

MUS 541, Topics in the Cross-Cultural Study of Music: Traces of Blackness: Theorizing Radical Black Positionalities through Sound and Affect
Instructor: Kevin Holt

In 1993, Stuart Hall posed a simple but poignant question: What is this “black” in black popular culture? Hall’s question pushes us beyond imagining blackness as a signifier of phenotype or genotype and into the realm of the symbolic and the performative. That pliable concept of blackness gets decoupled from bodies marked as black and permeates our discourse, imbuing sounds, performances, spaces, gestures, and experiences with the work of representing blackness. This course explores the sticky, often contradictory theorizations of blackness as it manifests through place and performance and then refocuses the discussion on those radical iterations of blackness that bend it toward sociopolitical resistance. The title “Traces of Blackness” refers to the inherent ephemerality of performances, be they musical or not, leaving behind only traces from which we can construct an ongoing notion of radical black positionality and representations thereof. The thinkers outlined in this course offer interdisciplinary explorations of art and identity, hailing from Africana studies, musicology, performance studies, queer studies, feminist & gender studies, and history.

This seminar is primarily intended for MA or PhD students. Though it counts as a history course for performers, any MM or DMA students considering enrolling must confer first with Prof. Holt.

3 credits