AFAM 403/THST 431/AM STDS 386
“...Who Run the World”:
Black Women and Popular Music Culture

[Billie] Holiday demonstrates... the value of important lives and voices Otherwise dismissed.
--Lindon Barrett, Blackness and Value

My persuasion can build a nation.
--Beyonce

From Bessie Smith and Billie Holiday to Tina Turner and Beyonce, from Nina Simone and Grace Jones to Lauryn Hill and Nicki Minaj, black women have used various forms of musical expression as sites of social and ideological resistance and revision. Through an exploration of voice, lyricism, kinesthetic performance, instrumentality and visual aesthetics, this course examines the “world wide underground” of black women’s sonic cultures, and it re-interrogates pop music subculture theories through the intersecting prisms of race, gender, class and sexuality. It considers the ways that black women musicians operate as socio-political and cultural intellectuals, and it reads their work as historically-situated cultural texts that resonate in multiple contexts.

Throughout the semester, we will explore the ways in which black women culture workers have stylized and innovated disruptive and iconic performance practices within the context of American popular music culture, from the postbellum era through the present day. Part of the aim of this course is to trace the tensions between the enormous influence and ubiquity of the black female singing voice in globalized popular cultures and the ways in which a range of entertainers have nonetheless negotiated eccentric and “obscure” musical gestures that signaled and affirmed the existence of resistant musical aesthetics in the face of panopticism. Iconic performers as well as lesser-known artists will figure prominently in discussions that will focus on re-theorizing subculture studies in relation to black women’s musicality. Through an interrogation of performance politics and the work of unconventional black vaudeville musical and cabaret entertainers, classic blues
and jazz artists, gospel singers, rock and roll pioneers, girl groups, folk and pop iconoclasts, funk and disco performers, punk and new wave musicians, and contemporary R&B and hip hop artists, this course will examine the meaning of musical bohemia for black women as well as the ways that black feminist praxis emerges sonically and in the context of embodied performance. Audio texts, as well as film and video, literary narrative, critical theory, pop music criticism, artist biographies, and cultural histories will serve as central sites of textual inquiry.

Required Texts available at the Yale Bookstore
Dick Hebdige, Subculture: The Meaning of Style
Farah J. Griffin, If You Can't Be Free, Be A Mystery: In Search of Billie Holiday
Gayle Wald, Shout, Sister, Shout: The Untold Story of Rock-and-Roll Trailblazer Sister Rosetta Tharpe
Etta James with David Ritz, Rage to Survive
Nina Simone, I Put A Spell On You
Matt Dobkin, I Never Loved A Man the Way I Love You: Aretha Franklin, Respect and the Making of a Soul Music Masterpiece*
Tina Turner with Kurt Loder, I, Tina

*Available via Amazon.com and Library Reserves

V2 Server: Course Packet articles, audio & video clips
Film Reserves

Grading:
• Attendance, Class Participation, Weekly Music Blog: 15%
• Group Oral Presentation Assignment (archival research included): 15%
• Midterm Paper: 30%
• Final Exam (In Class OR Take Home Option): 40%

Academic Integrity Statement
All work for this class must be original and authored by the student. Any instances of plagiarism will result in severe penalties. Please consult the Yale College Writing Center at the website below for resources on how to properly cite all outside sources, and please also see below the link to Yale’s Academic Integrity Policy for information regarding the consequences of cheating.

http://writing.yalecollege.yale.edu/advice-faculty/addressing-issue-plagiarism-your-students

http://yalecollege.yale.edu/content/cheating-plagiarism-and-documentation
Syllabus:

**Week One:**

“Worldwide Underground”: Theorizing Black Women’s Sounds in Modern Culture

Tu 1/13 **Introduction: “Who Run the World?”**


**Youtube Clip:** Renee Marie, “Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing”; “Marian Anderson: The Voice of the Century”

**Week Two:**

**Super Bass: “Secret” Histories, Counterpublics & Afrosonic Feminist Theory**


**Audio & Video Reserves:** The Sex Pistols, “Pretty Vacant”; The Clash, “White Riot”; Zora Neale Hurston, selected
recordings; Nicki Minaj, “Super Bass”; fka twigs, “Video Girl,”
Many Licks...”; Janelle Monae, “Violet Stars Happy Hunting”

Th 1/22
Dick Hebdige, Selections from Subculture 100-112, 128-133;
Ellen Willis, “Beginning to See the Light”; Jayna Brown, “Brown
Girl in the Ring”; Adorno, “The Curves of the Needle” and “The
Form of the Phonograph”; Roland Barthes, “The Grain of the
Voice”; Janelle Monae & the Wondaland Arts Society, Liner
Notes for The Archandroid album

Audio & Video Reserves: The Sex Pistols, “Bodies”; Bessie
Smith, “Send Me to the ‘Lectric Chair”; Janelle Monae, “Cold
War”; Kanye West feat. Nicki Minaj et. al, “Monster”; X-ray
Spex, “Oh Bondage! Up Yours!”; Bow Wow Wow, “I Want
Candy”; M.I.A., “Bad Girls”; Abbey Lincoln and Max Roach,
“Triptych: Prayer, Protest, Peace”

Week Three: Old School: “Coon” Shouters & Musical Theater Ingenues,
or The Black(ened) Roots of Iggy Azalea
Tu 1/27
David Wondrich, “Minstrelsy or Get Out De Way”; Lori
Harrison-Kahan, “Sophie Tucker and the Female Blackface
Tradition”; Elijah Wald, “Race Records: Blues Queens,
Crooners, Street Singers, and Hokum; D.A. Brooks, “This voice
which is not one”

Audio & Video Reserves: Harry “Haywire Mac” McClintock,
“Darkie Uncle Ned”; Collins and Ossman, “All Coons Look Alike
to Me”; Bert Williams, “Nobody”; Sophie Tucker, “Yiddishe
Mama,” “I Don’t Want to Get too Thin”; Alberta Hunter, “Two-
Fisted Double-Jointed Rough and Ready Man,” “My Handy
Man”; Ethel Waters, “No Man’s Mamma Now”; Bessie Smith,
“Down Hearted Blues,” “‘Tain’t Nobody’s Business if I Do”; Amy
Winehouse, “Rehab,” “Back to Black”; Iggy Azalea, “Fancy,”
“Work”

Th 1/29
Jayna Brown, “Letting the Flesh Fly”; Mae G. Henderson
"Josephine Baker and La Revue Nègre: From Ethnography to
Performance”; Shane Vogel, “Performing Stormy Weather”;
Selected New York Times & New Yorker magazine Porgy & Bess
features and reviews

Audio & Video Reserves: Josephine Baker, “[J’ai deux amores,”
“Don’t Touch My Tomatoes”; Ethel Waters, “Stormy Weather”;
Anne Brown, “Summertime”; Audra McDonald, “Summertime”;
Fantasia, “Summertime”; selected clips from Diahann Carroll, Diana Ross, Beyonce, Rihanna

**Week Four:**

**Tu 2/3**

**Under the Big Tent: Revising Blues Histories**

Daphne Duval Harrison, “Riding Toby to the Big Time”; Hazel Carby, “It Jus Be’s Dat Way Sometime;” Tera Hunter, “‘Sexual Pantomimes,’ the Blues Aesthetic and Black Women in the New South”; D.A. Brooks, “Mamie Smith”; Paige McGinley, “Real Personality: The Blues Actress”


**Th 2/5**

Angela Davis, “I Used to Be Your Sweet Mama” (Chapter 1 in *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*; select Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith song lyrics in Angela Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*; Michelle Scott, “An Empress in Vaudeville: Bessie Smith on the Theater Circuit”; John Jeremiah Sullivan, “The Ballad of Geeshie and Elvie”


**Week Five:**

**Tu 2/10**

**New Cool: Jazz, Gender & Black Feminist Sonic Modernity**

Farah J. Griffin, *If You Can't Be Free, Be A Mystery* (Preface-Chap. 4, pp. 1-116); Brent Hayes Edwards, “Louis Armstrong and the Syntax of Scat”; Mary Lou Williams, “Rhythm Section” (pp. 178-188)

Th 2/12

Farah J. Griffin, *If You Can’t Be Free, Be A Mystery* (Chap. 5-Coda: pp. 117-200); Leroi Jones, “Dark Lady of the Sonnets”; Rita Dove, “Canary”; Shane Vogel, “Lena Horne’s Impersona”


Week Six: Sacred Subcultures: Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Mahalia Jackson & the Politics of Gospel “Crossover”

Tu 2/17


Audio & Video Reserves: Sister Rosetta Tharpe, “My Man and I,” “This Train,” “God Don’t Like It,” “Strange Things Happen Everyday,” “Didn’t It Rain,” “Rock Me,” “I Want a Tall Skinny Papa”; Down by the Riverside,” “Trouble in Mind,” “Shout, Sister, Shout!” “Up Above My Head”; The Noisettes, “Sister Rosetta (Capture the Spirit),”; youtube clips from Sister Rosetta Tharpe, The Noisettes

Th 2/19


**Week Seven:**

**Tu 2/24**

**Blue(s)print to Rock: New Narratives of Love & Theft**

Selections from Etta James with David Ritz, *Rage to Survive*

**Audio & Video Reserves:** Etta James, “Try A Little Tenderness,” “Something’s Got a Hold On Me,” “What’d I Say,” “At Last,” “Stop the Wedding,” “Tell Mama,” “I’d Rather Go Blind” “Money (That’s What I Want)”; Selected clips from Little Richard, Sharon Jones & the Dap Kings, Ruth Brown

**Th 2/26**


**Film Reserves:** *Cadillac Records*

### Week Eight:
**Bohemian Rhapsody: Adventures in Afrocospolitanism: Nina Simone & Eartha Kitt**

**Tu 3/3**

**Audio & Video Reserves:**

**Th 3/5**
- Eartha Kitt, Selections from *I’m Still Here*; Francesca Royster, “Eartha Kitt, the Stranger”

**Audio & Video Reserves:**

**Tu 3/10**
- **S**pring Break—No Class

**Th 3/12**
- **S**pring Break—No Class

**Tu 3/17**
- **S**pring Break—No Class

**Th 3/19**
- **S**pring Break—No Class

### Week Nine:
**Heartbreaking Genius: Girl Groups & Teen Ingenues**

**Tu 3/24**

**Audio & Video Reserves:**

**Th 3/26**
- Martha Reeves, “Dancing in the Street;” Mary Wilson, Chapter
14, *Dreamgirl*; Diana Ross, “Get Up and Sit on the Piano”

**Film Reserves:** *Dreamgirls*


**Week Ten:**

“Rolling in the Deep”: The Gendered Politics of Soul, the Radical Poetics of Folk

Tu 3/31

Matt Dobkin, *I Never Loved A Man the Way I Love You: Aretha Franklin, Respect and the Making of a Soul Music Masterpiece*

**Audio Reserves:** Aretha Franklin, “I Never Loved a Man,” “How I Got Over,” “Bridge Over Troubled Water,” “Dr. Feelgood,” “Respect,” “Chain of Fools,” “(You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman,” “I Say A Little Prayer for You,” “Since You’ve Been Gone,” “Spirit in the Dark,” “Rock Steady,” “Wholy Holy,” “You’re All I Need to Get By”

Th 4/2


**Week Eleven:**

**Heavy Mettle: Black Women Do Hard Rock, Funk, Disco & Punk**

Tu 4/7


Th 4/9


Week Twelve: “Bring the Pain”: Diva Pop, Hip Hop Soul, Neo Soul & the Retro Soul Revival

Tu 4/14


**Evening Film Screening:** *Beyond the Lights* (2014) dir. Gina Prince-Bythewood

**Th 4/16**


Selected clips from Rihanna; Beyoncé, “Crazy in Love,” “Ring the Alarm,” “Resentment,” “If I Were A Boy,” “Single Ladies,” “Girls (Run the World),” *Beyoncé* (2013)

**Week Thirteen:**

“*I Woke Up Like This*: Feminist Hip Hop/ “I’m An Alien From Outerspace”: Afrofuturist Feminism

**Tu 4/21**


**Th 4/23**


Reading Period Session:
Listening Party, Critical Karaoke, Tying Up Loose Ends