The Power of Black Music: Blues to Rap

AFST 3390
Professor John Siqueiros
jsiqueiros@utep.edu
915-747-8650 office
915-747-6413 direct or voice
915-667-5915 cell (call or text)
Tech Support: 915-747-HELP (4357)
LART 401

This is an upper-level undergraduate course satisfying both diversity and fine arts prerequisites.

GRADUATE CREDIT FOR THIS COURSE: In order to obtain graduate credit for this course, you must satisfactorily complete a graduate level project with a topic and parameters approved beforehand by the course instructor.

Course Description

The Power of Black Music: Blues to Rap is a fine arts block elective; it satisfies both Diversity and Fine Arts prerequisites. This class will survey a social history of Black music in the United States and Jamaica. The evolution of Black music will be presented in chronological order beginning with the work song of slavery and ending with a social critique of hip-hop culture and rap music. In particular, the music of the people of the African diaspora in the New World will be examined within the context of their struggle for freedom and their enduring quest for social justice - African American music as a form of resistance and a means of survival. Issues of gender, religion, social justice and race will be examined in the light of the enormous impact of African American music on the American experience, particularly when AA music is appropriated by White youth. This course examines why America’s popular music — culture that is quintessentially American — was created by people who were excluded from the American Dream.

Musical genres will be examined for inheritance, innovation, and aesthetic and linguistic qualities in light of the socio-political environment in which they were created and evolved -- who, what, when and where, with special emphasis on why, will create a structure for the discussion of Black music.

Musician biographies, song lyrics, and seminal events in the history of American race relations will reveal the importance of positive values such as perseverance and self-determination as agents of achievement.

Over-arching course themes will include:

- White appropriation and the influence of the music business.
- Black music as a means of survival.
- Black music as resistance.
- White teen rage as a catalyst for social racial strife.
- Inheritance and the cyclic and recycled nature of Black music.
- Gender and sex.

Goals

- To engage the students in a multidisciplinary narrative on the social history of African American music with special emphasis on its functions in the spiritual life and work life of the African, slave, and post-civil war African American; and to frame the ethos of African American musical culture within the context of its inheritance.
- To develop academic literacy through the critique of rap lyrics by teaching students to identify characteristics such as irony, tone, and point of view; and to analyze lyrics for plot, motif, character development and metaphor.
- To develop academic literacy through exercises and assignments involving one-on-one comparisons of a canonic poem and a song lyric.
- To help students develop critical social consciousness through the lessons learned in the music, lyrics, musician biographies and events studied in the course.
- To speculate and discuss the future of hip hop

Student Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course you will understand the following:
- How Black music functions in African American society, particularly how Black music has traditionally been both a form of resistance and a source of inspiration for the African American.
- How White American musicians have repeatedly appropriated Black music and in the process have diminished its communicative and emotive power in an effort to make it their own and reach a larger audience (the influence of commerce).
- How Black music, when appropriated by White teens, has created social strife in America.
- How the two processes stated above detail the history of race relations in America.
- How the music industry has enormous influence and has traditionally treated the African American musician in inequitable ways.
• How the different eras or genres of African American music are both similar and different.

Schedule of Content
Approximately one module every two weeks

PART ONE: Introductions, Fundamentals and Issues

MODULE ONE:
• The Function of Black Music and Social Strife in America
• Black Music as Resistance
• Black Music as a Means of Survival
• Music and Society; The Popular Music Industry and Black Music
• Issues of Gender
• White Appropriation, White Teen Rage, Black Music and Issues of Race in America
• Learning through Music: Where is the Love? by The Black-eyed Peas

PART TWO: A Social History of Black Music in America

MODULE TWO:
• Slave Music, Function and Meaning
• Sacred Slave Music
• Secular Slave Music
• Learning through Music: Night of the Living Baseheads, Public Enemy

MODULE THREE:
• Blues as a Soundtrack to the African American Experience
• Transformation and Transmigration: a Social History of the Blues
• Experiencing Blues Music: Listening and Identifying
• Learning through Music: A Change is Gonna Come by Sam Cooke
MODULE FOUR:
- Accessing Old Traditions in New Ways
- Ragtime
- New Orleans
- The Birth of Jazz
- The History of Jazz

MODULE FIVE:
- The Sounds of Struggle:
- Rhythm and Blues
- Soul
- Reggae
- Learning through Music: All Along the Watchtower, Jimi Hendrix

MODULE SIX:
- Technology and the Post-Civil Rights Era:
- Funk
- Disco
- House
- Techno
- Learning through Music: Break the Grip of Shame, Paris

MODULE SEVEN:
- A Brief Social History of Hip-hop
- The South Bronx in the Late 1970s
- Black Linguistic Traditions and the Birth of Rap
- Creating Identity: Graffiti and Break Dancing
- The Music of Hip Hop: The DJ and Turntablism

Word cloud final essay is due on the last day of the semester.

Textbook

African American Music: An Introduction
by Mellonee V. Burnim (Editor), Portia K. Maultsby (Editor)
Routledge; New edition (October 23, 2005)
ISBN-10: 0415941385
736 pages
READING:

Chapter 1: Columbus, The Indians, and Human Progress
Chapter 2: Drawing the Color Line
Chapter 3: Persons of Mean and Vile Condition
Chapter 4: Tyranny is Tyranny
Chapter 6: The Intimately Oppressed

Discussion Board Forums

Discussion of Issues Relating to Course Content
I will post a series of questions at the end of each module. You are expected to comment on each issue and then, comment on one of your peer’s comments. Before you can see anyone’s comments, you will need to post your comment first.

Coffee House
This forum is reserved for you to communicate with your course mates. You may discuss anything in this forum -- from casual and friendly dialog to conversations relating to the course content.

General Discussion
This is reserved for you make comments about anything related to the course: upcoming concerts and events, "heads-up" warnings, things you found interesting, etc.

Assignments

Word-Cloud Essay
This is the final exam. The essay requirements and suggestions for approaching will given on the first day of class. It is a comprehensive essay that you prepare throughout the semester and turn-in on the day of the final exam (See Academic Schedule, Spring 2015)

The following will be assigned throughout the course. At least two-week notice of due date will be given.
Video Analysis
Analyze a music video per written guidelines and instructions given in class.

Informant-Focused Field Work Essay
The objective is to determine how music functions in your informant's life. Follow the guidelines posted in the ASSIGNMENTS FOLDER on the homepage.

Concert and CD Reviews
Attend a live performance and write a review per the guidelines posted in the ASSIGNMENTS FOLDER on the homepage.

Rap/Poem Comparison
Per the guidelines posted in the ASSIGNMENTS FOLDER on the homepage compare and contrast the poem Mother to Son by Langston Hughes with the rap son Mama by Tupac Shakur.

Video Analysis
Per the guidelines posted in the ASSIGNMENTS FOLDER on the homepage write an analysis of the official Black Eyed Peas video, Where is the Love?.

Listening Journal
_Due at the end of the semester._
Spend 10 minutes a day for 7 days (not necessarily consecutive days) in a seemingly quiet place documenting what you hear. Listen intently and beyond the obvious, describe your listening environment, and your state of mind at the end of each session.

Term Paper, Class Presentation, or Dance Project.
_Due at the end of the semester._
Term paper is a thesis paper intended to prove or disprove something (rap music does/does not promote misogyny).

Testimonial
_Due at the end of the semester._
Students learn positive values through the analysis of rap poems and musician biographies. Values learned include: love vs. hate (including self--love/hate), perseverance, doing the right thing, making amends, patience, integrity and self--confidence. Students are asked to write a short essay relating four of the learned values to their own life experiences.

Grading Method
• Module Quizzes will be weighted by a factor of one.
Assignments and Discussions will be weighted by a factor of two.
Module Exams will be weighted by a factor of three.
Final exam or project weighted by a factor of four

By "weighted" I mean essentially that you will receive multiple grades for each activity with the exception of Module Quizzes. In other words, if you get an 85 on a discussion, then 2 grades of 85 each will be entered into the grade book. If you got 100s on 4 quizzes, an 85 on a discussion and a 75 on an exam, then your grade book would look as follows:

100 100 100 85 85 75 75 75 88.3

As you can see, just doing well on the quizzes will not ensure a good grade. Compare the grade average to the same grades, but when each grade is weighted the same:

100 100 100 85 75 93.3

The disparity in the two grades equals one letter grade.

Grading Discussions

Discussions will be graded on the following criteria:

• Originality of comment
• Relevance of comment
• Quality of articulation of comment

Grading Assignments

• Achievement of goal(s)
• Quality of articulation of goal

Grading Exams and Quizzes

• Quizzes will be graded on the number of correct answers as a percentage of the total number of questions.
• Exams, always essay, will be graded on the following criteria:

  o Achievement of goal(s)
  o Quality of articulation of goal
  o Originality (versus re-articulating lectures, books, etc.); this will demonstrate your ability to think critically and assimilate different content.
Communicating with the Professor

I check my email frequently. I live in New Mexico in the Mesilla Valley; sometimes my internet will be down, so it is ok to call or text. You may contact me via email, phone or text anytime during the day. You can text or call 915-667-5915. If you are experiencing problems, please contact me. I cannot help you, if I do not know that you need help.

Technology Requirements

The following programs will be essential to you being able to access the content:

• Adobe PDF Reader
• Java
• Micromedia Flash Player
• Win Zip
• Open Office or MS Office
• Quicktime of Windows Media Player

Class Decorum

Please observe the following etiquette when communicating in discussion boards or with your peers and the professor:

• Always be respectful of other's ideas, opinions and beliefs. I want to encourage you to argue -- this is an important skill to have and keep sharp. However, please always do so with dignity and respect. It is important that we always treat others with respect and kindness.
• When commenting in discussions, avoid simplistic 3-word answers like, I totally agree, You are so right, etc. Make your point and then add 2 or 3 sentences to support your statement.
• A comment containing substance contributes to everyone's understanding by either reflecting on meaning, analyzing content, elaborating on someone's comment, giving examples, or providing a synthesis of what has been said.
• I have found it useful to write my comments in Word, and then post them after I have had time to edit them. If you begin answering questions at the time the forum commences, then you will have plenty of time to tweak and improve your submission. Just make sure that you join the discussion before the expiration date.
• Avoid the use of all caps, as it is usually interpreted as shouting.
Content Delivery

- Video Lectures
- In Class Lectures
- Brief Powerpoint Presentations or Written Online Lectures
- Textbook Reading
- This online course will be rich in multimedia:
  - Youtube links
  - NBC Content links
  - UTEP Library Film Database links

COURSE POLICIES

Zero tolerance for any behavior that disrupts the class:

- Interfacing with cell phones in any way
- Talking during the delivery of content (content includes lectures, music, videos, etc)
- Rude, insulting behavior or comments
- Disrespect of any kind
- Leaving early (make arrangements with the professor, if you must leave early)

Course Requirements

Participation: Students are expected to participate in class. Participation is a vital part of your education and a skill that you will need to be successful throughout your career. Professors tend to remember students who participate in class and at some point you will need letters of recommendations from your professors. Sleeping or appearing to sleep in class, refusing to respond to the Instructor, unauthorized texting or other use of personal electronic devices in class, or acts that show a clear attitude of contempt toward the class, the Instructor, classmates or visitors will be penalized by points off the student’s participation grade. This should be extremely rare.

Homework: All homework is due at the beginning of class on the due-date. Any work posted or turned in after the beginning of class will be counted as late, and subject to late penalties.

Other daily responsibilities: Check Blackboard and your UTEP email account daily for announcements/updates.
Tests/exams: Quizzes will be posted on Blackboard and due dates are listed in the Course Calendar. There will be four benchmark essay exams. These essays need be comprehensive, but that does not mean that they need to be long. Points off for verbosity; points added for terse, but thorough essays. Get to the point, meet the objectives and write with proper grammar.

Papers or other writing assignments: Major written assignments in this class include those listed above under “grading.” All written assignments done outside of the classroom must be completed and submitted printed on paper, single-space. Handwritten assignments will not be accepted.
Oral reports: A group presentation and the final collective presentation.

**Required Policy Information**

Attendance / Lateness Policy: In this course you are required to attend all classes, except in the case of university-sponsored activities or other excused absences. Other excused absences (proof may be required) are:
Medical – a contagious illness or other diagnosed debilitating condition is affecting the student’s ability to attend class;
Family Medical – the student is responsible for the care of a sick, injured or disabled person and the provision of that care affects the student’s ability to attend class;
Death of Family Member – the death of a person who is considered to be a member of the student's family or who is otherwise considered to have a sufficiently close relationship to the student that the person’s death is considered to be a showing of good cause for temporary absence;
Military Duty – active duty service as a member of the Texas National Guard or the armed forces of the United States is considered to be a showing of good cause for temporary absence;
Work Schedule – the temporary change of the student’s work schedule that is beyond the control of the student, and that affects the student’s ability to attend class.
Other Emergencies, here defined as an immediate threat to life and property, or unexpected events that interrupt public access to the university.

If you miss a class for any reason, excused or unexcused, you are still responsible for getting with someone else in the class, finding out what you missed, and turning in a summary of the class that you missed.

Attendance will be taken at every class, by means of a sign-in sheet. It is your responsibility to sign in. If you do not sign in, you are counted as absent. For example, the fact that your car didn’t start in the morning is no excuse for missing class. Every student needs to have some other backup arrangement ready to get to campus on time in case regular transportation plans fail or are not available.
You are required to make non-emergency medical and dental appointments, or interviews, outside of class time.
If you miss class for any reason, excused or unexcused, you are still responsible for learning the material covered and turning in all work. You will be held accountable for all the material covered in every class, through either attendance or through make up work, not just on tests. If you do not make up missed work, you may lose all credit for that work, plus extra penalties for refusing to participate. LEAVING DURING CLASS, AFTER HAVING SIGNED-IN AND TURNED-IN WORK DUE ON THAT DAY, IS UNETHICAL AND IS GROUNDS FOR DROPPING YOU FROM THE CLASS.

Withdrawal: Simply not attending classes does not constitute official withdrawal, so please see your advisor in order do so. If you simply stop attending this course, you will be counted as absent and will receive grades based on work completed up to your last attendance as well as missing class requirements assigned during your absence. In cases of extreme absenteeism (here defined as the total equivalent of two weeks worth of absences any time in the semester, for any reason including excused absences), you may possibly be dropped at the Instructor's option without notice, with a grade of "W" if the infractions occur prior to April 2. However, if the last infraction happens on or after April 2 or if the majority of your absences are unexcused, you will automatically fail the course. AS YOU CAN SEE, THERE IS LITTLE VALUE IN SKIPPING CLASS.

Tardiness and the "Ten Minute Rule"
If the instructor is more than ten minutes late for class without notice or advance arrangement, you may leave without being counted absent. If you arrive more than ten minutes late for class (or leave class early before being dismissed), you will be counted absent.

Policy for late work: Assignments submitted after class begins on the due date will be penalized one letter grade for every day late.
Students who fail to submit assignments on time do not receive feedback on performance. Therefore, it is important to submit work before deadlines for full credit and proper feedback. To earn a passing grade ("A," "B," or "C") students must have completed all major assignments, paragraphs, and essays, even if they are too late to get points. If a major assignment is over three calendar days late, the student faces failure for this assignment. However, in order to pass the class students must still complete all major assignments in good faith. "Better late than never."

Policy for missed tests: The only formal “test” in this course is the Final Exam. Students failing to sit for the Final Exam will receive a grade of "F" for the course. Any student who will not be able to attend the Final Exam at the scheduled date and time may take the exam early.
Policy for extra credit: Extra credit is available for certain extra event reports related to the theme of this course, or for participation in certain other special events. Ask the instructor for details if interested. Extra credit may also be offered at the Instructor's option for extraordinary work clearly beyond the level of the course. This latter type of extra credit is rare, and may not be requested.

Copyright Statement Some of the materials in this course are copyrighted. Violation of US copyright law can result in civil damages up to $100,000 for each work copied. Copying of textbooks is not “fair use” under the Copyright Act. The “fair use doctrine” only permits non-commercial copying of part (in general, not more than 10%) of a copyrighted work. Do not bring a copied textbook to this class. Your cooperation is expected.

1.3 Student Conduct: [From the Handbook of Operating Procedures: Student Affairs]

Each student is responsible for notice of and compliance with the provisions of the Regents Rules and Regulations, which are available for inspection electronically at http://www.utsystem.edu/bor/rules/homepage.htm.

1.3.1 Scholastic Dishonesty: [From the Handbook of Operating Procedures: Student Affairs]

It is the official policy of the University that all suspected cases or acts of alleged scholastic dishonesty must be referred to the Dean of Students for investigation and appropriate disposition. It is contrary to University policy for a faculty member to assign a disciplinary grade such as an "F" or zero to an assignment, test, examination, or other course work as a sanction for admitted or suspected scholastic dishonesty in lieu of normally charging the student through the Dean of Students. Similarly, students are prohibited from proposing and/or entering into an arrangement with a faculty member to receive a grade of "F" or any reduced grade in lieu of being charged with scholastic dishonesty. Any student who commits an act of scholastic dishonesty is subject to discipline. Scholastic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to cheating, plagiarism, collusion, the submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person, taking an examination for another person, any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student or the attempt to commit such acts.

1.3.12 Plagiarism: [From the Handbook of Operating Procedures: Student Affairs]

"Plagiarism" means the appropriation, buying, receiving as a gift, or obtaining by any means another's work and the unacknowledged submission or incorporation of it in one's own academic work offered for credit, or using work in a paper or assignment for which the student had received credit in another course without direct permission of all involved instructors.
Students with Disabilities Policy: If you have or suspect a disability and need an accommodation you should contact Disabled Student Services Office (DSSO) at 747-5148 or at dss@utep.edu or go to Room 106 Union East Building.

Syllabus Change Policy:
Except for changes that substantially affect the evaluation (grading) statement, this syllabus is a guide for the course and is subject to change with advance notice.

Class meeting dates: Mondays and Wednesdays. In case of absence, or if class is ever cancelled due to circumstances beyond Instructor control, students are still expected to complete and submit all assignments shown on the Calendar if at all possible.