Expressive Culture: Sounds
Freedom Songs

CORE-UA 730-001

Fall 2017

Mondays and Wednesdays
2:00-3:15 p.m.

Prof. Maureen Mahon
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Office Hours: Wednesdays, 3:30-4:30 and by appointment

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Course description: Music is a significant expressive form precisely because it is a tangible product of human activity through which individuals and groups tell themselves and others who they are and what they value. This semester we will examine some of the ways African American musicians and activists have used music to express their desire for freedom, to demand rights, and to assert individual and group identity in the United States, a context where African Americans have historically been denied full citizenship and personhood. We will learn about key artists, songs, and musical styles and their connection to sociopolitical struggles and cultural debates in the U.S. We will relate our discussion to issues of representation, authenticity, appropriation, political economy, and aesthetics.

Course objectives: Through lectures, discussions in recitation sections, reading and listening assignments, papers, and projects, students will

- Learn about 20th and 21st century African American culture and history through a focus on music.
- Learn about different styles of African American music and their artistic and cultural significance.
- Learn about some of the concepts and methods that scholars in the interdisciplinary field of African American studies use to study African American music and music-making.
- Develop and improve critical writing skills.
- Learn about the importance of grounding interpretation and analysis of expressive cultural forms such as music in historical and social context.
Course requirements: Students are expected to complete the reading and listening assignments, attend lecture and recitations regularly, and participate in class discussions. Over the course of the semester, you will be required to submit five one-page response papers to your Preceptor as directed. You will receive prompts for these papers. These papers should be uploaded to NYU Classes by the assignment deadline. You will submit a short essay (2-3 pp.) in which you discuss assigned readings and music based on a prompt, an individual report (2-3 pp.) on your Break a Cultural Rule group project, and a final essay (no more than 6 pages) based on a prompt. Your papers should reflect your familiarity with the assigned readings, material discussed in lectures, and films and music presented in class and as listening assignments.

Timely submission of work is mandatory.

Your grade will be based on the following:
Lecture & Recitation Attendance and Recitation Participation 20%
Response papers (five papers) 20%
“Lift Every Voice and Sing” paper, due in class, October 11 20%
Break a Cultural Rule project report, due in class, November 15 20%
Final essay, due in class, December 13 20%

Required readings for the course and listening assignments will be available through NYU Classes. You can access the class page via the Academics tab of NYUHome. Our course is listed under the heading EXPRESSIVE CULTURES: SOUNDS. There, you can find articles organized by unit title by clicking the Resources folder on the left side of the page. Musical examples, also organized in folders labeled by unit title, are also in the Resources folder.

Integrity of Scholarship: When writing your papers, please take care to identify the sources of the ideas you are using and the material you are quoting. We will discuss the proper ways to cite the work of others in recitation. Each student should be familiar with the NYU Core Curriculum Statement on Academic Integrity. A copy is attached to this syllabus for you to consult during the semester. We will also distribute a copy to you on the first day of class; please read and sign the statement and return it to your Preceptor by Friday, September 16. Representing the work of others as your own can lead to an “F” in the course and severe disciplinary action by the University.

Classroom Etiquette: Lecture is scheduled for one hour and fifteen minutes. Please come to class prepared to stay in class for that length of time. Getting up and leaving the room (to get water or use the restroom, for example) during class is disruptive to your colleagues, preceptors, and professor. Please refrain from talking during lecture and when sound and video examples are played. We encourage you to participate actively in discussion, both in lecture and recitation. If you have questions or comments, please raise your hand and share your thoughts and queries. Finally, please suspend all on-line activity while you are in class and be sure to silence your cell phones.
September 6—Overview of Course

September 11—African American Culture and Identity…and Music


Listen to “Nobody Knows the Trouble I See” and at least two other spirituals available in the “Musical Examples—Spirituals” folder.

***Response Paper #1 due***

September 13—African American Culture and Identity…and Music


Listen to “Nobody Knows the Trouble I See” and at least two other spirituals available in the “Musical Examples—Spirituals” folder.

September 18—African American Culture, Identity, and Music


Selections from Wilson, Sondra K. and Julian Bond, Lift Every Voice and Sing: A Celebration of the Negro National Anthem: 100 Years, 100 Voices (New York: Random House, 2000) [selections. A copy of this book is on Reserve at Bobst]

Johnson, James Weldon, and Rosamond Johnson, “Lift Every Voice and Sing” simple sheet music

September 20—African American Culture, Identity, and Music


Selections from Wilson, Sondra K. and Julian Bond, Lift Every Voice and Sing: A Celebration of the Negro National Anthem: 100 Years, 100 Voices (New York: Random House, 2000) [selections. A copy of this book is on Reserve at Bobst]

Johnson, James Weldon, and Rosamond Johnson, “Lift Every Voice and Sing” simple sheet music
September 25—Anthems


September 27—Anthems


October 2—Early Protests


October 4—Early Protests


October 9 & 11—Fall Break. No class meetings.

****“Lift Every Voice and Sing” Assignment due October 11****
October 16—Freedom Songs in the 1950s & 1960s


***Response Paper #2 due***

October 18—Freedom Songs in the 1950s & 1960s


October 23—The Culture Concept


October 25—The Culture Concept

In class Break a Cultural Rule group project work

October 31—Freedom Songs in the 1960s


***Response Paper #3 due***

November 1—Freedom Songs in the 1960s


November 6—Freedom Songs in the 1960s

November 8—Freedom Songs in the 1960s


November 13—Rap


***Response Paper #4 due***

November 15—Rap


****Break a Cultural Rule Project Report due in class****

November 20—Rap


November 22—Thanksgiving Holiday. No class meeting.

November 27—Individual Final Essay Meetings

Ten-minute student/preceptor meetings.

November 29—Individual Final Essay Meetings

Ten-minute student/preceptor meetings.

December 4—Individual Final Essay Meetings
Ten-minute student/preceptor meetings

December 6 & 11—Contemporary Freedom Songs


At least one of the following:

Greg Tate, “#6: Who Makes The Protest Music” [On “We The People” by Tribe Called Quest”] *New York Times Magazine* special issue on ”25 Songs that Tell Us Where Music is Going,” March 9, 2017


***Response Paper #5 due, December 6***

December 13--Conclusions

****Final Essay due in class****