

The History of Black Music in America

Course Syllabus

Course description: This course focuses on a central question: how do we define “African American music”?

In attempting to answer this question, we will be thinking through a number of keywords such as authenticity, representation, recognition, cultural ownership, appropriation, and origin(s). These concepts have structured the ways in which critics, musicians and audiences have addressed the various social, political and aesthetic contexts in which African American music has been composed (produced), performed (re-produced) and heard (consumed). In exploring the diversity of African American musical expression, we will question our assumptions about race, about music, and the links between the two. By taking a thematic approach, we will see how African American music has both shaped and been shaped by the social contexts in which it is created and performed. Our readings and discussions will encompass African American music from spirituals and work songs to bebop and hip hop, from Duke Ellington to N.W.A., from Bessie Smith to Stevie Wonder, all of which will help us explore the rich set of meanings black music has held in the Americas for over four hundred years.

Course Goals: Students will gain or deepen familiarity and knowledge of African American music culture through readings, in-class discussions, listening examples, music performance and various documentaries which we will watch in class.

Course Outcomes: By the end of this course, students should ably demonstrate their acquisition of the following knowledge:

- Musical terms and concepts
- Historical perspectives on African American music cultures
- Enhanced music listening and performance skills

Format and Procedures: Class sessions will be a combination of lectures and discussions. In fact, I encourage questions and comments about the readings, videos or music. I have set up a Google Classroom. All information, assignments and additional listening will be posted on Google Classroom.

Coursework Requirements: Students will be tested after each section of the course. Tests will include a listening portion in which they will be required to identify the style of African American music. Students will be given a listening test which will encompass many different styles of African American music. Students will be given a final exam for the course.