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# The blues

This class is not a survey of the entire genre of blues, but rather a historical snapshot of the period 1920-1940. This class will provide a brief introduction to several styles of the blues, covering rural and urban styles. We will listen closely to recordings, read some history, and do a close reading of Ishmael Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo*, using concepts borrowed from musicology, historiography, and literary theory.

**Prerequisites**: none

**Reading**:

* Ishmael Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*;
* Angela Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude “Ma” Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday*;
* something on the history of the South;
* excerpts from the biography of Charley Patton;
* excerpts from *Call and Response: The* *Riverside Anthology of African American Literature*;
* Mellonee V. Burnim and Portia K. Maultsby *African American Music: An Introduction*

**Listening**: Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, Son House, Charley Patton, Muddy Waters, Billie Holiday

**Writing**: weekly writing assignments and a final essay

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| Class 1: The blues as a genre and a form | * David Evans, “Blues: Chronological overview,” in *African American Music: An Introduction*, pp. 79-96; * Daphne Duval Harrison, “Blues,” ibid., pp. 508-28 |
| Class 2: The blueswomen | * Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*; |
| Class 3: The bluesmen |  |
| Class 4: Listening to urban blues |  |
| Class 5: Listening to rural blues |  |
| Class 6: The audience for the blues |  |
| Class 7: Billie Holiday |  |
| Class 8: Muddy Waters |  |
| Class 9: …and some poetry  Class 10: |  |
| Class 11: |  |
| Class 12: *Mumbo Jumbo* |  |
| Class 13: *Mumbo Jumbo* |  |