. You may contact the professor, unit chair (Professor Catherine Saucier), or Director (Prof. Heather Landes) if you have concerns.



**Required Readings and Media:** There is one required text for this course: *Hamilton: The Revolution* available through the campus bookstore. Readings from this book are marked “HB” (for Hamilton Book). All other readings available on Blackboard as PDFs or via hyperlinks. Students will need a free Spotify account to access assigned listening.

**Grading Scale:**

A+ = 98-100    A = 94-97    A- = 90-93

B+ = 88-89    B = 84-87    B- = 80-83

C+ = 78-79    C = 70-77    D = 60-69

F = 0-59

(fractional points of .5 or greater will be rounded up to the next whole number)

**Evaluation:**

Participation: 15%

Writing Assignments: 40% (2 assignments, 20% each)

Cabinet Battle Assignment: 15%

Creative Project: 30%

## **COURSE SCHEDULE**

### **Week 1—1/8, 1/10**

#### **Introduction**

**Read (for 1/10):**

Rebecca Mead, “All About the Hamiltons,” *New Yorker*

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/02/09/hamiltons>

Michael Paulson, “Lin-Manuel Miranda, Creator and Star of ‘Hamilton,’ Grew Up on Hip-Hop and Show Tunes,” *New York Times*

<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/16/theater/lin-manuel-miranda-creator-and-star-of-hamilton-grew-up-on-hip-hop-and-show-tunes.html>

HB: 10-11

32-33

46-47

102-103

276-279

**Watch:** Surf YouTube for Hamilton Material



## **Week 2—1/15, 1/17**

### **Introduction cont'd**

#### **Read:**

Carol Oja, "Hip-Hop History" *Times Literary Supplement*

<https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/public/hip-hop-history/>

Philip Gentry, "Hamilton's Ghosts," *American Music* 35, no.2 (Summer 2017): 271-280.

John Kenrick, selections from *Musicals 101* (for review if needed)

<http://www.musicals101.com/musical.htm>

<http://www.musicals101.com/score.htm>

<http://www.musicals101.com/book.htm>

<http://www.musicals101.com/make1b.htm>

<http://www.musicals101.com/creative.htm>

HB: 14-15

52-55

#### **Watch:**

"Lin-Manuel Miranda Performs at the Whitehouse Poetry Jam"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WNFf7nMIGnE>

"Hamilton at the Grammys"

[http://www.slate.com/blogs/browbeat/2016/02/15/watch\\_the\\_cast\\_of\\_hamilton\\_perform\\_the\\_musical\\_s\\_electrifying\\_opening\\_number.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/browbeat/2016/02/15/watch_the_cast_of_hamilton_perform_the_musical_s_electrifying_opening_number.html)

## **Week 3—1/22, 1/24**

### **Hamilton, Act I**

**Listen:** Hamilton Cast Recording, Act I, 1-11

#### **Read:**

Nancy Isenberg, "'Make 'em Laugh': Why History Cannot Be Reduced to Song and Dance," *Journal of the Early Republic* 37, no.2 (Summer 2017): 295-303.

Marvin McAllister, "Toward a More Perfect Hamilton," *Journal of the Early Republic* 37, no.2 (Summer 2017): 279-288.

"Gimme Gimme: the I Want Song in Musical Theatre," *HowlRound*

<http://howlround.com/gimme-gimme-the-i-want-song-in-musical-theatre>



**Week 3, cont'd.**

HB:

20-22

38-41

58-59

78-79

**Watch:**

Howard Ho, "My Shot Explained in 11 Songs"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=on24jsOBZAA>

**Week 4—1/29, 1/31**

**Hamilton, Act I cont'd**

**Listen:** Hamilton Cast Recording, Act I, 12-23

**Read:**

HB: 88-90

107-109

112-117

124-126

132-136

Heather S. Nathans, "Crooked Histories: Re-presenting Race, Slavery, and Alexander Hamilton Onstage." *Journal of the Early Republic* 37, no.2 (Summer 2017): 271-278.

Alyssa Rosenberg, "'Hamilton' is a smash. Why so few other stories about the American Revolution?" *Washington Post*

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/act-four/wp/2016/07/06/hamilton-is-a-smash-why-so-few-other-stories-about-the-american-revolution/?utm\\_term=.bb3d3af00f06](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/act-four/wp/2016/07/06/hamilton-is-a-smash-why-so-few-other-stories-about-the-american-revolution/?utm_term=.bb3d3af00f06)

**Watch:**

Howard Ho, "The Aaron Burr Chord Progression"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BK42FerFetg>

**Week 5—2/5, 2/7**

**Hamilton, Act II**

**Listen:** Hamilton Cast Recording, 1-9

**Read:**

HB: 148-149

164-167

172-175



### **Week 5, cont'd.**

Benjamin Carp, "World Wide Enough: Historiography, Imagination, and Stagecraft," *Journal of the Early Republic* 37, no.2 (Summer 2017): 289-294.

Kelsey Klotz, "Hamilton is Innovative, But Not Quite Revolutionary," *The Common Reader*  
<https://commonreader.wustl.edu/c/hamilton-innovative-not-quite-revolutionary/>

Anne Searcy, "Bringing Dance Back to the Center in *Hamilton*," *American Music* 36, no.4 (Winter 2018): 429-447.

### **Watch:**

Howard Ho: "Stay Alive Explained in 8 Songs"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2oeRDXgRyHU>

Howard Ho: "10 Reasons 10 Duel Commandments is Amazing"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1qXsFs2ywMo>

### **Week 6—2/12, 2/14**

#### **Hamilton, Act II cont'd**

**Listen:** Hamilton Cast Recording, 10-23

### **Read:**

HB: 205-208

212-213

214-217

222-223

225-228

250-252

256-257

263-265

270-271

Joanne B. Freeman, "Will the Real Alexander Hamilton Please Stand Up?," *Journal of the Early Republic* 37, no.2 (Summer 2017): 255-262.

Andrew M. Schocket, "The American Revolution Rebooted: Hamilton and Genre in Contemporary Culture," *Journal of the Early Republic* 37, no.2 (Summer 2017): 263-269.

### **Watch:**

Howard Ho, "Eliza's Chord Progression Explained"

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jiULm\\_cDjus](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jiULm_cDjus)



## **Week 7—2/19, 2/21**

### **In the Heights**

**Listen:** In the Heights Original Cast Recording

**Read:**

Kerri Allen, "Growing Up PR 'In the Heights'," *Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education* 19, no.2 (October 2008): 36-38.

Gabriela Cázares, "Resisting Gentrification in Quiara Alegría Hudes and Lin-Manuel Miranda's *In the Heights* and Ernesto Quiñonez's *Bodega Dreams*," *American Studies* 56, no.2 (2017): 89-107.

Alexis Greene, "No Place Like Home," *American Theatre* 25, no.8 (October 2008): 32-34.

Roxanne Heinz, Review of "In the Heights," *Theatre Journal*

Melena Ryzik, "Heights Before Broadway," *New York Times*  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/14/theater/14heig.html>

## **Week 8—2/26, 2/28**

### **Musical Theater Influences: Rent, West Side Story**

**Listen:** *Rent* Original Cast Recording, *West Side Story* Original Cast Recording

**Read:**

Kristen Smith, "Rent: Constructing Community," *International Journal of Cultural Politics* 11, no.2 (2015): 225-238.

Elizabeth A. Wells, "'Mambo!': West Side Story and the Hispanic," in *West Side Story: Cultural Perspectives on an American Musical* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010)

**\*\*\*SPRING BREAK\*\*\***

## **Week 9—3/12, 3/14**

### **Musical Theater Influences: Sondheim, History Musicals**

**Listen:** *Into the Woods* Original Cast Recording, *1776* Original Cast Recording  
1776

**Read:**

Elissa Harbert, "'Ever to the Right?': The Political Life of 1776 in the Nixon Era," *American Music* 35, no.2 (Summer 2017): 237-270.

Elissa Harbert, "Hamilton and History Musicals" *American Music* 36, no.4 (Winter 2018): 412-428



## **Week 10—3/19, 3/21**

### **Hip-Hop Influences**

#### ***Read:***

Loretta Charlton, “Is *Hamilton* Technically Impressive Rap? Talib Kweli Analyzes the Broadway Smash,” *Vulture*

<http://www.vulture.com/2015/10/talib-kweli-analyzes-hamilton.html>

“All the Hip-Hop References in *Hamilton*: A Track-by-Track Guide,” *Slate*

[http://www.slate.com/blogs/browbeat/2015/09/24/hamilton\\_s\\_hip\\_hop\\_references\\_all\\_the\\_rap\\_and\\_r\\_b\\_allusions\\_in\\_lin\\_manuel.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/browbeat/2015/09/24/hamilton_s_hip_hop_references_all_the_rap_and_r_b_allusions_in_lin_manuel.html)

Justin Williams, “Theoretical Approaches to Quotation in Hip-Hop,” *Contemporary Music Review* 33, no.2 (2014): 188-209

Loren Kajikawa, “‘Young, Scrappy, and Hungry,’ *Hamilton*, Hip-Hop, and Race,” *American Music* 36, no.4 (Winter 2018): 467-486

HB:

20-22

94-95

#### ***Listen:***

Notorious B.I.G. “10 Crack Commandments”

Hamilton Cast, “10 Duel Commandments”

Mobb Deep, “Shook Ones Pt.II”

Nas, “The Genesis”

Nas, “New York State of Mind”

Hamilton Cast, “Helpless”

Ja Rule, Ashanti, “Helpless”

Beyoncé, Jay-Z “Crazy in Love”

Ja Rule, Jennifer Lopez, “I’m Real”



## **Week 11—3/26, 3/28**

### **Hip-Hop Influences cont'd**

#### ***Listen:***

*Hamilton Mixtape*

All songs from the *Hamilton Original Cast Recording* that also appear on the mixtape.

#### ***Read:***

Kyle Adams, "On the Metrical Techniques of Flow in Rap Music," *Music Theory Online* 15, no.5 (2009).

Justin Williams, "'We Get the Job Done': Immigrant Discourse and Mixtape Authenticity in *The Hamilton Mixtape*," *American Music* 36, no.4 (Winter 2018): 487-506

HB: 68-69

## **Week 12—4/2, 4/4**

### **Hamilton and Social Media**

Read: Elizabeth Craft, "'Is This What It Takes Just to Make It to Broadway?!': Marketing In the Heights in the Twenty-first Century," *Studies in Musical Theatre* 5, no.1 (March 2011): 49-69.

Laura Reineke, "*Hamilton's* Ham-4-Ham Preshow: The Complete Compendium (So Far)," *Vulture*

<http://www.vulture.com/2016/01/hamiltons-ham4ham-preshow-complete-compendium.html>

Meghan R. Murray, "Runaway Success of 'Hamilton' Shows the Power of Creating Buzz on Social Media," *Washington Post*

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/runaway-success-of-hamilton-shows-the-power-of-creating-buzz-on-social-media/2016/09/15/4a6584fe-79e8-11e6-ac8e-cf8e0dd91dc7\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.5f77d7998226](https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/runaway-success-of-hamilton-shows-the-power-of-creating-buzz-on-social-media/2016/09/15/4a6584fe-79e8-11e6-ac8e-cf8e0dd91dc7_story.html?utm_term=.5f77d7998226)

Jessica DiLuglio, "Non-Stop: Five Ways Hamilton is Utilizing New Social Media Tactics," *Medium*

<https://medium.com/@jessica.diluglio/non-stop-five-ways-hamilton-is-utilizing-new-social-media-tactics-d072a1541a8b>

Erin Carson, "5 social media lessons your business can learn from Hamilton's Lin-Manuel Miranda," *Tech Republic*

<https://www.techrepublic.com/article/5-social-media-lessons-your-business-can-learn-from-hamiltons-lin-manuel-miranda/>



## **Week 13—4/9, 4/11**

### **Hamilton and Contemporary Politics**

Elizabeth Craft, "Headfirst into an Abyss: The Politics and Political Perception of Hamilton," *American Music* 36, no.4 (Winter 2018): 448-466

Adam Gopnik, "Hamilton and the Case for Progressive Heroism," *The New Yorker*  
<https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/hamilton-and-the-hip-hop-case-for-progressive-heroism>

Mark Harris, "The Hamilton Pence Incident Was More Than Just a Distraction,"  
*Vulture*  
<http://www.vulture.com/2016/11/why-the-hamilton-pence-incident-matters.html>

Naomi Graber, "The President Takes the Stage: On Theatre and Safe Spaces for Politicians," *Trax on the Trail*  
<http://www.traxonthetrail.com/article/president-takes-stage-theatre-and-safe-spaces-politicians>

Naomi Graber, "Seeing Double: Presidential Parodies and the Art of the Musical,"  
<http://www.traxonthetrail.com/article/seeing-double-presidential-parodies-and-art-musical>

## **Week 14—4/16, 4/18**

### **Hamilton and Education**

Assignment TBA

## **Week 15—4/23, 4/25**

### **Open**



# Hamilton, Hip-Hop, and Musical Theater, Spring 2019

## Assignment Guide

### Short Paper Assignments

#### Due Dates:

**Paper 1: February 27<sup>th</sup>**

**Paper 2: March 27<sup>th</sup>**

You will produce two 2-3 page papers, selecting from the options below:

#### **Option 1**

Choose any song from the Lin Manuel-Miranda's Spotify playlist "ICYMI: Lin-Manuel Miranda's HAMthology Playlist" and discuss its influence on *Hamilton: An American Musical*. Cite one or more musical numbers from the show, and be sure to discuss issues such as tempo, timbre, dynamics, texture, rhythm, melody, and harmony (note: you do not need to discuss *all* these elements, only those you think are relevant) in addition to discussing lyrics.

#### **Option 2**

Design a new scene for *Hamilton*. It could be an additional cabinet battle, a scene from another historic battle, a longer epilogue, more development from another character, something to introduce for example Benjamin Franklin or the city of Philadelphia into the show...anything you want! Describe the scene, identify where in the show it would fit, and explicate its importance to making *Hamilton* a stronger and more complete musical. Also discuss what would happen musically in the scene. You may do so in general terms, but please describe what sort of musical number or numbers would be involved (which characters, what genre of music, etc.) and whether you would bring back, manipulate, or otherwise use characters' motifs or chord progressions.

#### **Option 3**

Identify any individual musical, musical theater composer, number in a musical, hip-hop artist, hip-hop album, or hip-hop song that you see having a strong connection with or potential influence on *Hamilton*. Identify specific musical numbers in *Hamilton* where you see this influence and identify musical, lyrical, and topical connections. You may not select a work already listed on the course syllabus, but you may choose another work or set of works by the same artist.

#### **Option 4**

Write a paper on a topic. Clear the topic with me first!!

**Note:** You may choose any of the six options for each paper, **but you may only choose each option once**. For example you write papers on options 1 and 4, but you could not write more than one paper on option 1.



## **Hamilton, Hip-Hop, and Musical Theater, Spring 2019**

### Assignment Guide

#### **Cabinet Battle Assignment:**

#### **Due April 5<sup>th</sup>**

You will work in pairs to write your own rap battle to the instrumental backing track from *Hamilton's* "Cabinet Battle #1." You may choose any two historical figures (including music historical figures)

You will perform your piece for the class and at one of the School of Music's outdoor Tuesday afternoon concerts.

Your piece should incorporate some of the rhyming styles and elements we have learned throughout the semester as well as the style of intertextual reference Miranda uses throughout *Hamilton*.



## Hamilton, Hip-Hop, and Musical Theater, Spring 2019

### Assignment Guide

#### Creative project:

**Due April 28<sup>th</sup>**

For your Hamilton creative assignment, the door is wide open to produce a broad range of projects. The instructions are intentionally vague/minimal as I'm more interested to see what **you** want to produce than what I've already dreamed up. Nevertheless, here are some suggestions:

- An original “Hamilton parody” like those we saw online.
- A lesson plan for a K-12 lesson surrounding *Hamilton*.
- A new *Hamilton* song (like the short paper assignment, but with fully-written lyrics).
- A video blog or other piece of media explaining or highlighting interesting *Hamilton* issues in a creative way (like Howard Ho's work).
- A “Ham4Ham” style performance.
- Anything else you can dream up, just e-mail me.

#### Rules and guidelines:

- Your creative assignment can come in paper, video, or audio format. For video or audio, please upload to a streaming platform (YouTube, Soundcloud, etc.) and provide me a link.
- In all cases, please provide a 1-page prose explanation of your project and the thought process behind it.
- If you do a song (parody or otherwise), it must include full lyrics with annotations similar to those in our course textbook.
- You may use your assigned “cabinet battle” if you take some time to polish it, submit a video performance, and also submit a full sheet of lyrics with annotations and a prose description.