

# MHIS-221 -002 / -003 SP20

American Music History & Culture

## Music of the African Diaspora in the United States

002: Monday 5-6:50pm / 003: Monday 7-8:50pm

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Office Location	7 Haviland 304
Office Hour	Monday 4-5pm, or by appointment
Course Website	<a href="http://ol.berklee.edu/course/view.php?id=108344">http://ol.berklee.edu/course/view.php?id=108344</a> (002) / <a href="http://ol.berklee.edu/course/view.php?id=108345">id= 108345</a> (003)
Course Chair	Dr. Simone Pilon, <a href="mailto:spilon@berklee.edu">spilon@berklee.edu</a> , 7 Haviland 334, 617-747-6329

### Course Description

This course explores the history of the music of the African diaspora in the United States: from African roots and early African-European musical encounters through various transformations in the US. Important trends include the development of African aesthetics into a succession of new and evolving styles, the role of African cultural values in the development of American music and culture, the evolution of African-American harmonic, melodic, textural, and rhythmic approaches, and how syncretic processes, racial politics, and the exceptional as well as everyday labors of African Americans have influenced the development of American music, dance, and the music industry. Over the course of the term, we examine music and its social contexts from pre-colonial Africa into the antebellum period, the rise of “black music” as a public product in the postbellum years, and the development of African-American popular, sacred, and concert music from ragtime to rap. Along the way we study the ways that both African-American cultural resiliency and ideologies of race and nation have profoundly shaped the sound of American music and broader understandings and contestations of Americanness.

### Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Outline how American music has evolved from earlier forms and practices grounded in African core concepts and values, as driven by the interaction of African and European cultures in the US.
- Develop a factual and conceptual framework for understanding the development of Afrodiasporic music from its roots in pre-15<sup>th</sup> century Africa.
- Relate trends in American music—performance, production, and composition—to major historical movements, events, and technological media.
- Analyze individual works of American music in social and historical context.
- Articulate the social, political, geographic, economic, technological, and cultural dimensions that have shaped contemporary American music, and how this music has in turn influenced society and history.
- Write an analytical essay focusing on a significant work that reveals the ongoing making of the music of the African diaspora in the US.

## Course Materials

Most of our readings, required and recommended, are available via the course website as PDFs and URLs. In addition, we will primarily be reading from the following two books, available at the bookstore, [on reserve](#) at the library, or via various online retailers:

Floyd, Samuel A. *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting Its History from Africa to the United States*. New York: Oxford, 1996.

Wald, Elijah. *How the Beatles Destroyed Rock'n'Roll: An Alternative History of American Popular Music*. New York: Oxford, 2009.

I also recommend the following text, an indispensable history (also on reserve and at the bookstore):

Southern, Eileen. *The Music of Black Americans: A History*. New York: Norton, 1997.

Each week's readings are accompanied by YouTube playlists offering a "shortlist" and a "deep dive" of audio/visual examples. We will structure our weekly conversations around the shortlists, while the deep dives, as well as recommended readings, are for those with the time and inclination to explore further.

## Course Requirements

- **40% Weekly Pre-Class Responses & In-Class Participation**

Before we meet each week, you will be tasked with reading an article or chapter (or two) and reviewing a playlist of examples. After doing so, and *prior to our class meeting*, you will post a brief response on OL, writing up a short paragraph for **ONE** of the following three questions:

- 1) What seems in need of clarification or elaboration?
- 2) What was the biggest "a-ha" moment / "lightbulb" passage in the piece?
- 3) What demands further discussion and/or debate?

Please include a pertinent quotation from the reading(s) and, if possible, point to a shortlist example that relates to your response.

To receive credit for these assignments, they *must* be posted prior to class.

While I will do some lecturing and guided discussion, class meetings will also be structured around small group conversations and student-led examinations of the shortlist examples. All students are expected to contribute to in-class discussions. Together we will develop interpretations of the examples, connecting aesthetics and social values to the changing historical forces of cultural production.

- **40% Writing Assignments**

These are directed toward working up our final papers: analytical essays that build an argument around a central musical example using carefully researched and selected scholarship on the artist(s) and musical work in question. These brief written assignments, mainly due in the second half of the semester include a proposal, a bibliography, and an outline with thesis statement, etc.

- **20% Final Paper (1500 words)**

Students will compose an analytical essay placing a significant artist and a particular work (i.e., a recording or performance) into historical context, including a discussion of the aesthetic, social, cultural, economic, and political dimensions that informed its production, reception, and ongoing resonance. The choice of artist/work is open as long as it falls under our subject's rather large umbrella.

The paper should consider both *synchronic* and *diachronic* historical perspectives, situating the work in its particular historical moment as well as showing how it relates to broader trends of tradition, innovation, and influence. Connecting specific musical features to historical forces, your essay will examine the ways that artists' aesthetic choices can be understood historically.

Your paper should also aim to build on our discussions of the course's core concerns and themes, including but not limited to: the maintenance and transformation of African core concepts, aesthetic priorities, and values; the impact of the "color line" on American music (and vice versa); the strategic embrace or militant refusal of the "mask" of minstrelsy; the jook continuum and working-class cultural politics; respectability, "racial uplift," and assimilationist approaches; Afro-modernism and Black Arts movements; sacred and secular interplay; migration and regionalism; interracial exchanges and coalitions; appropriation and exploitation; integrationist and anti-racist movements; black nationalism and self-determination; the long struggle for Civil Rights and economic justice.

### **Attendance Policy**

Attendance is required in all classes, private lessons, instrumental labs, and ensembles, beginning with the first scheduled meeting. Absences must be addressed directly with the course instructor. Class begins promptly on the hour and ends ten minutes before the hour. Late arrival is both unprofessional and disruptive. You are only allowed two absences without penalty; after that, your final grade will be reduced by half a grade for each absence. If you miss more than four weeks of class, you will automatically earn a grade of F in the course.

Berklee recognizes that its students will be presented with professional opportunities, such as job interviews, auditions for professional positions or graduate school, and exceptional performance opportunities (including those sponsored by Berklee). Students hoping to take advantage of such opportunities are not excused from course assignments or deadlines, and are required to discuss the ramifications of any related absences with their course instructors *in advance*.

### **Devices and Social Media Policy \*\*\***

As a gesture of mutual respect and toward increasing individual and collective engagement, I ask that students refrain from using electronic devices – laptops, smartphones, tablets – and take a complete break from social media (Facebook, Twitter) and other forms of non-class communication during our meetings. If you need to consult a digital dictionary, conduct a class-related internet search, or if you genuinely use your laptop to take notes, you are welcome to. Note that we will always take a break in the middle of every class in case you need to check your messages, get your social media "fix," or simply stretch your legs.

## **Academic Honesty**

Berklee College of Music insists on academic honesty. Unless the assignment explicitly is a group project, all of the work in this class must be your own. The source of all information in any written assignment must be cited properly, whether it is a quotation, paraphrase, summary, idea, concept, statistic, picture, or anything else you get from any source other than your own immediate knowledge—including the Internet. Writers give credit through accepted documentation styles, including parenthetical citation, footnotes, or endnotes. Plagiarism—not giving proper credit to a source and thereby passing off someone else’s material or idea as your own—is a type of intellectual deceit and cannot be tolerated in an academic setting. Plagiarism may result in a failing grade for the assignment or course, and possible dismissal from the College. It is your responsibility to be aware of and abide by the rules governing plagiarism, fraud, and cheating found in the College Bulletin under the section "Honesty in Academic Work and in Scholarly and Professional Practice." If you have any questions about what plagiarism is and how to avoid it, please talk with a reference librarian, ask a teacher, or refer to a writing handbook. Websites that discuss types of plagiarism and how it can be avoided through evaluation and proper documentation of sources include:

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/index.html>

<http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/Documentation.html>

<http://lib.nmsu.edu/instruction/evalcrit.html>

## **Title IX**

Berklee is a diverse community composed of individuals with different life experiences, viewpoints, belief systems, and identities. A welcoming and inclusive culture is essential to maintaining the college’s role as a leader in music education and Berklee highly values the dynamic environment that results when students, faculty, administrators, and staff from diverse backgrounds come together to learn, live, and work. The Equity Policy and Process prohibits and addresses sexual misconduct, as well as other forms of discrimination and/or harassment based on legally “protected characteristics” and provisions covered under Title IX of federal law. If you have concerns about a possible violation of the college’s Equity Policy, please contact Dr. Christopher Kandus-Fisher at [ckandusfisher@berklee.edu](mailto:ckandusfisher@berklee.edu). For more information: [www.berklee.edu/equity](http://www.berklee.edu/equity)

## **Liberal Arts Department Equity Mission Statement**

The Liberal Arts Department at Berklee strives to provide a supportive environment for all students, regardless of sex, gender identity, sexual identity and orientation, health, ability, social class, and racial, ethnic, religious, national, and personal backgrounds. Our strength is in our differences, and a diverse community promotes equity through the support of and respect for people with a broad range of backgrounds and experiences. We welcome the opportunities to work with and learn from each other.

## **Support Services**

The Center for Liberal Arts Tutoring (CLAT) offers various tutoring services to the Berklee community. Located in 7 Haviland Street 110, CLAT falls under the auspices of the Liberal Arts Department in the Professional Education Division. For more information: <https://www.berklee.edu/liberal-arts-tutoring>

Additional Student Services include:

- Counseling Services, 161 Mass Ave, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor, 617-747-2310
- Health and Wellness Office, 161 Mass Ave, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor
- Academic Advising Center, 939 Boylston Street, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, 617-747-6535
- Disability Services, 939 Boylston Street, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, To schedule a session:  
<https://www.berklee.edu/disabilityappointment>
- Stan Getz Library and Media Center, 150 Mass Ave

## Class Schedule

### Topic 1 **Introduction & Review of Syllabus**

### Topic 2 **Roots & Routes: Africanisms & Americanisms**

Required: Wilson, "It Don't Mean a Thing" [PDF]

Recommended: Floyd, ch. 1-2 (14-57); Jamison, "Square Roots" & "Transforming Tradition" [PDF]; Werthman, "Alan Lomax, Beyoncé, and Sampling Sounds from the Jim Crow South" [URL]

*Due: Writing Assignment 1: Introduce Yourself*

### Topic 3 **Spirituals & Minstrelsy: Black Music as Public Form**

Required: Southern, p. 82-96 [PDF]; Thompson, "Same Script, Different Actors" [PDF]

Recommended: Floyd, ch. 3 (58-65, 86-7); Jackson, "Digital Blackface" [URL] and "Weird Cartoons Transform the Minstrel Aesthetic" [URL]

### Topic 4 **Ragtime & Early Jazz**

Required: Wald, ch. 2-4 (25-59); Floyd, p. 66-72

Recommended: Gilbert, "The Birth of the Manhattan Musical Marketplace" [URL]

### Topic 5 **Blues & Country**

Required: Wald, "What Is Blues?" [PDF] and/or "What the Records Missed" [PDF]

Recommended: Wald, ch. 11, 12 (esp. 138-44); Floyd, p. 66-69, 72-81; Thomas, "Why African Americans Put the Banjo Down" [PDF]; Lewis, "In 2019, Country Music Has a Raging Identity Crisis" [URL]; Sullivan, "Rhiannon Giddens and What Folk Music Means" [URL]; Day, "Bulldyzers and Lady Lovers" [URL]

### Topic 6 **The Jazz Age & the Swing Era**

Required: Wald, ch. 6, 8-9 (71-83, 97-125) and/or Shearer, "Sugarfoot Stomp" [PDF]

### Topic 7 **Afromodernism & Black Arts Movements**

Required: Floyd, p. 100-126, 131-43, 160-70

Recommended: Suisman, "The Black Swan" [PDF]; Southern, 487-505 [PDF]; Shatz, "Blues to Come" [URL]; Ross, "Rediscovery of Florence Price" [URL]; Iverson, "Received Wisdom" and "Theory of Harmony" [URL]

*Due: Writing Assignment 2: Paper Proposal*

### Topic 8 **Rock of Ages: Gospel through the Years**

Required: Southern, 475-87, 452-65 [PDF]; Floyd, 63-65, 126-9, 170-5, 196-201

Recommended: Younger, "How Kirk Franklin Revolutionized Gospel and Made Hip-Hop a More Spiritual Place" [URL]; Caramanica, "Building a Small Empire

Through Viral Gospel” [URL]; Crawley, “Forgotten: The Things We Lost in Kanye’s Gospel Year” [URL]; Tegnell, “The Presence of the Past in John Coltrane’s Expressive and Searching Music” [URL]

Topic 9 **The Birth (and Death?) of Rhythm & Blues**

Required: Wald, ch. 11 (esp, 144-49), Molanphy, “I Know You Got Soul” [URL]  
Recommended: Floyd, p. 143-5, 175-80; George, “Crossover: The Death of Rhythm & Blues (1975-79)” [PDF]

Topic 10 **Rock'n'Roll to Rock (& Soul)**

Required: Wald, ch. 13 (166-83); Hamilton, “How Rock & Roll Became White” [URL]  
Recommended: Floyd, p. 176-80, 201-03; Lipsitz, “Ain't Nobody Here But Us Chickens” [PDF]; Steptoe, “The Queer Roots of Rock’n’Roll” [PDF]; Remnick, “The Possessed: James Brown in Eighteen Minutes” [URL]; Ashton, “Time to Recognize the Ronettes” [URL]; Weller, “Jimi Hendrix: I Don't Want to Be a Clown Anymore” [URL]; Tausig, “On Prince and Interpretive Freedom” [URL]; Williams, “The Truth About Elvis” [URL]; Shearer, “The Thinning of Big Mama” [URL]

*Due: Writing Assignment 3: Preliminary Bibliography and Literature Review*

Topic 11 **Soul to Funk**

Required: Garofalo, “Popular Music and the Civil Rights Movement” [PDF]  
Recommended: Vincent, ch. 1-2, 4 (3-22, 31-44) [PDF]; Southern 513-18 [PDF]; Floyd, 203-06, 180-82; Maxwell, “When Nina Simone Sang What Everyone Was Thinking” [URL]

Topic 12 **Disco to House & Techno**

Required: Lawrence, “Beyond the Hustle” [PDF]  
Recommended: Matos, *The Underground Is Massive*, ch. 1-2 (p. 1-44) [PDF]; Fikentscher, “In the Mix” [PDF]; Patrin, “TSO NYC” [URL]; Walters, “Walter Gibbons” [URL]; Shapiro, “Saturday Mass” [URL]; Arnold, “Ron Hardy at the Music Box” [URL]

*Due: Writing Assignment 4: Thesis Statement and Paper Outline*

Topic 13 **Reggae & Hip-hop**

Required: Marshall, “Hip-hop’s Irrepressible Refashionability” [PDF]  
Recommended: Veal, *Dub* excerpts [PDF]; Katz, “Mix and Scratch” [PDF]; Charnas, “Why Eminem Isn't Elvis” [URL]

Topic 14 **Latin Tinges, Salsa & Reggaeton**

Required: Flores, “Creolité in the Hood” [PDF]; Marshall, “Everything You Ever Wanted To Know About 'Despacito'” [URL]

Recommended: Marshall, “Dembow: A Loop History” [URL]

*Due: Final Paper*

## Course Bibliography

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