

## HIUS 134: Black Cultural History

Professor Widener  
UCSD, Spring 2008  
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Loc: WLH 2204  
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“we went from pickin’ cotton/to chain-gang line choppin’  
be-boppin’ to hip-hoppin’/blues people got the blue chip stock option  
invisible man/got the whole world watchin’

-mos def

Course Description: Our class traces the history of people of African descent in North American, using the development of African American culture as a window into social history. On the one hand, the course offers a study in the social production of art, tracing how shifts in the material conditions of black people have been reflected in their cultural production. Paraphrasing Brecht, however, we will adopt the view that art is both a mirror held up to reality and a hammer used to shape reality. Thus, our course will also take art in general, and music in particular, as a critical site for the production of black struggle itself. Using culture and politics as our primary analytic frames, we will seek to unravel Mos Def’s comments. We will use the musical genres of blues, jazz, R & B, and hip hop as our primary avenues. In following migration, social struggle, cultural production, and political debate, we will take African American history as both inherently international and highly local. In the end, we will seek to understand how African Americans have sought to answer the primary question that confronts all peoples: what is to be done?

Requirements: You must be present to learn. As the course materials are designed to function dialectically, you will find that neither stellar attendance nor regular reading is sufficient alone. You must endeavor to do both. Classroom time will be divided between lecture and discussion, with the assigned readings constituting the primary subject of the latter. Films will be shown out of class. Attendance at the films is highly suggested as well, although you will have opportunities to see films on reserve.

Reading: All course readings are on electronic reserve. You must read them all. I suggest that you print them out and bring them with you to class—you will have occasion to use them. We will do our best to insure that your final marks coincide in rough proportion to the amount of reading that you complete. While this is more an art than a science, I didn’t get here yesterday.

Music: Music will be placed on the libraries digital audio reserves site as well.

Evaluation: Your grade will be based on the following:

Midterm Exam #1 (in-class):	30%
Midterm Exam #2 (in-class):	30%
Reading Quizzes	20%
Film Analyses	20%

Additional Comments: This course will assume a general familiarity with the broad sweep of American history in general and African American history in particular. If terms like the great migration, bebop, reconstruction, Plessy v. Ferguson, Prince Hall, the impressions, the numbers, chitlins, Marion Barry or the Five-Percent Nation are unfamiliar to you, I suggest you either enroll in HILD 7A next fall and come back around, or proceed to the library or bookstore and pick up a survey text on our subject.

My suggestions include:

- a. Vincent Harding, *There is a River*
- b. John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*
- c. Nell Painter, *Creating Black Americans*

### Course Outline and Themes

#### -selections from sam floyd

Wk. 1 (4/1) course intro and themes

(4/3) roots and routes

Read: Gerhard Kubik, *Africa and the Blues* (selections) [ch. 1, 2]  
Samuel Floyd, *The Power of Black Music* (chapter 1)

Wk. 2 (4/8) routes and roots

(4/10) do you remember the days of slavery?

Read: Newbell Puckett, *Folk Beliefs of the Southern Negro*, pp. 57-107  
Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, pp. 190-238  
Dena Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals* (chapters 2, 3, 10, 12)

### Blues and the Abstract Truth

Wk. 3 (4/15) Blues People I: blues epistemologies

(4/17) Blues People: II: sent for you yesterday

Read: Clyde Woods, *Development Arrested*, chapter 2, 5 (pp. 25-40; 88-120)  
Leroi Jones, *Blues People*, chapter 5 and 7 (pp. 50-59, 81-94)  
Angela Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*, (pp. 42-65)

Wk. 4 (4/22) Swing: from noun to verb

(4/24) bop and the racial imagination

Read: Eric Lott, Double V, Double-Time: Bebop's Politics of Style, *Callaloo* (Summer, 1988), pp. 597-605.

Ralph Ellison, "Golden Age, Time Past," in Ellison, *Living with Music*

David Stowe, *Swing Changes*, chapter 3 (pp. 94-140).

- Wk. 5 (4/29) the rebirth of cool  
(5/1) black apostles: Malcolm and Trane  
Read: Eric Porter, *What is this thing Called Jazz*, chapter 5 (pp. 191-239)  
Scott Saul, *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain't*, chapter 8 (pp.244-270)
- Wk. 6 (5/6) This is Our Music: free jazz and black revolution  
(5/8) **exam #1**  
Read: George Lewis, "Improvised Music after 1950: Afrological and Eurological Perspectives" *Black Music Research Journal* Vol. 16, No. 1 (Spring, 1996), pp. 91-122

### Soul on Ice

- Wk. 7 (5/13) Mississippi Goddam: R&B sings black freedom  
(5/15) A Change is Gonna Come  
Read: Amiri Baraka, "The Changing Same" in *The Black Aesthetic*  
Suzanne Smith, *Dancing in the Street*, chapter 2 (pp. 54-93)  
Brian Ward, *Just My Soul Responding*, pp. 293-303  
Ingrid Monson, "Monk Meets SNCC," *Black Music Research Journal*, Vol. 19, 1999
- Wk. 8 (5/20) say it loud! Black music as world revolution  
(5/22) Utopia: from Los Angeles to Outer Space  
film: **Wattstax**  
Read: Justin Labinjoh, "Fela Anikulapo-Kuti: Protest Music and Social Processes in Nigeria," *Journal of Black Studies* Vol. 13, No.1 (Sep., 1982), pp. 119-134 JSTOR  
David Covin, "The Role of Culture in Brazil's Unified Black Movement, Bahia in 1992," *Journal of Black Studies* Vol. 27, No. 1 (Sep., 1996), pp. 39-55. JSTOR  
Sujatha Fernandes, "Fear of a Black Nation: Local Rappers, Transnational Crossings, and State Power in Contemporary Cuba," *Anthropological Quarterly* > Vol. 76, No. 4 (Autumn, 2003), pp. 575-608. JSTOR

### Things Fall Apart

- Wk. 9 (5/27) Into the Fire: the 1970s on wax and screen  
(5/29) From the South Bronx to South Central  
Read: Mike Davis, *City of Quartz*, chapter 5 (pp. 265-322)  
Tricia Rose, *Black Noise*, chapter 3, (pp. 62-96)  
Robin Kelley, "Kickin' Reality, Kickin' Ballistics," in *Race Rebels*
- Wk. 10(6/3) Cultural Unity and Cultural Dissent  
(6/5) midterm exam #2