HEARING DIFFERENCE:
The Commercial Music Industry and the American Racial Imaginary

IDSEM-UG 1802
Fall 2016
Weds., 6:20pm – 9pm
The Gallatin School
1 Washington Pl.
Room 527
New York University

Figure 1: Bert Williams in a promotional photo by Samuel Lumiere (1921)

INSTRUCTOR:
Professor Kwami Coleman
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Office Hours:
Wednesday
1-4pm
and by appt.

SYNOPSIS:
In 1903, at the dawn of the American commercial music industry, the sociologist W. E. B. DuBois famously proclaimed that the foremost problem in twentieth century American society is “the problem of the color line.” Du Bois’s prescience sets the stage for this course’s exploration of racial identity in recorded, commercially available music. We will examine how racial performance has intermingled with music consumption in the United States since blackface minstrelsy in the 1830s. Our goal is to understand how deeply embedded race – both ascribed and claimed – is in American music culture, reverberating throughout the last century in debates on artists’ authenticity, propriety, and popularity.

This course is organized chronologically; each week is devoted to a particular era and its corresponding musical genres leading up to the present. Students will be guided through reading and listening assignments, developing critical thinking and listening skills and gaining a historical perspective on contemporary issues in American music culture like aural/visual racial stereotypes, “crossing over,” cultural appropriation, protest and resistance, and racialized performances of gender and sexuality.

REQ’D MATERIALS:
All materials (PDFs and audio files) can be found on the “Resources” page of our course site: http://wp.nyu.edu/hearingdifference2016. Links to the different course pages can be found in the menu bar at the top of the homepage.
GRADING:

- 10%: Participation (in-class discussion)
- 20%: Two shorter-length papers
- 20%: “Critical Listening Habits” project
- 15%: Final paper bib. and abstract
- 25%: Final paper
- 10%: Final paper presentation

EXPECTATION OF CLASS PARTICIPATION:

1) **Attendance:** This is an approx. 3-hr class that meets only once a week; it’s imperative that you come to every meeting to ensure your success in the course. You are allowed one unexcused absence; **every subsequent unexcused absence will lower your final transcript grade by a half point (i.e. A- becomes B+). More than three unexcused absences is an automatic fail.**

2) **Preparation:** You will complete the reading and listening assignment in full by the start of each class. Bringing (paper) hardcopies of the readings to class is preferred, but you may also refer to the electronic versions by accessing your laptop or tablet. Completing the reading and listening assignment prepares you to fully engage and participate in the class discussion of the material. Attendance alone does not constitute participation.

3) **Electronics:** If you do use your laptop or tablet in class, no extraneous web browsing. It’s fairly easy for me, the instructor standing at the front of the class, to notice if you’re mindlessly browsing Facebook, Tumblr, Instagram, etc.

4) **Writing assignments & Papers:** Please use either Chicago or MLA formatting styles for your papers. All writing assignments should be completed, proofread, and submitted by the due date. **No late assignments will be accepted except in cases of a documented emergency...period.** Allow yourself ample time to think about, outline, write, and review your work.

5) **In-class Conduct:** This course focuses directly on issues of difference in terms of identity, specifically race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, and habits of consumption. As such, many of the topics we will cover can be quite sensitive. Please exercise the utmost respect in class discussions towards both the material and your fellow classmates. Students should be allowed to voice their perspective(s) without fear of attack or belittling; likewise, any thoughts and observations on these topics in response to the reading and listening assignments must be voiced respectfully and in acknowledgement of each other’s (different) perspectives and lived experiences. Any categorically offensive behavior (remarks or gestures), whether made in class or online, is totally unacceptable and will be reported to the Dean’s Office.

EXPECTATION OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

As a Gallatin student, you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website (www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html)

If you have any questions about how to cite properly, what are acceptable references and source materials, or what constitutes plagiarism, please ask me!
How to Complete the Reading Assignments:
The reading assignments can be long, and a particular few can be challenging to read through. It is important that you give yourself enough time during the week to get through the approximately 130 pages (on average) of reading you will have weekly. With this in mind, there are important strategies that you can utilize to get through the readings efficiently and, most importantly, effectively. These strategies include:

- Looking over the assigned reading critically, taking note of what looks like the most important headings, subheadings, sections, paragraphs, etc. to get a sense of the “big picture.” Skim through the excerpt to find topical and sub-topical sentences that will clue you in to the content of each paragraph and the overall organization of the piece.

- Considering paragraphs as whole units of information that can be taken one at a time. Read and re-read them until you can answer the question: “What is the author saying in this paragraph?” How does it relate to the ‘big picture’?”

- Retaining important details and mark major conceptual “signposts” by underlining, making notes in the margin, and/or making notes in your notebook. Taking notes on a reading assignment is not excessive or redundant; it is an excellent way to ensure that you are internalizing this information!

- Attempting, after reading a few paragraphs, a major section, or the entire excerpt, to visualize and articulate the most important points of what you just read in your own words. Doing this will test your understanding of the material and help you develop good questions for our in-class discussion.

How to Complete the Listening Assignments:
I do not assume that you are a trained musician with perfect pitch, flawless musicianship, and an ironclad understanding of music theory. It is neither essential nor required that you read music notation for this course. What I do expect from you is that you listen to the recordings critically, make note of the content (e.g. lyrics), mood, instrumentation, texture of the voice and/or instruments, and gain a sense for the major sections of the song (i.e. intro, verse, chorus, interlude, outro) by using timestamps (i.e. “1:45”) to mark special moments. Consider how the recording relates to the reading assignment. And, by all means, if you feel unsure about any aspect of your “hearing” of the material, shoot me an email!

How to Complete the Papers:
You will craft three shorter-length papers in response to a specific prompt derived from the reading and listening assignments. You will also complete a full-length paper by the end of the semester. For each of these assignments, it will be important for you to: a) describe how the texts relate to each other by understanding, synthesizing, and comparing the authors’ main points; b) discuss the music at hand in relation to the information in the texts; c) explore questions that the material raised for you in the context of previous class discussions or the course’s theme or objectives, being careful to cite specific passages in the text; d) draw connections to events in contemporary popular (commercial) music and culture. You should use footnotes or in-text (parenthetical) citations when quoting specific passages or referring to pages in the source. Do not use contractions (i.e. it’s, they’d, we’re) in your papers; treat them instead as exercises in formal, argumentative writing. Please use only Chicago (preferred) or MLA formatting styles.
SCHEDULE:

I. Sept. 7: Introduction

Overview of syllabus and major concepts: What is race and ethnicity? How is race and ethnicity understood, broadly, in American culture? What are the origins of the commercial music industry in the United States (sheet music publishers, early commercial recording companies and technology, radio)?

II. Sept. 14: Overview of Race Ideology in the United States (18th c. – 19th c.); Intro. to Recording Technology

Reading:
2) Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (2010): Ch. 8 & Ch. 9 (pp. 104-150).

Listening:
1) Fisk Jubilee Singers, “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” (1909)
2) Edison cylinder of “Listen to the Mocking Bird” (~1912)

III. Sept. 21: Early American Popular Music (Early - Mid 19th c.)

Reading:

Explore:
1) Stephen C. Foster, “Massa’s In De Cold Ground” (1852 - sheet music)
2) Stephen C. Foster, “Old Black Joe” (1860 - sheet music)

IV. Sept. 28: The Birth of the Commercial Music Industry (Late 19th c.)

Reading:

Listening:
1) George W. Johnson, “The Laughing Song” (1890)
2) George W. Johnson, “Whistling Coon” (1890)
3) Scott Joplin, “Maple Leaf Rag” (1916)
4) Scott Joplin, “Elite Syncopations” (1916)

V. Oct. 5: Early Commercial Recordings (Pt. 1): “Classical Music” and Opera (Late 19th c. – Early 20th c.)

Reading:
1) Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (1988): Ch. 2 (pp. 85-168) & Ch. 3 (pp. 169-184 only)

Listening:
1) Sergei Rachmaninoff, Prelude in C-sharp Minor, Op. 3 (1919)
2) Willhelm Furtwängler and the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra:
   - Beethoven, Symphony No. 5 in C minor, Op. 67, first mvmt. (1926)

PAPER 1 DUE
VI. Oct. 12: Early Commercial Recordings (Pt. 2): “Race Records” and “Hillbilly Music” (1920-30s)


Listening: 1) James Reese Europe, “Hesitating Blues” (1919)
2) Mamie Smith, “Crazy Blues” (1920)
4) Fiddlin’ John Carson, “Dixie Cowboy” (1924)
5) The Skillet Lickers, “I Got Mine” (ca. 1926-7)

VII. Oct. 19: Jazz (1917-50)


Listening: 1) Original Dixieland Jazz Band, “Dixieland Jass One-Step” (1917)
2) Jelly Roll Morton, “Mr. Jelly Lord” (1923)
3) Louis Armstrong, “Heebie Jeebies” (1926)
4) Spirits of Rhythm, “I Got Rhythm” (1933)

VIII. Oct. 26: “Latin” Music (1930-50)

3) TBD

Listening: 1) Xavier Cugat, “She’s a Bombshell from Brooklyn” from *Stage Door Canteen* (1943)
2) Desi Arnaz, “Cuban Pete” (1946), performed on *I Love Lucy*
3) Carmen Miranda, “Chica Chica Boom Chic” from *Copacabana* (1947)

PAPER 2 DUE

IX. Nov. 2: Rhythm & Blues and Rock ‘n’ Roll (1950-60)


Listening: 1) Willie Mae “Big Momma” Thornton, “Hound Dog” (1952)
2) Little Esther, “Hound Dog” (1953)
3) Freddie Bell and the Bellboys, “Hound Dog” (1955)
4) Elvis Presley, “Hound Dog” (1956)

X. Nov. 9: Soul Music (1960-70)


Listening: 1) Sam Cooke, “A Change Is Gonna Come” (1963)
2) Aretha Franklin, “Dr. Feelgood (Live in Amsterdam)” (1968)
XI. Nov. 16: NO CLASS

“CRITICAL LISTENING HABITS” PROJECT DUE AT 6:20PM

XII. Nov. 23: NO CLASS

FINAL PAPER ABSTRACT AND ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY
DUE AT 6:20PM

XIII. Nov. 30: Disco & Rap (Pt. 1) (1970-90)

XIV. Dec. 7: Rap (Pt. 2); Sex, Gender, and the Culture Industry (2000s)
   3) Brittney Cooper, “Iggy Azalea’s Post-racial Mess: America’s Oldest Race Tale, Remixed,” on Salon.com

XV. Dec. 14: Student Presentations

XVI. Dec. 21: Student Presentation (tentative)

FINAL PAPERS DUE AT 6:20PM
Figure 2: Portrait of Egbert ("Bert") Austin Williams, by Samuel Lumiere (1921 or 1922)