

“Soul Music and the Civil Rights Movement”
Wednesdays, 10:00 am – noon
May 27 – June 24

Instructor

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Course Overview

Rhythm and blues music emerged as a genre in the late 1940s, coinciding with the rise of multiple civil rights movements in the United States. This course explores the intertwined histories of rhythm and blues music (and its offshoots) and the civil rights movements that developed between 1945 and 1980 – including African American and Mexican American freedom struggles, the Women’s Movement, and the Gay Liberation Movement. We’ll explore music by figures like Aretha Franklin, Carl Bean, Ray Barretto, James Brown, Diana Ross, and Sunny and the Sunliners. We’ll ask questions like: why have Black culture producers since the early 1900s used the concept of “soul” as an expression of racial politics? How and why did Motown’s views on civil rights evolve in the 1960s and 1970s? What is the relationship between dance music and movements for gender liberation?

We will meet via Zoom once per week, on Wednesdays 10:00 am – noon. The third hour of the course will consist of a weekly podcast produced by Dr. Steptoe and shared via the course drop box.

All readings are available in the course drop box for download.

About the Professor

Tyina Steptoe writes and teaches about race, gender, and culture in the United States. She is the author of the book, *Houston Bound: Culture and Color in a Jim Crow City*, which uses music to examine the culture of segregation in Texas. Her latest research project explores the history of sexuality and gender in rhythm and blues music since the late 1940s. She also hosts a weekly radio program, *Soul Stories* on 91.3 KXCI, that explores the roots and branches of rhythm and blues music.

Schedule and Readings

Week One - May 27

- Podcast: “The Impulses of African American Music”
- Lecture: “From Race Records to Rhythm and Blues”
- Reading: Peter Guralnick, “Prologue to Soul: Sam Cooke, Ray Charles, and the Business of Music,” from *Sweet Soul Music: Rhythm and Blues and the Southern Dream of Freedom* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1999), 21-75.

Week Two – June 3

- Podcast: “What Is Soul?”
- Lecture: “Rhythm and Blues and Backlash”
- Reading: Maureen Mahon, “Listening for Willie Mae ‘Big Mama’ Thornton’s Voice: The Sound of Race and Gender Transgressions in Rock and Roll.” *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 15 (2011): 1-17.

Week Three – June 10

- Podcast: “How Motown Conquered America”
- Lecture: “Soul Power”
- Charles Hughes, “Selling Soul: Black Music and Black Power in Memphis,” in *Country Soul: Making Music and Making Race in the American South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 80-104.

Week Four – June 17

- Podcast: “Latino Soul”
- Lecture: “Young, Gifted, and Brown”
- Reading: Reading: Juan Flores, “Boogaloo and Latin Soul,” in *The Afro-Latin@ Reader: History and Culture in the United States*, Miriam Jiménez Román and Juan Flores, eds. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010): 199-206.

Week Five – June 24

- Podcast: “Disco and the Gospel Impulse”
- Lecture: “Music and the Gay Liberation Movement”
- Reading: Alice Echols, “The Land of Somewhere Else: Refiguring James Brown in Seventies Disco,” *Criticism* 50, no. 1 (Winter 2008): 19-41.

Interested in Reading More?

1. Ruth Feldstein, *How It Feels to Be Free: Black Women Entertainers and the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).
2. Juan Flores, *Salsa Rising: New York Latin Music of the Sixties Generation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).
3. Tanisha Ford, *Liberated Threads: Black Women, Style, and the Global Politics of Soul* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015).
4. Peter Guralnick, *Sweet Soul Music: Rhythm and Blues and the Southern Dream of Freedom* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1999).
5. Charles Hughes, *Country Soul: Making Music and Making Race in the American South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015).
6. Emily J. Lordi, *The Meaning of Soul: Black Music and Resilience since the 1960s* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020).
7. William Van Deburg, *Black Camelot: African-American Culture Heroes in Their Times, 1960-1980* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997).
8. Deborah Vargas, *Dissonant Divas: The Limits of La Onda in Chicana Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).
9. Brian Ward, *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness, and Race Relations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).
10. Craig Werner, *A Change Is Gonna Come: Music, Race and the Soul of America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006).