

Course Syllabus

Introduction to Music and Race

Critical Studies in Music, MUS 235, course code 04882

Winter 2021, University of California, Irvine

Course meets: Fridays 1pm-3:50 pm, on Zoom

Instructor: Michael Dessen

Office hours: By appointment ([email me \(mailto:mdessen@uci.edu\)](mailto:mdessen@uci.edu) your free times)

I came to theory because I was hurting - the pain within me was so intense that I could not go on living. I came to theory desperate, wanting to comprehend - to grasp what was happening around and within me. Most importantly, I wanted to make the hurt go away. I saw in theory then a location for healing.

- bell hooks, "Theory as Liberatory Practice," in [Teaching to Transgress](https://www.routledge.com/Teaching-to-Transgress-Education-as-the-Practice-of-Freedom/hooks/p/book/9780415908085) [↗\(https://www.routledge.com/Teaching-to-Transgress-Education-as-the-Practice-of-Freedom/hooks/p/book/9780415908085\)](https://www.routledge.com/Teaching-to-Transgress-Education-as-the-Practice-of-Freedom/hooks/p/book/9780415908085) (1994)

These chapters put forth an argument for extending the study of American literature into what I hope will be a wider landscape. I want to draw a map, so to speak, of a critical geography and use that map to open as much space for discovery, intellectual adventure, and close exploration as did the original charting of the New World - without the mandate for conquest. I intend to outline an attractive, fruitful, and provocative critical project, unencumbered by dreams of subversion or rallying gestures at fortress walls.

- Toni Morrison, [Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination](https://www.hup.harvard.edu/catalog.php?isbn=9780674673779) [↗\(https://www.hup.harvard.edu/catalog.php?isbn=9780674673779\)](https://www.hup.harvard.edu/catalog.php?isbn=9780674673779) (1992)

Data suggests that over a period of several weeks last spring, between 15 million and 26 million people in the US attended Black Lives Matter protests in response to the deaths of George Floyd and others, making this potentially [the largest social movement in the nation's history](#) [↗](#)

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/03/us/george-floyd-protests-crowd-size.html>). The 2020 protests took place across all areas of the country, in over 2,500 small towns and cities located in predominantly white counties, suggesting that in contrast to most earlier protests, these were attended by unusually large numbers of White people.

Students taking this class will likely be familiar with current debates on what this moment means - or doesn't. On the one hand, as video and social media make visible the daily racism experienced by Black and Brown people, White citizens seem to be increasingly reflecting on white privilege and engaging in activism. Yet the "changing same" of US racism is still deeply engrained in both socio-economic systems and individual attitudes, challenging any simple narrative of progress. These same dynamics are on display in the academic music field, where critiques of systemic racism over the past year have been as prominent and explosive as ever.

In this context, what relevant analytical skills might be the focus of a graduate seminar called "critical studies in music"? What do artists, educators or researchers actually mean when using terms like "critical thinking" and "critical practice" in describing aspects of their work? For some, these phrases might evoke a stance of negation or emotional distance, but as the epigraphs above suggest, critical inquiry can be aimed at collective processes of transformation, discovery, and liberation.

In this seminar, we will study a variety of research on race and music. We will read across different disciplines and questions, though most readings will focus on US contexts. Students will complete short writing assignments in connection with the weekly readings; develop original work in two presentation assignments on relevant topics of their choice; and gain practice discussing race with nuance and complexity in class discussions. Guiding questions include the following:

- How do racialized social systems impact the values and communities through which we create and experience music? How are musical genres, identities, pedagogies and institutions shaped by systemic racism?
- How can our understanding of musical practices be deepened through intersectional analyses that consider racial formations in relation to other salient aspects of identity such as ethnicity, gender, class, national origin, and sexuality?
- How have musicians navigated and transformed the racialized constructs and power relations they inherit? What are educators doing to address racism in their fields and what steps - including strategies informed by research - can White faculty and students in academia take to support anti-racist institution building?
- Most broadly, how can critical inquiry into race and racism - quantitative and qualitative, theoretical and practice-based - expand our understanding of the music worlds in which we operate, and in doing so, help us realize new artistic and social possibilities?

Coursework details

The eight weeks of assigned readings are the core of this seminar. If you have trouble understanding a concept, you should take notes so that you can ask precise questions in class.

Writing assignments will typically be a short exercise in which you concisely answer a few questions about an article's core arguments. We will review writing submissions during the first half of class, to support our collective comprehension of the readings.

In that first part of class, we will discuss the assigned readings as objectively as possible, clarifying questions about their content. In the second part of class, we will connect the readings to our individual experiences in the field and share our individual, subjective responses. Everyone is required to participate in class discussions, and participation involves active and informed listening, not merely talking.

For week 6 and finals week, each student will prepare a 10 to 15 minute presentation on a related topic of their own design. Examples might include extending an analysis that arose during a previous class discussion into a short analytical paper; presenting on a relevant book or current debate not covered in the course; or sharing original research or even ethnographic work in progress that might be the start of a larger project. The two presentations might also be used to develop a single work, such as a first and final draft of a paper, for example. Presentations must be somehow related to the seminar topic and should reflect thoughtful preparation, but otherwise are designed by the student.

Evaluation criteria and accommodations

I will not assign grades to individual assignments, but I will communicate with you if I ever think that your work overall is falling below a "B," the minimum grade for graduate course requirements. By noon Friday in finals week, you must submit a brief paragraph of self-evaluation in which you explain the grade you believe you earned for your work in the course, based on the following criteria (equally weighted):

- Informed participation in class discussions
- Weekly short writing assignments
- Two presentation assignments

I expect you to attend all classes and submit all assignments on time. Aside from illness or emergencies, any absences or late assignments will lower your grade. Missing more than 2 out of the 11 class meetings for any reason may result in a grade of C or lower for the course, because our discussions are a central part of the coursework.

Since we are living through a global pandemic, I will be as accommodating as possible within these

policies, but it is your responsibility to communicate any difficulties to me as early as possible. If you prefer to talk, just email me requesting a meeting and list your available times.

If you have a disability that affects your performance in this course, you should document it through the [Disabilities Services](https://dsc.uci.edu/) [\(https://dsc.uci.edu/\)](https://dsc.uci.edu/) and have them contact me with a contract by the end of the first week of the quarter.

Academic integrity and inclusivity

I value collaboration highly and you may choose to pursue collaborative presentations, but the writing assignments in this seminar must be your own work only. Most of all, you must be always careful to *avoid representing another person's work as your own*. Whenever you draw on others' work, you must provide full citations for all references, using any standard bibliographic style. Please note that using direct quotes from any source, published or unpublished, always requires quotation marks and a proper citation. Any attempt to represent another person's work as your own will be considered a violation of UCI's [Academic Integrity Policy](https://aisc.uci.edu/policies/academic-integrity/index.php) [\(https://aisc.uci.edu/policies/academic-integrity/index.php\)](https://aisc.uci.edu/policies/academic-integrity/index.php), and will be reported.

My intention is always to facilitate welcoming, inclusive and respectful environments for collective learning among diverse students, in the spirit of the [UC's system-wide policies on diversity](https://diversity.universityofcalifornia.edu/policies-guidelines/). [\(https://diversity.universityofcalifornia.edu/policies-guidelines/\)](https://diversity.universityofcalifornia.edu/policies-guidelines/) Those policies - which we may even examine during our seminar, alongside Sara Ahmed's analysis of "diversity" work in academia - define diversity as "the variety of personal experiences, values, and worldviews that arise from differences of culture and circumstance" and "include race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, language, abilities/disabilities, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic status, and geographic region, and more." Most important, I expect all of us to aspire to create a supportive environment, to communicate with one another in respectful, constructive ways, and to understand the presence of varied life experiences and perspectives in our classroom not as a burden, but as a strength and learning opportunity for everyone. By remaining in the course after reading this syllabus, you are affirming that you share these intentions.

Schedule of Readings and Assignments

All readings will be provided as PDFs via the [Files](https://canvas.eee.uci.edu/courses/32995/files) [\(https://canvas.eee.uci.edu/courses/32995/files\)](https://canvas.eee.uci.edu/courses/32995/files) section of Canvas.

Jan. 8

First meeting, introductory exercises/discussions

Jan. 15

- Delgado, Richard, Jean Stefancic, and Angela Harris. "Hallmark Critical Race Theory Themes." In *Critical Race Theory (Third Edition): An Introduction*, 19–43. New York: NYU Press, 2017.
- Winant, Howard. "Race and Race Theory." *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (2000): 169–85.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/223441> ↗ <https://www.jstor.org/stable/223441>).
- hooks, bell. "Theory as Liberatory Practice." In *Teaching to Transgress*, 59–75. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Morrison, Toni. Excerpt from "Black Matters." In *Playing in the Dark : Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, 1–17. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992.

Jan. 22

- Kajikawa, Loren. "The Possessive Investment in Classical Music: Confronting Legacies of White Supremacy in U.S. Schools and Departments of Music." In *Seeing Race Again: Countering Colorblindness across the Disciplines*, 155–74. University of California Press, 2019.
- Ewell, Philip A. "Music Theory and the White Racial Frame." *Music Theory Online* 26, no. 2 (September 1, 2020). <https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.20.26.2/mto.20.26.2.ewell.html> ↗ <https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.20.26.2/mto.20.26.2.ewell.html>).
- Soto, Amanda. "New Faces in Old Spaces: Mexican American Musical Expressions and Music Equity within the Music Curriculum." In *The Oxford Handbook of Social Justice in Music Education*. Oxford University Press, 2015.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199356157.001.0001> ↗ <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199356157.001.0001>).
- Jenoure, Terry. Introduction and Chapter 6, from *Navigators: African American Musicians, Dancers, and Visual Artists in Academe*. SUNY Series, the Social Context of Education. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000.

Jan. 29

- Lewis, George E. "Improvised Music After 1950: Afrological and Eurological Perspectives." *Black Music Research Journal* 16, no. 1 (1996): 91–122.
- Iyer, Vijay. "Beneath Improvisation." In *The Oxford Handbook of Critical Concepts in Music Theory*, edited by Alexander Rehding and Steven Rings. Oxford University Press. Accessed December 22, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190454746.013.35> ↗ <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190454746.013.35>).
- Nicholls, Tracey. "Speaking Justice, Performing Reconciliation: Twin Challenges for a Postcolonial Ethics." *Critical Studies in Improvisation / Études Critiques En Improvisation* 6, no. 1 (May 1, 2010). <https://doi.org/10.21083/csieci.v6i1.1082> ↗ <https://doi.org/10.21083/csieci.v6i1.1082>).

Feb. 5

- Small, Christopher. "Introduction and Chapter 2, On the Ritual of Performance." In *Music of the Common Tongue : Survival and Celebration in African American Music*, 1–16, 49–80. Hanover,

NH: University Press of New England, 1998.

- Wang, Grace. "Interlopers in the Realm of High Culture: 'Music Moms' and the Performance of Asian and Asian American Identities." *American Quarterly* 61, no. 4 (2009): 881–903.
- Shieh, Eric. "Relationship, Rescue, and Culture: How El Sistema Might Work." In *The Oxford Handbook of Social Justice in Music Education*. Oxford University Press, 2015.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199356157.001.0001> 
(<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199356157.001.0001>).

Feb. 12

- Presentation #1 assignment due today. Presentations in class.

Feb. 19

- Morrison, Matthew D. "Race, Blacksound, and the (Re)Making of Musicological Discourse." *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 72, no. 3 (December 1, 2019): 781–823.
<https://doi.org/10.1525/jams.2019.72.3.781>  (<https://doi.org/10.1525/jams.2019.72.3.781>).
- Wong, Deborah. "Listening to Local Practices: Performance and Identity Politics in Riverside, California." In *Speak It Louder: Asian Americans Making Music*, 139–58. New York and London: Routledge, 2004.
- Diamond, Beverly, Aaron Corn, Frode Fjellheim, Cheryl L'Hirondelle, Moana Maniapoto, Allan Marett, Taqralik Partridge, John Carlos Perea, Ulla Pirttijärvi, and Per Niila Stålka. "Performing Protocol: Indigenous Traditional Knowledge as/and Intellectual Property." In *Ethnomusicology: A Contemporary Reader*, 17–34. New York: Routledge, 2017.

Feb. 26

- Davis, Angela Y. "I Used to Be Your Sweet Mama: Ideology, Sexuality and Domesticity." In *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday*, 3–41. New York: Pantheon Books, 1998.
- Hisama, Ellie. "Postcolonialism on the Make: The Music of John Mellencamp, David Bowie and John Zorn." *Popular Music* 12, no. 1 (May 1993): 91–104.
- Redmond, Shana L. "Chapter One: Hologram." In *Everything Man: The Form and Function of Paul Robeson*, 14–38. Durham: Duke University Press, 2020.
- Cleage, Pearl. "Mad at Miles." In *Deals with the Devil: And Other Reasons to Riot*, 1st ed., 36–43. New York: Ballantine Books, 1993.

March 5

- Ahmed, Sara. "The Language of Diversity." In *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*, 51–82. Durham ; London: Duke University Press, 2012.
- Smith, Daryl G. "Identifying Talent." In *Diversity's Promise for Higher Education: Making It Work*, 135–176. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009.

- Bergner, Daniel. "'White Fragility' Is Everywhere. But Does Antiracism Training Work?" *The New York Times*, July 15, 2020.
- Gasman, Marybeth. "Opinion | An Ivy League Professor on Why Colleges Don't Hire More Faculty of Color: 'We Don't Want Them.'" *Washington Post*, September 26, 2016.
- Selected insitutional documents provided in a PDF, including university policies, funding calls, job advertisements, and others
- Reference: United States Government Department of the Interior, Office of Civil Rights. "Standards for Maintaining, Collecting, and Presenting Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity," July 1, 2015. <https://www.doi.gov/pmb/eeo/directives/race-data> 
(<https://www.doi.gov/pmb/eeo/directives/race-data>)_.

March 12

- Moreno, Jairo. "Bauza-Gillespie-Latin/Jazz: Difference, Modernity, and the Black Caribbean." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 103, no. 1 (2004): 81–99.
- Johnson, Gaye Theresa. "'Teeth-Gritting Harmony': Punk, Hip-Hop, and Sonic Spatial Politics." In *Spaces of Conflict, Sounds of Solidarity: Music, Race, and Spatial Entitlement in Los Angeles*, 123–67. American Crossroads. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013.
- Kelley, Robin D. G. "Keeping It (Sur)Real: Dreams of the Marvelous." In *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2002.

Exam week

- Presentation #2 due in exam week meeting, 1pm Friday March 19
- One-paragraph self-evaluation due by 5pm Friday, March 19