

African-American music history

Intitulé du cours / Course title

Discipline <i>Academic field</i>	Music & Cultural Studies
Enseignant <i>Teacher</i>	Etienne Chasson
Contact <i>E-mail address</i>	etienne.chasson@sciencespo-aix.fr
Niveau de formation <i>Academic level</i>	
Volume horaire <i>Hours</i>	20h
Langue <i>Language</i>	English

Description du cours / Course outline

This course will offer an insight into the history of African American music from the Revolution until today. We will examine the ways in which various Black musical forms, practices and cultures have reflected, and continue to reflect, the evolving place of African Americans in US society; conversely, we will analyse how African American artists have used music as an instrument in the struggle for emancipation and social change.

By contextualising the emergence of individual musical genres (spirituals, jazz, blues, R&B, hip-hop...) within the broader social, political and cultural history of African Americans, and within the history of race relations in America more generally, we will attempt to make sense of the music as a complete cultural practice. Beyond an analysis of the music itself, this will also lead us to consider how it is made, and how it is listened to.

Objectifs pédagogiques du cours / Course objectives

We will aim to develop an understanding of how African American music fits into the history of America as a whole, as well as Black America in particular. This will provide students with a strong general foundation in American social, political and cultural history, as well as specific knowledge in the field of music aesthetics and practices across numerous genres.

Compétences acquises / Learning outcomes

We will aim to foster an ability to interpret music on a number of levels, taking into consideration not only formal aspects such as musical aesthetics and the literary analysis of lyrics, but also issues surrounding the production, commercialisation and reception of music.

Plan de cours par séance / *Course content for each session*

We will start with a brief general overview of the past two centuries of American history, focusing more specifically on the African American perspective, and outlining the main stages in the evolution of Black music alongside that history.

Once this framework is established, we will proceed to look into a number of transversal issues linked with African American music, using a thematic (rather than chronological) approach:

- How African is African-American music?
- Music and the Black experience
- Musical assimilation: the allure and dangers of breaking into the mainstream
- Black power, identity and music
- Black music, white ears: on the reception of African-American music
- White (mis)appropriations

Références bibliographiques / *Bibliography*

- S. A. Floyd, *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting its History from Africa to the United States*, Oxford University Press, 1997
- J.H. Franklin & E. Higginbotham, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans*, McGraw-Hill, 2020
- L. Jones, *Blues People: Negro Music in White America*, Harper, 1999
- G. P. Ramsey, *Race Music: Black Cultures from Bebop to Hip-Hop*, University of California Press, 2004

Mini CV de l'enseignant / *Mini CV of the teacher*

Etienne Chasson is an English teacher at Sciences Po Aix. In addition to teaching courses focusing on the culture, literature and societies of the English-speaking world, he has a background in musicology.