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Popular culture as a tool for critical information literacy and social justice education

Hip hop and *Get Out* on campus

We live in a politically polarizing climate and at a time when there is great economic and social unrest in the United States. Our current moment brings to my mind other periods in our nation's history. First, the 1857 Dred Scott decision, when the Supreme Court decided that slaves were not U.S. citizens and could not sue for their freedom. So that even if a slave escaped to the North, he or she was still considered the property of the slave owner and must be returned.[1] The second is in the 1960s, when the antiwar and civil rights movements occurred.[2,3]

College campuses play an important role in this current moment through education and discussion of current sensitive issues. Libraries can help students and faculty process concepts and cultivate discussion around these topics by using popular culture topics such as hip hop and films like *Get Out*. This article provides two examples of how popular culture was used at Cal Poly-Pomona (CPP) to teach critical information literacy and social justice education.

Hip hop and activism series

The California State University (CSU) system is the largest degree-granting university in the world. Roughly "60% of CSU students are students of color [and] more than one-third of CSU undergraduates are in the first gen-eration of their family to attend college.[4] In Fall 2017, 83% of students identify as being ethnically diverse at CPP."[5] A number of these students are undocumented and were discouraged after the 2016 election results, so, in response, the first Hip Hop Symposium debuted in February 2017. I created the Hip Hop and Activism (HHA) series to help students use hip hop to channel their feelings and discuss topics that could help them learn about various movements of resistance and constructive ways to protest in their own lives.

Process

There were a few obstacles in organizing the HHA series, which required recruiting faculty and staff from departments that don't usually work together. For example, some participants misunderstood hip hop culture and held common biases against it. However, after explaining hip hop pedagogy and the concept of the series, they came on board. According to Derrick J. Jenkins Sr. and David Stovall,[6] hip hop pedagogy

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is a style of teaching and strategic effort to raise "critical consciousness" and "cultural awareness" through a social justice lens or perspective with the focus on marginalized groups and those in high-poverty environments to help them seek empowerment.[7]

The series involved two panel presentations and discussions and two film screenings with post discussions that incorporated faculty from interdisciplinary departments such as political science, ethnic and women's studies, and history. In some presentations, faculty invited students to present with them and alumni students were invited to moderate discussions. A online resource guide[8] was created to support the discussion and provide students the opportunity to continue learning through the CPP and CSU+ collections. The hip hop student club led a discussion in which the students brainstormed ways to be activists.

Initial results
Some faculty offered their students extra credit for attendance, but there was no guarantee of a turn out for the series. This made it easy to keep expectations low and manageable. However, our expectations were exceeded. Some panel discussions had standing room only. In total, 128 participants attended.

Music was played in the beginning of every event to expose participants to hip hop artists from the Middle East and South America. Discussions were lively and the presentations helped students learn more about hip hop's origins and the new artists who rap about socially conscious issues. Also, controversial topics about hip hop and

Hip Hop and Activism Series flier.

political artists, misogyny, and mental illness were covered by panelists and unpacked in discussions.

Lessons learned
Participants completed a survey at the end of every event, but only 23% percent were filled out. The constructive feedback was used for the second annual Hip Hop Symposium in February 2018. In the survey, when asked "Share your thoughts? What could be improved? What would you like to see next year?" participants responded:

"Next year there should be a workshop that teaches you how to find these underground socially conscious artists."

"Bigger space."

"It would be great to bring in more hip hop artists in the future."

Other lessons included having a better understanding of campus culture. Registration is needed to estimate how much food to order and how to organize seating in the room, but students rarely register for events. They also must sign in when they attend each event. However, when comparing the registration to the event sign-in sheets, very few students who registered actually showed up to the event, and students who did not register did attend. This resulted in not enough food and often not enough seating.

Another obstacle was scheduling. Students have full schedules, and the only times there are no classes scheduled are Tuesday and Thursdays between 12 and 1 p.m. To be more accessible, all events started at 12 p.m. and ended around 2 p.m. This resulted in some

Hip Hop and Activism film and bookmark.

students having to leave early to get to their 1 p.m. classes.

Benefits and future directions

The success of this hinged on faculty, staff, and students coming together in the library for the events in the HHA series. The series provided venues for students to discuss the struggles in their communities and how politics affects them. Through discussion, students unpacked issues with hip hop lyrics and developed constructive and manageable ways to use resistance movement strategies in their daily lives. Participants learned about the origins of hip hop culture and had guided critical discussions on issues with the medium's evolution.

Participants in the survey shared their gratitude for the series:

"It was an amazing and empowering experience."

"I really enjoyed the discussion and hope to see more of these on campus! I especially enjoy the parallels of Hip-Hop and social impact and hope to see how other forms of Pop culture can affect activism as well. I would definitely come back next year."

". . . th[e] documentary films [were] very informative especially for someone out of black communities to learn more about their culture and their hardships and obstacles in fulfillment of their dreams mainly among young generations."

Future directions

The Hip Hop Symposium: Hip Hop, Race and Education was held in February 2018. It built on the success of the HHA series and has been improved through learning from participant feedback. Some changes included a keynote speaker and more student involvement. This time the panels weren't broken up over the month of February but was condensed into one half day. Also, the panels included participants on campus and from the Los Angeles area who responded to a call for papers. This was an effort to be more inclusive of research into hip hop pedagogy in the region.

Get Out online resource guide

Only in the last decade have online resource guides existed around movements, music videos, and films that act as gateways

to educational resources. There have been pathfinders to resources since the 1960s,[9] but the use of popular culture-releated pathfinders is fairly new. Popular culture has many pedagogical messages that can spark thinking about topics and engagement with content in higher education and vice versa.

In February 2017, Jordan Peele's blockbuster horror film *Get Out* was released, and, by the end of the year, it had grossed $175 million dollars.[10,11] In March 2018, Peele won an Oscar for Best Original Screenplay for the film. This black writer-director keeps making history. Building off the model and success of the topical, popular culture guide[12] on Beyonce's *Lemonade* video, a topic guide was created in spring 2017 to unpack some

its release in spring 2017 and is shareable, so librarians can copy and tailor it to support faculty and students in their institutions. This guide is used beyond the CPP campus, including being referenced in a UCLA course inspired by the film.[14]

Usability

For easy navigation of the guide, the left navigation tabs are for the main topics the film addressed. Each page features an introduction and discussion of the topic, and books for further reading are featured below. Podcasts, Twitter feeds with relevant hashtags, and related/relevant films are suggested under the menu on the left side. The guide features multisensory resources to support auditory and vi-
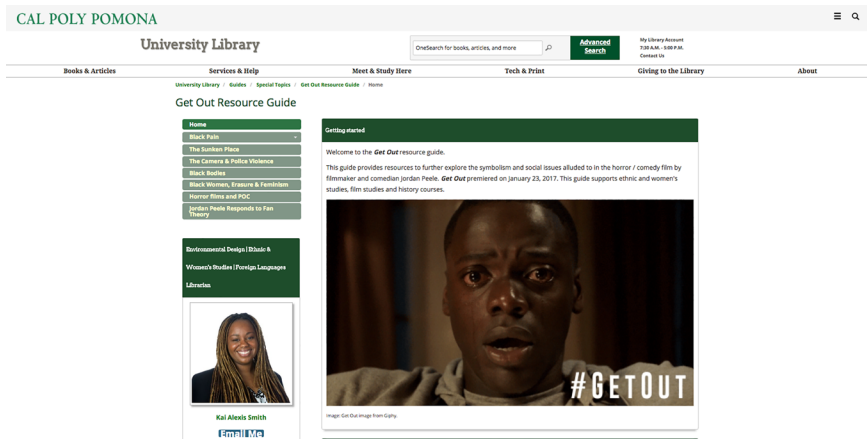
Get Out Topic LibGuide.

of the concepts in the film using LibGuides. This guide supports CPP classes, but became so much more.

Methods

The *Get Out*[13] online resource guide provides students an entry point into the topics and issues covered in the popular film and helps them gain a deeper understanding of the issues through literature and films in the CPP collection and CSU+. Faculty and librarians on and off campus have suggested content, which was added. The guide also references Crystal Boson's syllabus on *Get Out* and a fan response video by Peele. The guide has had more than 4,000 views since

sual learners, as well. These supports are represented in images (including slideshows) and GIFs. Links to guides on relevant topics, such as Ferguson and Black Lives Matter, and apps are featured in slide shows. For books without available cover images, public domain images were used and authors were cited below the book titles. At the bottom of the left side, most pages had a "Not at CPP? Get it here . . ." box that guided viewers to an interlibrary loan (ILL) service.

Pitfalls

In summer 2017, all 23 CSU campuses united their catalogs. Links needed to be updated in fall 2017 to continue access to the suggested

resources (mainly monographs and DVDs) in the CSU+ system. If these items were not available in CSU+, students were advised to request the resources through ILL.

Future plans

Upkeep of the guide is crucial to keeping it relevant and accessible. A Google Alert[15] was set up for anything written about *Get Out,* and items were assessed and selected to be added to the guide. LibGuides has a Link Checker[16] feature that sends a notification if a link is dead. This is how active outside links are maintained.

Conclusion

The campus environment is where students discuss current events. Hip hop is a cathartic way of dealing with oppression. While it has been argued that hip hop culture has strayed from its roots to glorify consumerism, misogyny, homophobia, and sexism, there are still artists who hold true to hip hop's origins. Hip hop helps to broach these meaningful conversations. Similarly, the *Get Out* guide provides an entry point to expand knowledge of concepts from the film through a variety of resources. While not all LibGuides should be popular culture-themed guides, staying abreast of what is going on with students is important to reframe old concepts they may find dry with new popular culture elements that might make the information more palatable. Peele's film and hip hop help them discuss difficult subjects using critical pedagogy and social justice education and can help students cope with the struggles in their lives and the current times.

Notes

1. Alan Axelrod, *Political History of America's Wars* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2007), xi.

2. Ibid., xv.

3. William Chafe, "Commentary: America has been this divided only twice before," *The Mercury News,* last modified November 5, 2016, https://www.mercurynews.com/2016/11/04/commentary-america-has-been-this-divided-only-twice-before/.

4. "Serving California's Diverse Population," Calstate.edu, accessed January 3, 2018, www.calstate.edu/federalrelations/priorities/ServCalifDiversePop.shtml.

5. Cal Poly Pomona, Office of Equity Inclusion and Compliance, "University Enrollment, Fall 2017," CPP.edu, accessed January 4, 2017, www.cpp.edu/~arar/just-the-facts/university-enrollment.shtml#GenderEthn.

6. David Stovall, "We can Relate," *Urban Education* 41, no. 6 (2006): 584–602.

7. Derrick Jenkins, *Sr. Hip Hop and Activism in Education: The Historical Efforts of Hip Hop Congress to Advance Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy through the Urban Teacher Network* (University of Cincinnati, 2012), 77.

8. Located here: http://libguides.library.cpp.edu/hiphopandact.

9. Luigina Vileno, "From Paper to Electronic, the Evolution of Pathfinders: A Review of the Literature," *Reference Services Review* 35, no. 3 (2007): 434–51.

10. Jacob Stolworthy, *"Get Out:* Jordan Peele becomes the first black writer-director to earn $100 million movie debut," *The Independent* (2017), accessed December 27, 2017, www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/news/get-out-jordan-peele-becomes-the-first-black-writer-director-with-100m-movie-debut-a7628586.html.

11. "Get Out," *Box Office Mojo,* accessed December 21, 2017, www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=blumhouse2.htm.

12. Jennifer Ferretti, Beyonce LibGuide, Maryland Institute College of Art, http://libguides.mica.edu/lemonade.

13. Located at http://libguides.library.cpp.edu/getout.

14. Jessica Wolf, "'Get Out'-inspired UCLA class gets students to dig into portrayals of race and fear," UCLA Newsroom, last modified October 13, 2017, http://newsroom.ucla.edu/stories/get-out-inspired-ucla-class-gets-students-to-dig-into-fictional-portrayals-of-race-and-fear.

15. Google Alerts, https://support.google.com/websearch/answer/4815696?hl=en.

16. Spring Share Link Checker, https://support.springshare.com/friendly.php?s=libguides/linkchecker. ✐