

Black Vistas: the Visual and Material Culture of Jazz

Chris Johnson

chrisjohnso@earthlink.net

Web Site

<http://blackvistas.com/index.html>

password "culture"

This course presents Jazz as a 20th century artistic phenomena of global import. We will examine the evolving image of the performing artist as revealed in photographs of performers, audio clips, and film clips. Additional readings draw from biography, fiction, African music, the literature of race and image, and folk culture. Classic recordings will be analyzed for their artistic and technical merits. Rare film clips will be studied for clues into the presentation of artists.

Participants are required to write two essays of approximately ten pages in length each. The first essay will be due at mid semester and the second near the end of the term. Essay topics will be chosen from course readings and themes.

Required texts

Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s. Ann Douglas. 1995.

Stomping the Blues. Albert Murray. 1976.

All additional readings will be available via the course web site.

All writing assignments must be typed. Please double-space the lines and use one-inch margins on all sides of the page.

Final grades will depend 60% on submitted written work and 40% on class participation.

Please inform me of any medical issues that may influence your attendance and performance in class.

More than four class absences result in automatic failure of the course. Recurring tardiness will be reflected in the final grade.

Plagiarism occurs when one writer copies the words of another writer without attributing the words to the source. Unattributed copying will result in course failure.

Course calendar (subject to change)

Week

One

Two

Three

Four

Five

Six

Seven

Eight

Essay Due

Nine

Ten

Eleven

Twelve

Essay Due

Thirteen

Fourteen

Part One — Definitions of Jazz

Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s

The Meaning of Jazz

Musical Elements

Popular Dance in the Twentieth Century

Part Two — Precursors of Jazz

Slave Narratives, Festivals, Advertisements

Nineteenth Century Performance

Africa , Jazz and Blues

African American and African Visual Arts

Part Three — The Influence of Jazz

Individual In-Class Conferences

Authenticity and Jazz

Revolution and Cockroach Capitalism

The Jazz Avant-Garde

The Louis Armstrong Catalyst

Sound and Cultural Practice in Rap Music

Black Rhetorics, Black Rhythms

Class Schedule (subject to change)

Part One — Definitions of Jazz
Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s

Reading

Excerpt from Terrible Honesty. Ann Douglas. 1995.

Image

Josephine Baker and pet leopard

Reading

Chapter 12 from Stomping the Blues. Albert Murray. 1976.

*Playlist*¹

The Meaning of Jazz

Reading

“What Jazz Means to Me.” Max Roach. Black Scholar. 1972.

“Fortunes Unattended.” Archie Shepp. Lightworks. 1978.

Image

The Louis Armstrong Hot Five

Reading

Terrible Honesty first half of chapter one to page 54

Musical Elements

Reading

“African Influence on the Music of the Americas.” Richard Waterman. Americanist. 1949.

“African and European Music.” Music: Black, White and Blue. Ortiz Walton. 1972. (excerpt)

Image

Robert Johnson

Image

Fletcher Henderson Orchestra

Reading

Terrible Honesty second half of chapter one

¹ Playlists will be distributed in class as handouts at the time of each listening session.

Popular Dance in the Twentieth Century

Reading

Black Dance in the United States. Lynn Emery. 1972. (excerpt)

Image

Savoy Ballroom Dancers

Reading

Terrible Honesty chapter two

Literature

“The Caucasian Storms Harlem.” Rudolph Fisher. 1927².

Part Two — Precursors of Jazz

Slave Festivals (Northup, Douglass), Advertisements, Narratives

Reading

Readings in Black American Music. Eileen Southern. 1971. (excerpt)

Image

The Old Plantation, anonymous folk art painting

Reading

Stomping the Blues chapters 1,2, 3 and 4

Nineteenth Century Performance (Place Congo, Creole Slave Songs)

Reading

Social Implications of Early Negro Music. Bernard Katz. 1969. (excerpt)

Image

Drawings by Benjamin Latrobe, banjo and drum

Reading

Terrible Honesty chapter five

Africa, Jazz and Blues

Reading

Savannah Syncopators. Paul Oliver. 1970. (excerpt)

Image

Ma Rainey with Thomas Dorsey, “The Father of Gospel Music”

Reading

2 Literary selections have been taken from The Norton Anthology of African American Literature. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. ed. 1997.

Stomping the Blues chapters 5 and 6

Phrasing, Rhythm and Meter in the African American and African Visual Arts

Reading

Flash of the Spirit. Robert Farris Thompson. 1983. (excerpt)

Image

African musicians, alghatia player and gourd player

Reading

Terrible Honesty chapter seven

Part Three — The Influence of Jazz

Authenticity and Jazz

Reading

The Black Atlantic. Paul Gilroy. 1993. (excerpt)

Image

Drummer Max Roach

Reading

Stomping the Blues chapters 7 and 8

Literature

“How it Feels to be Colored Me.” Zora Neale Hurston. 1928.

Revolution and Cockroach Capitalism

Reading

Black Nationalism and the Revolution in Music. Frank Kofsky. 1970. (excerpt)

Image

Archie Shepp

Reading

Terrible Honesty chapter nine

The Jazz Avant-Garde

Reading

Black Music. Amiri Baraka. 1970. (excerpt)

Image

Saxophonist Sonny Rollins

Reading

Stomping the Blues chapters 9 and 10

The Louis Armstrong Catalyst

Reading

Playing in the Dark. Toni Morrison. 1992. (excerpt)

Image

Williams and Walker

Reading

Terrible Honesty chapter ten

“Sound” and Cultural Practice in Rap Music

Reading

Black Noise. Tricia Rose. 1994. (excerpt)

Image

Hip Hop Dancer

Reading

Terrible Honesty chapter eleven

Black Rhetorics, Black Rhythms

Reading

Masters of the Drum. Robert Elliot Fox. 1995. (excerpt)