

Expressive Culture: Sounds
African American Lives and Music

CORE-UA 730-001

Fall 2015

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. In many cases, it is the site and subject of sociopolitical struggle, debate, and activism. This semester we will examine some of the theoretical and methodological approaches ethnomusicologists, cultural anthropologists, and other scholars use to study the ways African-

Americans use music and music-making to construct and express identity. 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 on your Break a Cultural Rule group project (2-3 pp.), and a **final essay** (no more than 6 pages). Your papers should reflect your familiarity with the assigned readings, material discussed in lectures, guest lectures, and films and music presented in class and as listening assignments.

Timely submission of work is mandatory. We will not accept late papers or give incompletes for this course.

Your grade will be based on the following:

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| Lecture & Recitation Attendance and Recitation Participation | 20% |
| Response papers (five papers) | 20% |

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| “Lift Every Voice and Sing” paper, due in class, October 14 | 20% |
| Break a Cultural Rule project report, due in class, November 11 | 20% |
| Final essay, due in class, December 14 | 20% |

Both required texts are on two-hour reserve in the Avery Fisher Center on the second floor of Bobst Library. They are available for purchase at NYU’s Main Bookstore (726 Broadway).

Shana L. Redmond, *Anthem: Social Movements and the Sound of Solidarity in the African Diaspora* (New York University Press, 2014)

Matt Sakakeeny, *Roll With It: Brass Bands in the Streets of New Orleans* (Duke University Press, 2013)

Additional required readings (marked with an asterisk on the syllabus) 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. There, you can find articles organized by unit title by clicking the Resources folder on the left side of the page.

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 class. 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 11. 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 take a bathroom break, 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—if a point isn’t clear or if something said spurs an idea--please raise your hand

and share your thoughts and queries. Finally, please suspend all electronic and digital communication and activity while you are in class and be sure to turn off your cell phones.

September 2—Overview of Course

September 7—Labor Day Holiday. No class meeting.

September 9--African American Culture and Identity...and Music

*W.E.B. Du Bois, “Of Our Spiritual Strivings” and “The Sorrow Songs” in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), pp. 37-44, 185-194

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

September 14—African American Culture and Identity...and Music

*W.E.B. Du Bois, “Of Our Spiritual Strivings” and “The Sorrow Songs” in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), pp. 37-44, 185-194

September 16— African American Culture and Identity...and Music

*W.E.B. Du Bois, “Of Our Spiritual Strivings” and “The Sorrow Songs” in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), pp. 37-44, 185-194

*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 21—Songs of Identity and Belonging

Shana L. Redmond, *Anthem: Social Movements and the Sound of Solidarity in the African Diaspora*

Introduction, pp. 1-20 AND Chapter 2, pp. 63-98

September 23—Songs of Identity and Belonging

Shana L. Redmond, *Anthem: Social Movements and the Sound of Solidarity in the African Diaspora*

Introduction, pp. 1-20 AND Chapter 2, pp. 63-98

September 28—Songs of Identity and Belonging

Shana L. Redmond, *Anthem: Social Movements and the Sound of Solidarity in the African Diaspora*

Chapter 4, pp. 141-178

September 30—Songs of Identity and Belonging

Shana L. Redmond, *Anthem: Social Movements and the Sound of Solidarity in the African Diaspora*

Chapter 4, pp. 141-178

October 5—Songs of Identity and Belonging

Shana L. Redmond, *Anthem: Social Movements and the Sound of Solidarity in the African Diaspora*

Chapter 5, pp. 179-220

October 7—Songs of Identity and Belonging

Shana L. Redmond, *Anthem: Social Movements and the Sound of Solidarity in the African Diaspora*

October 12—Fall Break. No class meeting.

October 14—Songs of Identity and Belonging

Shana L. Redmond, *Anthem: Social Movements and the Sound of Solidarity in the African Diaspora*

Part of Conclusion, pp. 261-269

****“Lift Every Voice and Sing” Assignment due in class****

October 19— The Culture Concept & Ethnographic Approaches

*Luke Eric Lassiter, “Anthropology and Culture” in *Invitation to Anthropology* (third edition), (2009), pp. 35-68, Altamira Press.

*Helen Myers, “Fieldwork” in *Ethnomusicology: An Introduction*, ed. Helen Myers, (1992), pp. 21-49. New York: W.W. Norton

October 21— The Culture Concept & Ethnographic Approaches

*Luke Eric Lassiter, “Anthropology and Culture” in *Invitation to Anthropology* (third edition), (2009), pp. 35-68, Altamira Press.

*Helen Myers, “Fieldwork” in *Ethnomusicology: An Introduction*, ed. Helen Myers, (1992), pp. 21-49. New York: W.W. Norton

October 26—Music, Community, and Identity in New Orleans

Matt Sakakeeny, *Roll With It: Brass Bands in the Streets of New Orleans*

Prologue, pp. ix-xv

Introduction, pp. 1-11

Chapter 1 pp. 13-67

October 28—Music, Community, and Identity in New Orleans

Matt Sakakeeny, *Roll With It: Brass Bands in the Streets of New Orleans*

Prologue, pp. ix-xv

Introduction, pp. 1-11

Chapter 1 pp. 13-67

November 2—Music, Community, and Identity in New Orleans

Matt Sakakeeny, *Roll With It: Brass Bands in the Streets of New Orleans*

Chapter 2, pp. 69-107

Chapter 3, pp. 109-141

November 4—Music, Community, and Identity in New Orleans

Matt Sakakeeny, *Roll With It: Brass Bands in the Streets of New Orleans*

Chapter 2, pp. 69-107

Chapter 3, pp. 109-141

November 9— Music, Community, and Identity in New Orleans

Matt Sakakeeny, *Roll With It: Brass Bands in the Streets of New Orleans*

Chapter 4, pp. 143-177

Conclusion, pp. 179-185

Afterword, pp. 187-194

November 11—Ethnographic Approaches

Matt Sakakeeny, *Roll With It: Brass Bands in the Streets of New Orleans*

Chapter 4, pp. 143-177

Conclusion, pp. 179-185

Afterword, pp. 187-194

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

November 16—Authenticity and African American Musicians--Classical

*Nina Sun Eidsheim, "Marian Anderson and 'Sonic Blackness' in American Opera," *American Quarterly* (2011), pp. 641-671

November 18— Authenticity and African American Musicians--Classical

*Nina Sun Eidsheim, "Marian Anderson and 'Sonic Blackness' in American Opera,"
American Quarterly (2011), pp. 641-671

November 23— Authenticity and African American Musicians

TBA

November 25—Thanksgiving Holiday. No class meeting.

November 30— Authenticity and African American Musicians--Rock

*Maureen Mahon, "Jimi Hendrix Experiences," *Right To Rock: The Black Rock Coalition and the Cultural Politics of Race* (2004), pp. 231-256

December 2—Authenticity and African American Musicians--Rock

*Maureen Mahon, "Jimi Hendrix Experiences," *Right To Rock: The Black Rock Coalition and the Cultural Politics of Race* (2004), pp. 231-256

December 7—Authenticity and African American Musicians--Rock

In-Class screening of the documentary *Afro-Punk* directed by James Spooner (2004)

December 9—Authenticity and African American Musicians—Rock

Afro-Punk discussion

December 14—Conclusions

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