

CLASSROOM STORIES: Red Shaydez' Red Shaydez Day

Red Shaydez: I went to Fitchburg from 2010 to 2014, and like I said, the day I stepped foot on campus, I had just dropped a mix tape.

[Red Shaydez' *Buy All the Land Up* plays as show theme]

So I had met one of my new roommates in Aubuchon, and she was like, "Oh, what? You got a mix tape? We gotta get this out." We used to have- this used to be like the Underground, am I in the right place?

Was this the Underground or somewhere else? Yeah, right here, right?

[Intro music fades out]

Katherine Jewell: Welcome everybody. Thank you so much for coming. I'm just going to introduce our speakers today. I'm Professor Katherine Jewell. I'm in the history program here, department of Economics, History and Political Science. And the origins of this event is with my class, History 1500, which is the United States, 1877 to present.

And our theme this term has been the intersection of media and politics going all the way back to yellow journalists and muckrakers of the late 19th century, and all the way up to our case study at the end of the 20th century on hip hop. And we've been really thinking about the question of where Americans find their meaning, where they connect to their larger political, social, cultural institutions, and what role media and popular culture play in that.

And so today's event is the capstone on that inquiry in which we look. Really local to Fitchburg State and our own history and connection to hip hop. And I have brought in a student, class of 2025, Toni Magras.

Toni Magras: Woo-hoo!

[Applause]

Katherine Jewell: Hooray. She is an award-winning filmmaker, producer, director, and also the chief operating officer of Hull Bay Productions, and she was in a class that I taught over the winter on the history of hip hop.

So we thought that this was a natural extension of that conversation to bring in one of our illustrious alumni. So I'm gonna turn things over to Toni, who is our emcee!

Toni Magras: Well, good morning!

[Applause]

Toni Magras: Boston Music Award winner, hip hop artist educator- this is my favorite: cultural architect and visionary... Red Shadez is here!

CLASSROOM STORIES: Red Shaydez' Red Shaydez Day

[Applause]

Thank you so much. Welcome home.

Red Shaydez: Yes. Thank you for having me.

Toni Magras: Welcome home. So what don't you do? First of all.

Red Shaydez: All the easy things I can't do. Okay. I feel like the simple stuff, that's very hard for me to do.

Toni Magras: Yeah. Yeah. So give me a typical Red day.

Red Shaydez: Nowadays, it's so busy. A typical red day: I'm like teaching a film and video class, then I'm doing art consultations with like artists in the community. I'm performing. I'm rehearsing so many things and spending time with family.

Toni Magras: That's very, very important. So, tell me about how you got into, um, your career as a hip hop artist. What was that like? When did you fall in love with hip hop?

Red Shaydez: I fell in love with hip hop in the early nineties because of my father. Right. And also my mom had like a vast music collection as well. So growing up like five, six years old, my dad was the hip hop junkie. So he's put me onto like the Lost Boyz, Nas, Lil' Kim, Queen Latifah,

Toni Magras: Let's go.

Red Shaydez: Right. And then my mom, we have a Jamaican background, so I'm listening to classic reggae, dance hall and some eighties music as well.

So I just heard it all growing up and I think once I saw my dad start pursuing his rap career in like 96, 97, I was like, "I wanna do that too." He would like, I would be in the house while he would get ready for music videos and to perform. He opened up for Rakim, so I was just like, "oh my gosh, this is crazy."

Toni Magras: That is awesome that you were exposed at such a young age and that you fell in love with it. You come in the shadows of some greats. MC Lyte, Queen Latifah, Salt and Pepper. What did those women do for you in your artistry? How did you connect with them and the path that they laid for you in terms of the artists that you wanted to be?

Red Shaydez: Yeah. Growing up, I always made sure that I watched like. I don't know if you remember like, TRL, obviously.

Toni Magras: Yes.

Red Shaydez: And then BET, they would just play videos all day. And I wasn't supposed to watch it, but I watched it every single day. So when I saw those Femcees come up on the

CLASSROOM STORIES: Red Shaydez' Red Shaydez Day

screen and command that stage, or like, just make sure that they let you know that they were here, it did a whole lot for me because I saw myself in them.

Right. And there was all the ones you just named, they're all so different. So for me, I was like, I can do this too. But most importantly, Queen Latifah is a huge inspiration because she also does so many different things and people might not know. So she's in film, she's an executive producer, she has a jazz album, she acts.

And so Living Single is one of my favorite TV series. So seeing her, I was like, oh yeah. Like, that's who I wanna, I wanna be just like that.

Toni Magras: How has the culture changed for female MCs? So we're now in a stage where, um, we, we still see the power right in, in some of our, um, current MCs, but they're kind of redefining some of the themes that I had growing up with Queen and MC Lyte and salt and pepper.

There's, um, there's a lot of gender fluidity. There is a lot of not adhering to this hypersexualized woman. Talk about how those themes have changed over the years.

Red Shaydez: Yeah. I think now, you know, the industry, they made it so that, you know, when the female rapper was introduced to you, they had to come from a male camp, right?

Toni Magras: Mm-hmm.

In my, in my era, right? And so now. Um, like you said, we don't have to have the hypersexualization, but if that's the route that you wanna take, you have that space to do that. But like I think now we have so much artists that if you're into conscious rap, if you're into like screamo rap, whatever the sub genre is, you can literally find an artist that like fits that mold.

And that's what I love. And I think today another big thing is you don't have to be this big billboard artist. To have a cult following or there's like so many ways to sort of make it in the industry. So I think as far as female rap goes, it's way more vast now. Because I remember like maybe 10 years ago, around the time I was here at Fitchburg, I literally could count all the female rappers on my hand, at least that I knew about.

And I was like, "where are they?" So I'm so happy that today I like lost count. There's so many, and I play 'em all.

Toni Magras: Yeah. And Doechii kind of came out of nowhere, right? And just exploded on the game. But talk about that business model a little bit more because. Yeah. Growing up you had to be signed to a label.

Red Shaydez: Mm-hmm.

CLASSROOM STORIES: Red Shaydez' Red Shaydez Day

Toni Magras: You had to have like an A&R exec, you had to do things in this very traditional way. So talk about the change in the business model in case we have any, you know, future hip hop artists out there that may wanna take that route.

Red Shaydez: Yeah. I'll tell you a story that includes Fitchburg right around the time I was going to step on campus for the first time.

This was like January of. 2010, I just released like a 22 track mix tape that I engineered myself, right. Um, with Adobe Audition. And that was the start of this new era, this new digital era. I think that was what we called the blog era back then. And so it started shifting from having to be discovered to what we call DIY, do it yourself.

So you could create your own music, you could find producers. I would go on all these websites and be able to like garner beats from producers from Australia, New York, anywhere. And we never had to meet face to face. And so my parents would always be like, "who are you talking to in there?" 'Cause I had my own radio station. I was doing my own podcast, but it was all online.

And I think that was the brink of what, like catapulted what we're in today of like, oh everybody, you can create your own buzz and create your own movement.

Toni Magras: That's awesome. And you know, if you do have a question or whatever, we have the professor over here, you know, or raise your hands.

We'll try and get you in there.

Um, I can't have you here and not talk about

Red Shaydez: Uh-oh.

Toni Magras: The biggest story in hip hop happening right now. The trial of Sean Diddy Combs.

Red Shaydez: Mm-hmm.

Toni Magras: Started yesterday. I mean, just what did we miss or what did we ignore?

Red Shaydez: I feel like we missed and ignored literally everything. People, the stories that are coming out today have been told for years.

There's not one story that I've heard that I'm like, "oh, I didn't know that." I feel like, all the accusations that are against him, like, nobody's like, "oh, did he do it like he did?" Because like, there's proof. I mean, in my opinion. There's videos, there's, even if there wasn't like- I'm kind of dating myself, but the Making the Band show with Aubrey O'Day and Danity Kane and all of that, they would literally show you there how he was treating them.

So just imagine what happened off camera. That's how I feel about it.

CLASSROOM STORIES: Red Shaydez' Red Shaydez Day

Toni Magras: This isn't our first time seeing a legend go down. We went through the whole R Kelly thing and then even before that, when you wanna talk about television, Bill Cosby, but Diddy's influence and his ability to take hip hop to this huge level.

Red Shaydez: Mm-hmm.

Toni Magras: Where, where does all that go? I mean, you know, it is a stain on the culture. Right. But even so, we should not ignore it. But what does, what does all, where does all his music end up? Like what do we do all that radio stations stop, you know, playing R Kelly immediately.

Red Shaydez: Mm-hmm.

Toni Magras: Right? Where does all that music go?

Red Shaydez: I think that's where physical CDs come into play. If you must still play the music. 'Cause you're right, like it's not even about the songs that had him featured as an artist. There's so many songs that he's a part of as a producer. Or he might say a couple lines at the top, on the intro.

There was a song I had to pass the other day called Trippin' by Total, and I love that song and he's on the front of it saying things and I'm just like, "oh, I feel weird." I feel awkward. But yeah. Yeah, I think that as long as you don't contribute to the, the sales and, and the streaming, I think that's something that I heard that people do to sort of step around that.

It's just play the music that you already bought or like listen to it on YouTube or something, but don't stream it so you're not, you know, giving money to the publishing companies.

Toni Magras: I wanna take a quick break and get one of the questions from one of the students out here

Katherine Jewell: So, I collected questions from my students beforehand, but I do want to return to the Fitchburg State context 'cause, so both Sid and Kyrie, they both wanted to know a little bit more about what role Fitchburg State played in your inspiration or your development as an artist.

Red Shaydez: Okay. Yeah, literally everything. So I went to Fitchburg from 2010 to 2014 and like I said, the day I stepped foot on campus, I had just dropped a mix tape. So I had met one of my new roommates, in Aubuchon, and she was like, "oh, what? You gotta mix tape? We gotta get this out." We used to have, this used to be like the Underground, am I in the right place?

Was this the underground or somewhere else? Yeah, right here. Right? So this was a place called the Underground, and this is where you would showcase your talent. So like they literally dragged me in here like the first week, and they had me spit a couple of bars, like on this stage. And I think that's still on YouTube too.

CLASSROOM STORIES: Red Shaydez' Red Shaydez Day

And so I, one thing that you guys need to know, and maybe this is like a fun fact, is yes, I'm an artist and yes, I'm always public speaking and performing, but I'm like very, very shy, which is why my whole persona is centered around Red Shadez because I can hide behind them. So usually when you see me on stage, my lens is- they're gonna be red, so I can't really see when I'm upstage with all the lights.

Right? Once I did that, more people caught wind of me because of that one performance. And so words started spreading on this campus. Like, "oh, okay, she raps. That's the rapper girl." I think in high school. No, even middle school. Middle school, all the way to college. It's like, that's the rapper girl. She be rapping.

So once I did that, I think I joined the film and video because I started here in sociology and, uh, they made me jump through hoops and whistles to get into film and video. They were like, you gotta get a 2.5 or higher in this class and you gotta go to Randy Howe and do- I'm like, "who is that?"

So I did that. They let me into the program and once I joined that, I started shooting music videos right on the quad. Like there's two, there might be two or three of them there. And then we shot some on the bridge as well. I don't know if the bridge is still here, but when you asked like, what role did Fitchburg State play? Literally that developed me, as an artist because I found my sound here.

I took photo shoots here. I took all my friends, we did short films here, so I could never tell my story without mentioning Fitchburg State. And when I joined, it was Fitchburg State College first. I literally saw them chop that down. And make it FSU.

Toni Magras: I want to get into just really talking about what it means being a black woman nowadays and being a black artist nowadays, because we are hearing so much of an attack on so many different aspects of culture and gender and everything right now.

But I want to read this one quote. Um, and I, I'm gonna ask you to respond to it. So the most disrespected person in America is the black woman. The most unprotected person in America is the black woman. The most neglected person in America is the black woman. Do you still feel that?

Red Shaydez: Absolutely. Yeah. I feel like black women are always coming to everyone's rescue, and I think we're now in a state where we're just tired.

Not that it isn't our fight and we're not gonna help, you know, with human rights or things of that nature, but it's like, who's gonna show up for us? Like we've been carrying the world for so long. And it's just like, when push comes to shove, do we have that same support? And, and I think we both know the answer to that.

And not only am I a black woman, I feel like, okay, I'm black, I'm a woman and I'm queer. Mm-hmm. So I feel like everything that's happening right now, I just have all the odds against me. You know,

CLASSROOM STORIES: Red Shaydez' Red Shaydez Day

Toni Magras: But that doesn't stop you.

Red Shaydez: It doesn't, not at all. We gotta keep fighting.

Toni Magras: Yeah. Yeah. So when you, when you hear that and when you feel that just the enormity of all, everything bad that's happening right now, what keeps you going?

Red Shaydez: I just- motivation, because I think this might be a cliché quote, uh, too, but when I watch like documentaries from Tupac and him saying that. He didn't think he was gonna change the world, but he would be. The spark that did, that would change the world. That keeps me going because even if I'm not that one person that helped change it, I wanna be one of those pioneers that, okay, when she, during her time on this plane, this is what she did to contribute to, you know, the betterment of the community.

Toni Magras: Let's talk about that. You are an educator. Yes. And that is something that you're also very passionate about. So tell me where that passion lies in you and what is so important about teaching the next generation about who they need to be and the voices that they need to have in this world.

Red Shaydez: Yes. Well, this is another fun fact, but growing up I wanted to be a teacher before I wanted to be a musician or any of those things for eight years. I was like, hell bent on, this is what I'm going to do. I'm going to teach, right? And so you could ask my parents too, in my room, I would have all those dolls lined up with those papers and the pens, took pictures, and we took class pictures. I'm having them find that picture with the, you know how I used to have the little thing in the middle? Oh, yeah. Oh yeah. With the, with the school.

So, for me, that's just like what track, what path that I thought I was gonna be on. And then as I started developing like a love for music, I was trying to find ways from that point on to merge both of those passions. And then film and video as well. And I'm finally doing all three. Right?

So I think what sparked that and, and gave me that passion is because I, that's where I gained, like self-fulfillment. I can't tell you exactly why. But I didn't have some of those resources growing up, and so I just feel like it's my life's work. It's my life's purpose.

I want, if I have the information, why would I gate keep it? Like, if you don't have to, like I went through such a tumultuous journey, why would I want, like, you know, my people to go through the same thing if there's more resources now. Right. So I just- I don't know. When I see somebody leave one of my sessions and they feel much more educated and they know about like much more things going on, I feel happy about that.

That's what makes me keep going.

Toni Magras: And you teach at MIT

Red Shaydez: I taught a collaboration course,

CLASSROOM STORIES: Red Shaydez' Red Shaydez Day

Toni Magras: Hip hop collaboration. Tell me why it's important for this younger generation to understand our hip hop history.

Red Shaydez: I think it's very important 'cause you do have to know where you came from. I think one of the things that grinds my ideas the most is like, oh, this is how we're doing this today.

This has never been done. Yes, it has. Like y'all might be throwing a little sprinkle or something different on it, but you gotta make sure you look because. It really is important so you can like take something and amplify it. You also, you need to pay tribute and respect to those because if it weren't for all those people that we named at the beginning, the Queen Latifah's and Lil' Kim's and you know, MC Lytes, I wouldn't be here today.

I just wouldn't. And when I go back and look at like some of my earlier works in the songs, I see a lot of similarities too. So even if you might think you're not influenced, you are.

Toni Magras: Right. Pay homage.

Red Shaydez: Yeah.

Toni Magras: You have another question for us.

Kate Jewell: So this question is from Jacob, who's right here in the front, and he wants to know how much you work.

How much work is this?

Red Shaydez: It's a lot of work, right? And, and I. Because of so much work that I do, I experience burnout probably every two months, um, because you need a team to do something like this. But it's hard to find a team when you're at this level where you're not like on a major label and they provide that team to you.

So how much work? It's, it's, it's all the invisible work that you don't see. So it's all the email correspondence for booking, sending assets, sending bios, rehearsing, making sure you are gathering the right people for a band. Are you gonna use a band? Is it the DJ? When can y'all meet coordinated schedules?

It's just exhausting. And that's just for performances. If I'm doing a talk or how I'm building an artist development bootcamp, like the planning for this has literally been like five or six months. So much paperwork. It's just, I, I could keep going. Does that answer your question? It's just like so much phone calls, I'm exhausted.

Toni Magras: I think that when you talk about the work, I think that sometimes, and I am a parent of six, so don't come at me sometimes I see these young people just not want to put it in. Can you be successful? Can you do what you do and not put the time in?

CLASSROOM STORIES: Red Shaydez' Red Shaydez Day

Red Shaydez: Absolutely not. One thing that I always like to preach is that you can't skip the steps.

You might be able to take a different journey than I did. There's always multiple ways to get to the same door, but you can't skip steps. So people, I hear them say, "oh, I'm moving to LA because you know, Boston doesn't have this, this, that, and the third, and I'm moving to New York." And that's great 'cause you wanna put yourself in position in a place that, like, has your artistry and that it's easier.

You know, gain other opportunities, but you still gotta go to New York and LA and put that work in. You're not just gonna pull up to LA and then now you're the biggest star, right? So it's like you gotta figure out what you wanna do, figure out what that plan is, and you still have to pay your dues, whatever that looks like.

Toni Magras: Do the work, you heard it! We have another question.

Katherine Jewell: So, look, this is the last of my questions. A lot of what the students asked Toni incorporated into it, but I have a specific question about Massachusetts and the scene of Boston and Greater Boston, I guess you could say. What differentiates the Boston Massachusetts scene from the national scene?

What's going on here? I could just give also, Pacey Foster of the uMass Hip Hop Archives says hello.

Red Shaydez: Hi.

Katherine Jewell: There's a lot of history work being done on hip hop in Massachusetts. Collecting the history, but I wanna know from your perspective as somebody who's in the scene

Red Shaydez: Mm-hmm.

Katherine Jewell: What does it look like? What's its contours and what differentiates it?

Red Shaydez: Yeah. One of the biggest things about Massachusetts infrastructure is that we are one of the biggest like DIY scenes, which is do it yourself. Right. That's a blessing and a curse. One thing that I see that differentiates us from the other markets is that we have a lot of support and funding here from like organizational or like institutions.

We get a lot of grants. Now there's a lot of competitions for those set grants, but they do fund a lot of artists to like pursue their work. And that's multidisciplinary too. So not just music, especially like visual artists and things of that nature. From what I've heard, not that it doesn't exist in Atlanta or New York or LA, it's really like the labels and that's why people go there in the first place.

CLASSROOM STORIES: Red Shaydez' Red Shaydez Day

And for those that don't know, Massachusetts was ranked number three in the most vibrant like art city ever, because of all of the funding that they put towards it. I think it's like millions that they allocate towards like arts funding here.

Toni Magras: And that gives me an opportunity to shout out one of my dearest friends who passed recently, Rob Stull, who is a visual artist and his work dawned the facade of the MFA, the first local black graffiti artists to ever do that.

So when we talk about the art culture here in Boston, it is so rich and it is so vibrant, and I think that, you know, that space just needs to be commended because you know, the, the work that he did between MFA, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum and the teaching that you're doing just really speaks to what we have holding on here.

I wanna get political for a second. Okay? Don't yell at me. Don't boo. President Donald Trump...

Red Shaydez: Oh Lord.

Toni Magras: In March, he signed an executive order titled, "Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History" meaning essentially he wants to ignore any negative references to our past, i.e. slavery.

Red Shaydez: Mm-hmm.

Toni Magras: How do you tell the collective American experience without talking about slavery?

Red Shaydez: You can't. That just further supports his mission of erasure which we've been experiencing since we got here in the first place, since we've been here, existing here.

I just think that man... you know, I'll try to keep it- Do you hear me? Don't have- this is plain delusional. That's delusion. Yes. So, it's just a erasure to me because why would we, I think it's important to factor in everything. It can't just be the good, the positive, like that negative part of history is the history.

Right. You already don't include everything in the history books, and we're already trying to like, you know, skate over some of the things that happened. So, I mean, obviously I just don't agree with that at all. And it's just, it's very frustrating and I can't believe like some of these, I know we're talking about this specifically, but all the other orders that he signed, he's signing as well that directly affect all of us in this room.

It's just like very disheartening.

Toni Magras: Oh yeah, he's an equal opportunity attackist, right? I mean, he's going after, we know his assault on non-documented immigrants, his assault on the LGBTQ plus community, you know, history and, and also arts too.

CLASSROOM STORIES: Red Shaydez' Red Shaydez Day

Red Shaydez: Look at the funding that we're just talking about. They're literally cutting the federal funding as well. So he is literally attacking everything.

Toni Magras: How do you get inspired in this current space?

Red Shaydez: Well, it reminds me of a song I have called Buy All the Land Up. It makes me wanna create more tracks like that for like resistance and to get people together and to care about it enough to wanna do something because there's strength in numbers.

And music and art plays always played a huge role in our protests and, you know, fighting for rights. So as a person with my medium, it makes me wanna create more content that, you know, helps the people come together instead of separating or being, you know, divisive.

Toni Magras: And what will you tell young students and, you know, whether they are interested in hip hop or whatever, that, you know, they're in this space right now, right?

Everything that you're doing, everything that you're touching, everything that you want to potentially pursue is under attack right now. Talk to the young people, you know, what kind of advice do you give them? I mean, people are scared, people are angry. People are hurt. What can we say?

Red Shaydez: Yeah, I think one thing that, 'cause you know, it's great to sit up here and say, you know, don't lose hope. Keep up the fight. Fight the good fight. Which, yes, you should do those things, but I think people forget that it's okay to like sit with those. With that discomfort and those feelings and not knowing what to do, because I don't always know what the answer is.

I think I wanna feel all of those feelings and hope that it does, like I said, spark some motivation to do something about it. And I think we have to remember like the community, we need each other to thrive. I know like nowadays, it's a very individualistic society. But I think if we can, you know, come together and with that shared anger and that shared hurt, that we can actually make some change.

And it looks like a bunch of different ways. It doesn't necessarily have to be a protest, but it can be contacting your elected officials. It can be going down, you know, to DC. It can look a multitude of ways. So I just think search for those support groups. But also feel your feelings as well 'cause it's a lot going on.

So everything we just named that literally attacks everything that I am and that I'm a part of. So that can be exhausting within itself. But I would say definitely find that motivation after you do that.

Toni Magras: Yeah. And we have another question.

Katherine Jewell: So last question. I wanted to know what you wanna see next for the students at Fitchburg State in terms of.

CLASSROOM STORIES: Red Shaydez' Red Shaydez Day

Student activities, student creativity, what do you wanna see them do in their daily lives as students in particular?

Red Shaydez: I would love to see everyone from like Fitchburg. I would love to see them out in the actual community. I would love for there to be a direct pipeline from the programs here. And to some, like when I saw a student from here, like on a set or on the news, like somebody that I used to go to school with here works on the news, like, that makes me happy.

So I would love to see you. As FSU students that got your start here, be out in the actual world and that we can cross paths and, and hopefully collaborate one day, 'cause you never know like what that will be. Yes, I'm in music, but I do a lot of other things as well and you never know. So I would love to meet some of you today and, and stay in touch and hopefully see you out in the world.

Toni Magras: All right. I have three rapid fire questions,

Red Shaydez: Uh-oh

Toni Magras: Real quick.

Red Shaydez: Okay.

Toni Magras: Name a person living or dead you would kill to collab with on a song.

Red Shaydez: Aaliyah.

Toni Magras: Yes. Greatest hip hop artists of all time.

Red Shaydez: Nas.

Toni Magras: Wow. Most underrated hip hop artists of all time.

Red Shaydez: Hmm. Missy?

Toni Magras: Yes. Yes. Yes. And what is the future of hip hop?

Where do you see hip hop 50 years from now?

Red Shaydez: Ooh.

Toni Magras: We made it to 50.

Red Shaydez: Yeah, we did make it to 50. I think there's gonna be like 50 more sub genres. I think. We're gonna start hearing hip hop from places we don't even consider.

[Red Shaydez' *Buy All the Land Up* fades in]

CLASSROOM STORIES: Red Shaydez' Red Shaydez Day

Red Shaydez (cont'd): But I think it is gonna be way more independent, because we're moving away from like needing those, that backing in the infrastructure.

But sound-wise, I have no idea. I'm a little scared.

Toni Magras: Thank you. Red Shadez. Can we give it up for Red Shadez?

[Applause]

[Outro music fades out]

[Perseverantia Network theme fades in]

Nikki McToggart: You've been listening to Perseverantia, the Fitchburg State Podcast Network.

[Perseverantia Network theme fades out]