MU243-A SPRING 2018
History of Gospel Music

MEETING TIME & PLACE: This online course has no meeting time or place. However, we will have a few synchronous meeting times as outlined below.

INSTRUCTOR: Dr. William L. Ellis, 203 McCarthy Arts Center (office); contacts: wellis@smcvt.edu (email); 654-2993 (office), 901-288-3146 (cell). I am typically in my office most days 9-9:45 a.m. and 1-3 p.m. So even though this course is essentially asynchronous, feel free to call, email, or knock (if you are on campus) should you have questions, need to discuss some issue, or simply want to introduce yourself.

COURSE: In this class, we will take a historical and analytical look at African American sacred song from the ring shout to holy hip-hop with an emphasis on the great body of nineteenth century spirituals and the subsequent development of gospel song – its composers, stars, and influence – over the span of the twentieth century. To that end, there are strong aural and video components as well as the reading and interpretation of texts. Students become familiar with essential primary sources, both written and recorded, and maintain a class blog for the sharing of responses, perspectives, and experiences. Asynchronous and self-paced in design, the course – which fulfills the Historical Studies LSC requirement – will have one or more synchronous meeting times to accommodate talks by experts in the field.

PREREQUISITE: None

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Please purchase these books online (if you go to Amazon.com, for example, you should be able to order all three for under $20). Additional required readings can be found on Canvas and should be completed with textbook assignments on the sunset dates listed below. I also recommend that you keep on hand a research paper reference guide, either a recent edition of the MLA Handbook, the Chicago Manual of Style, or the Turabian manual. Finally, please download the recording software Audacity, which we will use for an interactive project. The site is: http://web.audacityteam.org/. Note: course items as outlined in the syllabus may be subject to change and material may be added from time to time (you will be notified via Canvas when and if this happens).

LEARNING OUTCOMES:
After taking the course, students will:
1) Know the historical developments and changes that African American sacred song undertook in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries;
2) Be familiar with certain songs and their histories (e.g., “Go Down, Moses”) as well as later composers
and stars such as Thomas Dorsey and Mahalia Jackson;
3) Be able to aurally recognize various types of Black religious song, such as the ring shout or a lined out hymn, and be able to identify stylistic traits in certain genres such as gospel quartet singing;
4) Comprehend the innovative, improvisatory, and rhetorical processes of Black sacred song;
5) Come away with a deeper understanding of African American sacred music as a profound response to America's social and political landscape, notably that of slavery and post-Reconstruction America, as well as the music’s ongoing role in shaping popular song.
6) Come to understand the creation and expression of African American music in a communal, tradition-bearing context.
Furthermore, in terms of Historical Studies LSC outcomes, the course:
1) Addresses African American religious song as a musical and cultural expression through time, from the era of antebellum spirituals through the gospel composers and stars of the early twentieth century to the central voice Black religious music had in the Civil Rights Struggle;
2) Places the music and its makers within the larger political and social climates from which it came, such as the great body of Pentecostal song and composers that emerged in artful reaction to the challenging realities of post-Reconstruction America;
3) Puts the student in direct contact with primary sources that documented Black song as it was being created in the nineteenth and early twentieth century.
4) Examines how the music speaks directly to the African American Experience through critical analysis of lyrical texts and music.

*HOW TO WORK THROUGH THE COURSE:* This course consists of twelve modules that you must work through in chronological order. In Canvas, access the course and click on the left hand column to find “Modules” (you can also find module components under “Assignments”). Each module has a set number of components: 1) an introductory document with a summary of module ideas plus links to songs and videos; 2) readings related to the module content; 3) two response pages that require individual written responses to the readings and listening examples; and 4) a discussions page for threaded group responses to a prompt. Depending on the module, additional links and content may be added (make sure you look at everything). There is also a class blog that you will be expected to contribute to on a regular basis, which you can find under either “Assignments” or under “Modules” in the Introduction section. NOTE: Assignments have sunset dates, so be sure to pace yourself in a timely fashion that allows you to work through material in its entirety. For example, if a module’s set of assignments (readings, listening, responses, discussion) is due on, say, March 27, you are welcome to complete that module well before then. However, after March 27, certain elements in that module will become late and/or unavailable, which can hurt your grade should they remain incomplete by that time. And although the introductory modules include response and discussion questions for contextual reference, you must go to the actual “Response” and “Discussion” pages in each module to complete the assignments. Finally, music and video examples have links in the introductory sections of each module but are also posted for easy access as separate pages (the former as thematic Spotify playlists).

GRADE: Your grade will be a composite average of the following six components:

1) Questions based on readings (10%).
   You will post five questions per reading section based on your comprehension on the content and any issues it may raise for you. There are 30 assigned readings in addition to the four required texts. Since you have very little lecturing in this course, and it is impossible to monitor attendance in the traditional sense, it is essential that you take time with the readings to absorb its content and perspectives and to show me that you are engaging in the ideas being presented. Readings are posted under their related modules. You can choose to download the PDFs or view them in Canvas under the preview option.
2) Responses based on module content (15%).
These take the form of individual written responses to the readings, musical performances, etc. There are two response-type assignments per module. Typically, one is based on the readings, while the other is based on listening and responding to musical examples. Do not try to answer these questions as you encounter them imbedded in each module’s intro page but work from the appropriate assignment boxes found in each module.

3) Discussion threads based on module content (15%).
The group-focused thread grades are based on written responses presented as class discussion, i.e., a conversation among your peers that shows you understand and apply course content. You will be graded not only on how well you respond to the prompt question provided by me, but how well and how frequently you interact with and respond to the written thoughts of fellow classmates. You are also expected to generate at least one question yourself in the thread based on the topic at hand. There are 12 discussion threads, one per module. Do not try to work on the threads as they appear in a module’s intro page but work from the appropriate discussion box found in each module.

4) Class blog, [http://mu243gospel.blogspot.com/](http://mu243gospel.blogspot.com/) (20%).
It is my hope that the blog will be one of the more exciting, participatory elements in this class. Although I will occasionally weigh in with posts and comments, the blog is your forum to discuss ideas and issues, present your own discoveries and findings, share music, and, most of all, stay connected with one another. Be creative with the design, look, and shape of the site. It is for your collective expression as a class. One caveat: when linking to outside sites, be careful not to link to inappropriate content or non-secure sites, i.e., best to stick with proven sites such as YouTube or Vimeo. Please read the first two posts and send me your Gmail account names so I can add each of you as authors to the blog.

5) Term paper(s) (20%).
You are responsible for a term paper, approximately ten to twelve pages, or two shorter term papers approximately five to six pages each, due the final day of exams (May 11). The long paper topic will be a biographical and musical study of a gospel performer and/or composer; the short papers will be two song studies/histories of select spirituals and/or gospel songs. See “Paper” under “Assignments” in Canvas for details.

6) Short video (20%).
You are responsible for a short video, approximately three-to-five minutes long that will examine your own religious music traditions. See “Video” under “Assignments” in Canvas for details.

Good news: There are no quizzes and exams. However, your individual and collective responses via threads, your written assignments, and the blog will be judged not only on frequency of commentary but on understanding and application of course content. Academic integrity is essential in a class such as this, which can rely heavily on Internet access and information. Suffice to say, plagiarism and cheating are never tolerated and will result in a failing grade. Grading scale: A (100-93), A- (92-90), B+ (89-88), B (87-83), B- (82-80), C (79-70), D (69-60), and F (59-0).

ATTENDANCE: There is no attendance in the traditional sense. I expect everyone to be present, however, for the one scheduled synchronous meeting on March 15, when Bob Dylan vocalist, Regina McCray, will speak to the class (see Class Outline below). I will send an email to coordinate the best time that day for all to be present. Otherwise, the class is self-paced, meaning it is up to you to do the work (readings, responses, postings) in a timely fashion.

PREPARATION OUTSIDE CLASS: Unlike face-to-face courses, this online course is completely dependent on work outside of the classroom. Per Saint Michael College’s guidelines, students
are expected to devote a minimum of 10 hours per week on average to each 4-credit course during the 15-week semester. Expect to put at least that much time and effort into the course to meet minimum requirements for readings, written assignments, your paper and video project, and overall research and study.

A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY: The journey of African American song mirrors the journey of Black struggle and progress, and what makes every melodic note and refrain so compelling is its ability to bear witness. Over the years, varying terms – starting with the offensive and derogatory and moving toward the more dignified – have been used to broadly describe a race of ethnically- and culturally-diverse people once enslaved and dehumanized on America’s shores. Terms such as “negro,” “colored,” and even “Afro American” have since given way to “African American,” which I urge you to adopt as the default term for our course (it is both standard practice and a fitting description of the cultural dynamic at work in the construction of Black American culture). No need to hyphenate when African American is used as a noun. Black or Black American is also acceptable, though I ask that you capitalize the term when used. For one of many compelling responses to the issue, see the following Slate article by Aisha Harris: http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/culturebox/2014/07/black_american_versus_african_american_why_i_prefer_to_beCalled_a_black.html).

A NOTE ON TECHNOLOGY: This is a course that works only as well as your computer does. Because your computer’s health is paramount, I urge you to 1) read the trouble-shooting document in your introductory module; 2) alert me if and when things happen; and, 3) use the Saint Michael’s IT help desk (ext. 2020) as your first line of defense. This entails you create a work order through IT, which will respond in a timely fashion. Computer problems, however, are NOT allowed as an excuse to miss deadlines and the expectations of course work. If your computer gets misplaced, is stolen, or dies, find another one that works. In an online course, you are accountable for maintaining access and engagement.

Class Outline:

This is a self-paced course. Before you proceed with the modules, you must read the introductory materials, especially the syllabus.

Module 1: Contexts, Interactions, and Themes
Must complete by Jan. 29
Film (Slavery and the Making of America)
Suppl. readings 1.1, 1.2, 1.3

Module 2: Second Great Awakening – Shape Note Singing + The Camp Meeting
Must complete by Feb. 5
Textbook (Dickson, 61-122)

Module 3: Spirituals – Context and Development
Must complete by Feb. 12
Textbook (Slave Songs of the United States, i-xxxviii) + suppl. readings 3.1, 3.2, 3.3

Module 4: Spiritual Types
Must complete by Feb. 19
Suppl. readings 4.1, 4.2
Module 5: Meaning in the Spirituals
Must complete by Feb. 26
Film (I Ain’t Lying: Mississippi Folktales)
Suppl. readings 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5

Module 6: The Stage Spiritual
Must complete by Mar. 4
Suppl. readings 6.1, 6.2

Module 7: Third Great Awakening and Pentecostalism
Must complete by Mar. 18
Film (Slavery by Another Name)
Textbooks (Heilbut, 173-86; Boyer, 12-29) + suppl. readings 7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 7.4
NOTE: Mar. 15 guest speaker (synchronous meeting via Zoom): Regina McCray

Module 8: Early Recordings – Preachers + Street Evangelists
Must complete by Apr. 1
Textbook (Boyer, 36-43) + suppl. reading 8.1

Module 9: Gospel Composers
Must complete by Apr. 15
Film (Say Amen Somebody)
Textbook (Heilbut, ix-xxxv, 3-35, 97-113; Boyer 49-57) + suppl. readings 9.1, 9.2, 9.3, 9.4

Module 10: Gospel Quartets and Stars
Must complete by Apr. 22
Film (Mahalia Jackson: The Power and the Glory)
Textbook (Heilbut, 55-93, 187-203, 221-81) + suppl. readings 10.1, 10.2

Module 11: The Gospel Influence
Must complete by April 29
Film (The Gospel According to Al Green)
Textbook (Heilbut, 145-57) + suppl. readings 11.1, 11.2, 11.3

Module 12: Modern Gospel – Choirs + Holy Hip Hop
Must complete by May 4
Textbook (Heilbut, 205-19) + suppl. reading 12.1

SUPPLEMENTARY READINGS
(The 30 readings are numbered according to Canvas module groupings.)


9.2. Michael W. Harris, “Conflict and Resolution in the Life of Thomas Andrew Dorsey,” in *We’ll Understand It Better By and By*, 165-82.


