

# CSRE 19: Music & Race in the United States

*Building 160, Classroom 317*

*Tuesdays & Thursdays, 1:30pm–3:30pm*

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## Course Description

This course explores how the politics of race are made audible in twentieth and twenty-first century American popular music. Upending narratives of racial essentialism that persist in discourses about music, the course challenges students to reconsider their assumptions about cultural and personal identity by exploring two foundational stories in the United States: that music crosses racial boundaries, and that music bolsters racial boundaries. By engaging with primary source materials and reflecting on texts, films, and songs, students will develop critical listening and thinking skills and use those skills to understand the contested nature of American musical identity through familiar and unfamiliar histories of musical belonging and cultural solidarity, alongside sounds and stories of racial intolerance, discrimination, and exoticism in the music industry.

## Student Learning Outcomes

By the end of the quarter, students enrolled in this course will be able to:

- Describe several historically significant perspectives on the impact of race on the development of twentieth century popular music in the United States
- Understand how racial thinking persists in our personal and collective narratives of popular music, as well as how these narratives influence public perceptions of race
- Listen critically to American popular music by evaluating how racial narratives shape our perceptions of musical works, instruments, genres, forms, and other sonic elements
- Participate in difficult and nuanced conversations about how the politics of race, ethnicity, and identity take shape in contemporary American cultural expression
- Ask critical questions about how diverse practices of listening to and creating music are shaped by the intersecting politics of identity, race, and culture

CSRE 19 also satisfies the WAYS requirement for Exploring Difference and Power (EDP). By the end of the quarter, students will more generally be able to:

- Evaluate how existing social arrangements create and maintain social, political, or economic differences among people

- Acquire an understanding of how structures of difference based on relative advantage and disadvantage between social groups have changed over time
- Address challenges that emerge in interactions between people with different backgrounds, worldviews, and opportunities
- Explore power relationships (social, political, economic, racial, gendered, and cultural) and how those relationships have changed over time

### **Course Environment**

I believe education is an invitation and a responsibility. We are here to learn from and with each other, to generate new ideas, to reflect on our beliefs, to engage with unfamiliar perspectives, and to cultivate a communal space where learning can take shape. We may find that we do not always agree with one another, but we must agree that we can coexist with(in) disagreement. A classroom built upon a diversity of beliefs, ideas, experiences, skills, and identities is one where disagreement will flourish; we must find ways to make disagreement a space of generative potential. To that end, active and engaged listening, respectful discourse, and intellectual integrity are the basic tools that we will equip ourselves with to ensure success in this course for ourselves and our peers.

Furthermore, this course will explore material that some of us may find uncomfortable, unsettling, and controversial. Histories of racial and ethnic discrimination affect all of us, but their effects are distributed unevenly and unequally. We will all do our best to be mindful of the jagged edges of history, the hesitations and withholdings, the misunderstandings and overlookings, and the normative assumptions that govern our experiences of the world. If there are any concerns or questions about the course material proposed in this document, please feel encouraged to begin a conversation with me about ways we can address the issue.

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### **Course Components**

*Weekly Readings & Responses:* Before each class meeting, you will be asked to read the selected texts for that day's class and submit two reading responses on Canvas before the class period begins. The first reading response will be posted to a public discussion board and should include two elements: a quote from the text that stood out while you were reading, whether it was helpful, inspiring, or especially confusing; and an open-ended question that emerged after you finished reading to inspire discussion in the second half of class. The second reading response will be a private submission (150–200 words) where you will reflect upon your own identity, as well as your assumptions about music and race, in relation to the materials you engaged with to prepare for class. I will provide a question based on the theme from each weekly module to prompt your reflections. Course readings written in **bold** (see Weekly

Modules & Texts section below) are primary sources and should be approached with a critical lens—as documents that represent a historically situated perspective on a musical practice.

*Discussion Facilitation:* Each student will serve as discussion facilitator during the second half of a single class period chosen from one of the eight modules. As facilitator, your first responsibility will be to briefly summarize the materials we engaged with for that day’s class meeting. Your second responsibility will be to pose questions submitted by your peers in their weekly responses and moderate the ensuing conversation. You will not be responsible for coming up with questions yourself, but I do expect you to skillfully rework the questions provided by your peers into a coherent in-class conversation.

*Final Project:* Popular music traditions are often connected to specific geographies. Country music, for example, is often associated with Nashville, jazz with New Orleans, etc. These connections rely upon, while at the same time obscuring, histories of migration, development, and mobility (or the lack thereof) that are deeply tied to racial logics in the United States. The final project for this course will be a long-form (6–8 pgs.) non-fiction essay exploring an alternative narrative of race, music, and place in popular music. You will choose a genre, performer, instrument, album, etc. that has shaped your own identity and connect it to a place or time that it is not usually related to in order to explore, and perhaps even overturn, the racial assumptions that structure our narratives about musical life in the US. This project will serve as an opportunity to critically reflect on your own personal relationship with race and with musical listening. A proposal will be due midway through the quarter, followed by a brief presentation during the last class meeting; you will deliver the final draft on August 22. More detailed information about the project requirements to come. For all assignments, please do not use ChatGPT or other AI text generation tools; you will put yourself at risk of academic punishment.

### **Evaluation**

Weekly Responses	40%
<i>2 times a week for 8 weeks: 16 opportunities at 2.5% each</i>	
Module Facilitation	10%
Final Project	30%
<i>Project proposal due in Week 4; 5% of final project grade</i>	
Attendance & Participation	20%

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### **Course Policies & Expectations**

*Participation and Attendance:* This course is designed to balance large amounts of weekly reading with a small amount of writing. You will be asked to demonstrate your engagement with the

texts you read for that week by participating in daily class discussions. If you think this may not be feasible, we can discuss alternative ways of demonstrating engagement with course material.

Attendance and participation are significant aspects of the course but so is making sure that we take holistic care of ourselves. To that end, your presence and participation is required and expected. At the same time, I am willing to work with each of you individually to accommodate any planned or sudden absences with supplementary coursework. The most important part of your attendance grade is communicating with me about your attendance.

*The Summer Academic Resource Center (SARC):* **SARC** is your go-to resource for academic support during summer and offers tutoring in all subject areas—in the drop-in center in Harmony House or over Zoom. SARC tutors are Stanford graduate students and they're here to help you with learning strategies that allow you to do the work on your own. Tutors can help to prepare for exams, brainstorm study strategies, and hone academic skills.

*Technology:* You will need to have access to a device that connects to the internet so that you can access email and Canvas. All course details and materials will be posted on our Canvas course site. Students can borrow equipment and access other learning technology from **the Lathrop Learning Hub**.

*Abilities and Support:* Stanford is committed to providing equal educational opportunities for disabled students. Disabled students are a valued and essential part of the Stanford community. I welcome you to our class. If you experience disability, please register with the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). Professional staff will evaluate your needs, support appropriate and reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Academic Accommodation Letter for faculty. To get started, or to re-initiate services, please visit **oae.stanford.edu**.

If you already have an Academic Accommodation Letter, I invite you to share your letter with me. Academic Accommodation Letters should be shared at the earliest possible opportunity so I may partner with you and OAE to identify any barriers to access and inclusion that might be encountered in your experience of this course.

*The Stanford University Fundamental Standard* has set the standard of conduct for students at Stanford since it was articulated in 1896. It states: "Students at Stanford are expected to show both within and without the University such respect for order, morality, personal honor and the rights of others as is demanded of good citizens. Failure to do this will be sufficient cause for removal from the University."

More information on the Fundamental Standard is available at the following link:

**<https://communitystandards.stanford.edu/policies-guidance/fundamental-standard>**.

*The Honor Code is an undertaking of the Stanford academic community, individually and collectively.* Its purpose is to uphold a culture of academic honesty. Students will support this culture of academic honesty by neither giving nor accepting unpermitted academic aid in any work that serves as a component of grading or evaluation, including assignments, examinations, and research. Instructors will support this culture of academic honesty by providing clear guidance, both in their course syllabi and in response to student questions, on what constitutes permitted and unpermitted aid. Instructors will also not take unusual or unreasonable precautions to prevent academic dishonesty.

Students and instructors will also cultivate an environment conducive to academic integrity. While instructors alone set academic requirements, the Honor Code is a community undertaking that requires students and instructors to work together to ensure conditions that support academic integrity.

More information on the Honor Code is available at the following link:

<https://communitystandards.stanford.edu/policies-guidance/honor-code>.

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### **Weekly Modules & Texts**

*All course readings will be posted on Canvas; schedule is subject to change with due notice*

#### **Week 1 – Introductions**

*For Monday, June 23 –*

*Reading*

Morris, Wesley. 2019. “Why Is Everyone Always Stealing Black Music?” In *The New York Times Magazine*.

*Listening*

Big Mama Thornton, “Hound Dog” (1953)  
Elvis Presley, “Hound Dog” (1956)

*For Wednesday, June 25 –*

*Reading*

Anderson, Benedict. 1983. “Introduction.” In *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso — 5 pgs.

Kheshti, Roshanak. 2018. “Sound Studies.” In *Feminist Media Histories* 4(2) — 6 pgs.

Turda, Marius & Maria Sophia Quine. 2018. “Introduction.” In *Historicizing Race*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic — 12 pgs.

*Listening*

- The Marvelettes, "Please Mr. Postman" (1961)  
The Temptations, "You've Really Got a Hold on Me" (1962)  
Martha and the Vandellas, "Heat Wave" (1963)  
The Supremes, "Where Did Our Love Go" (1964)  
Smokey Robinson and the Miracles, "The Tracks of My Tears" (1965)  
The Four Tops, "Reach Out I'll Be There" (1966)  
Marvin Gaye & Tammi Terrell, "Ain't No Mountain High Enough" (1967)  
Stevie Wonder, "For Once in My Life" (1968)  
The Jackson 5, "I Want You Back" (1969)  
Stevie Wonder, "Signed, Sealed, Delivered (I'm Yours)" (1970)

**Week 2 – Narratives of American Music**

*For Monday, June 30 –*

*Reading – Choose one:*

- Chase, Gilbert. 1955. "The Musical Puritans." In *America's Music from the Pilgrims to the Present*. New York: McGraw-Hill — 16 pgs.**  
**Du Bois, W.E.B. 1903. "Of Our Spiritual Strivings" & "The Sorrow Songs." In *The Souls of Black Folk*. Chicago, IL: A.C. McClurg & Co. — 25 pgs.**  
**Koskoff, Ellen. 2005. "A Social-Historical Approach to Music in the United States." In *Music Cultures in the United States: An Introduction*, edited by Ellen Koskoff. New York: Routledge — 20 pgs.**  
**Lomax, Alan. 1960. "Introduction." In *The Folk Songs of North America in the English Language*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday — 16 pgs.**

*Listening*

The Lomax Digital Archive: <https://archive.culturalequity.org>.

*For Wednesday, July 2 –*

*Reading*

- Kun, Josh. 2005. "Strangers Among Sounds." In *Audiotopia: Music, Race, and America*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press — 28 pgs.

*Listening*

The Weavers, *Folk Songs of America and Other Lands* (1951)

*Watching*

Lee, Spike. 1989. *Do the Right Thing*. Universal Pictures. 120 minutes.

### Week 3 – Blackface Minstrelsy & Race Records

For Monday, July 7 –

#### Reading

**Rourke, Constance. 2004 [1931]. “That Long Tail’d Blue.” In *American Humor: A Study of the National Character*. New York: New York Review of Books — 20 pgs.**

Miller, Karl H. 2010. “Introduction.” In *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press — 22 pgs.

#### Listening

Bert Williams, “Nobody” (1906)

Carolina Chocolate Drops, *Genuine Negro Jig* (2010)

For Wednesday, July 9 –

#### Reading

Baraka, Amiri. 1963. “Classic Blues” & “The City.” In *Blues People: Negro Music in White America*. New York City: William Morrow — 40 pgs.

Davis, Angela. 1998. “I Used to Be Your Sweet Mama: Ideology, Sexuality, and Domesticity.” In *The Angela Y. Davis Reader*, ed. Joy James. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers — 13 pgs.

#### Listening

Mamie Smith, “Crazy Blues” (1920)

Bessie Smith, “Sam Jones Blues” (1923)

Ma Rainey, “Lawd Send Me a Man Blues” (1924)

Bessie Smith, “Baby Doll” (1926)

Ma Rainey, “Rough and Tumble Blues” (1925)

Ida Cox, “Wild Women Don’t Have the Blues” (1924)

Ma Rainey, “Prove It On Me Blues” (1928)

#### Watching

Wolf, George C. 2020. *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom*. Netflix. 94 minutes.

### Week 4 – Immigration & Borderlands

*Final project proposal due before class on Wednesday, July 16*

For Monday, July 14 –

#### Reading

Moon, Krysten R. 2005. “Introduction.” In *Yellowface: Creating the Chinese in American Popular Music and Performance, 1850s-1920s*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press — 10 pgs.

Moon, Krysten R. 2003. "There's No Yellow in the Red, White, and Blue': The Creation of Anti-Japanese Music during World War II." In *Pacific Historical Review*, 72(3) — 20 pgs.

Saporiti, Julian. 2019. "The Ghosts of No-No Boy in a Nation That Still Imprisons Immigrants." In *The Margins*.

*Listening*

No-No Boy, 1942 (2018)

Kishi Bashi, *Omoiyari* (2019)

For Wednesday, July 16 –

*Reading*

Ragland, Cathy. 2009. "Introduction" & "Mexicanidad and Música Norteña in the 'Two Mexicos'." In *Música Norteña: Mexican Migrants Creating a Nation Between Nations*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press — 26 pgs.

*Listening*

Los Tigres del Norte, *Gracias!... América... Sin Fronteras* (1986)

Selena, *Amor Prohibido* (1994)

*Watching*

Nava, Gregory. 1997. *Selena*. Warner Bros. 127 minutes.

### **Week 5 – Solidarity & Feeling**

For Monday, July 21 –

*Reading*

**Dyer, Richard. 1995 [1979]. "In Defense of Disco." In *Out in Culture: Gay, Lesbian and Queer Essays on Popular Culture*, edited by Corey K. Creekmur & Alexander Doty. Durham, NC: Duke University Press — 9 pgs.**

Echols, Alice. 2010. "I Hear a Symphony: Black Masculinity and the Disco Turn." In *Hot Stuff: Disco and the Remaking of American Culture*. New York: W.W. Norton — 31 pgs.

*Listening*

Donna Summer, *Love to Love You Baby* (1975)

Gloria Gaynor, *Love Tracks* (1978)

Chic, *C'est Chic!* (1978)

Donna Summer, *Bad Girls* (1979)

*Watching*

Livingston, Jennie. 1990. *Paris Is Burning*. Prestige Pictures. 78 minutes.

For Wednesday, July 23 –

*Reading*

Chang, Jeff. 2016. "The In-Betweens: On Asian-Americanness." In *We Gon' Be Alright: Notes on Race and Resegregation*. New York: Picador — 20 pgs.

Wong, Deborah. 2019. Selections from *Louder and Faster: Pain, Joy, and the Body Politic in Asian American Taiko*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press — 18 pgs.

*Listening*

Yellow Pearl, *A Grain of Sand: Music for the Struggle of Asians in America* (1973)

Recent Stanford Taiko Performances

**Week 6 – Exoticism & World Music**

*For Monday, July 28 –*

*Reading*

Hosokawa, Shuhei. 1999. "Martin Denny and the Development of Musical Exotica." In *Widening the Horizon: Exoticism in Post-War Popular Music*, edited by Philip Hayward. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press — 19 pgs.

Troutman, John W. 2013. "Steelin' the Slide: Hawai'i and the Birth of the Blues Guitar." In *Southern Cultures*, 19(1) — 20 pgs.

*Listening*

Various Artists, *Music of Hawaii* (1939)

Dorothy Lamour & Dick McIntire and His Harmony Hawaiians, *A Collection of Favorite Hawaiian Songs* (1950)

Martin Denny, *Exotica* (1957)

Martin Denny, *Quiet Village* (1959)

*Watching*

Logan, Joshua. 1958. *South Pacific*. 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox. 157 minutes.

*For Wednesday, July 30 –*

*Reading*

**Byrne, David. 1999. "Crossing Music's Borders in Search of Identity; 'I Hate World Music'." In *The New York Times*.**

Feld, Steven. 2012. "My Life in the Bush of Ghosts: 'World Music' and the Commodification of Religious Experience." In *Music and Globalization: Critical Encounters*, edited by Bob W. White. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press — 11 pgs.

Taylor, Timothy D. 2007. "Consumption, Globalization, and Music in the 1980s and After." In *Beyond Exoticism: Western Music and the World*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press — 17 pgs.

*Listening*

David Byrne & Brian Eno, *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (1981)  
Vampire Weekend, *Vampire Weekend* (2008)  
Angelique Kidjo, *Remain in Light* (2018)

### **Week 7 –Subversive Sounds & Belonging**

*For Monday, August 4 –*

#### *Reading*

Tremblay, Maxwell & Stephen Duncombe, eds. 2011. Selections from *White Riot: Punk Rock and the Politics of Race*. New York: Verso — 45 pgs.

Duncombe & Tremblay, “White Riot?”

**Mailer, “The White Negro”**

**Baldwin, “The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy”**

Sabin, “I Won’t Let That Dago By”

**Bangs, “The White Noise Supremacists”**

#### *Listening*

Black Flag, *Jealous Again* (1980)

Body Count, *Body County* (1992)

Los Crudos, *Discografia* (2002)

Negro Terror, *The Bootleg* (2017)

#### *Watching*

Rash, John. 2019. *Negro Terror*. Southern Documentary Project. 58 minutes.

*For Wednesday, August 6 –*

#### *Reading*

Samuels, David W. 2009. “Singing Indian Country.” In *Music of the First Nations: Tradition and Innovation in Native North America*, edited by Tara Browner. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press — 16 pgs.

Deloria, Philip J. 1998. “Introduction: American Indians and American Identities.” In *Playing Indian*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press — 10 pgs.

#### *Listening*

Link Wray, “Rumble” (1958)

Buffy Sainte-Marie, *It’s My Way* (1964)

Apache Spirit, *Indian Cowboy* (1973)

#### *Watching*

Bainbridge, Catherine & Alfonso Maiorana. 2017. *Rumble*. Rezolution Pictures. 103 minutes.

## Week 8 – New Narratives & Conclusions

Final project due on Friday, August 22

For Monday, August 11 –

### Reading

**Frere-Jones, Sasha. 2007. “A Paler Shade of White.” In *The New Yorker*.**

**Frere-Jones, Sasha. 2008. “Black and White and Red All Over.” In *The New Yorker*.**

Harris, Keith. 2024 [2012]. “Did New York Kill Indie Rock? In *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 36(2) — 3 pgs.

James, Robin. 2024. “Indie Rock’s Undead: Re-animating Keith Harris’s ‘Did New York Kill Indie Rock?’” In *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 36(2) — 10 pgs.

**Mohr, Tim. 2007. “Paint It Black.” In *Playboy*.**

**Moore, David. 2004. “Funeral, Arcade Fire.” In *Pitchfork*.**

Sahim, Sarah. 2015. “The Unbearable Whiteness of Indie.” In *Pitchfork*.

**Wilson, Carl. 2007. “The Trouble with Indie Rock.” In *Slate*.**

### Listening

Belle & Sebastian, *If You’re Feeling Sinister* (1996)

The Strokes, *Is This It?* (2001)

Arcade Fire, *Funeral* (2004)

LCD Soundsystem, *Sound of Silver* (2007)

Kanye West, *Graduation* (2007)

Foster the People, *Torches* (2011)

### Watching

Choose one:

Linklater, Richard. 2014. *Boyhood*. IFC Films. 165 minutes.

Braff, Zach. 2004. *Garden State*. Fox Searchlight Pictures. 102 minutes.

For Wednesday, August 13 –

### Reading

Brooks, Daphne A. 2005. *Jeff Buckley’s Grace*. New York: Continuum — 24 pgs.

Brooks, Daphne A. 2008. “The Write to Rock: Racial Mythologies, Feminist Theory, and the Pleasures of Rock Music Criticism.” In *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture*, 12 — 8 pgs.

Brooks, Daphne A. 2020. “Why Radiohead are the Blackest white band of our times.” In *The Guardian*.

### Listening

Jeff Buckley, *Grace* (1994)

Radiohead, *Kid A* (2000)

Beyoncé, *RENAISSANCE* (2022)

Beyoncé, *COWBOY CARTER* (2024)

*Watching*

Radiohead. 2008. *In Rainbows: From the Basement*. 63 minutes.

*Final project due Friday, August 22, 2025*