From spirituals to rap, African American music is one of America’s original contributions. In this course we will explore the interaction between jazz, one of the most complex forms of black music, and modern American Literature. Our main question is: How do writers use the forms, ideas and myths of this rich musical tradition? For the authors we are studying, jazz serves as a model and inspiration; they turn to it to find both American subject matter and an American voice. As well as reading a number of authors, including, Langston Hughes, August Wilson, Jack Kerouac, Ishmael Reed, Michael Ondaatje, Nathaniel Mackey, Jayne Cortez and Toni Morrison, we will listen to a number of African-American musicians and/or composers, including Bessie Smith, Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Ornette Coleman, John Coltrane, Sun Ra, Albert Ayler, and Abbey Lincoln. It turns out that we cannot understand the writers well if we do not understand the music well. Moreover, we will view two jazz movies, Amiri Baraka’s *Dutchman* and Sun Ra’s *Space is the Place* and will discuss the blues-jazz musical theory of Baraka, Ellison and Albert Murray.

**REQUIRED READING**

*Moment’s Notice* (MN)—Art Lange  
*The Collected Poems* (CP)—Langston Hughes  
*Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom*—August Wilson  
*Coming Through Slaughter*—Michael Ondaatje  
*Jazz*—Toni Morrison  
*On the Road*—Jack Kerouac  
*Living with Music*—Ralph Ellison  
*Invisible Man*—Ralph Ellison  
*The LeRoi Jones / Amiri Baraka Reader* (BR)—Amiri Baraka  
*Mumbo Jumbo*—Ishmael Reed  
*Atet A.D.*—Nathaniel Mackey

**WEEKLY TOPICS**

Week 1: Introduction

Week 2: Hughes’ blues poems (CP) and Wilson’s *Ma Rainey*

Week 3: Ondaatje’s *Slaughter* and James Baldwin’s “Sonny’s Blues” (MN)
Week 4: Morrison’s *Jazz*

Week 5: Kerouac’s *On the Road* and “The Subterraneans” (MN)

Week 6: Ellison’s *Living with Music*:

“Living with Music”
“Ralph Ellison’s Territorial Vantage”
“The Charlie Christian Story”
“Remembering Jimmy”
“The Golden Age, Time Past”
“On Bird-Watching, and Jazz”
“As the Spirit Moves Mahalia”
“Flamenco”
“Richard Wright’s Blues”
“Blues People”
“A Coupla Scalped Indians”

Week 7: *Invisible Man*

Week 8: *Invisible Man* and Baraka:

“How You Sound??” (BR)
“Look for You Yesterday, Here You Come Today” (BR)
“Blues People” (BR)
“Rhythm & Blues” (BR)
“The Screamers” (BR)

Week 9: Baraka:

“Dutchman” (BR and film)
“Answers in Progress” (MN)
“Jazz and the White Critic” (BR)
“The Changing Same”
“Black Art” (BR)
“Dope” (BR)
“In the Tradition” (BR)

Week 10: Frank O’Hara’s “The Day Lady Died” (MN), Michael Harper’s poems (MN), Henry Dumas’ “Will the Circle Be Broken” (MN) and Thomas Pynchon’s “Entropy” (online)

Week 11: Hughes’ *Montage of a Dream Deferred* (CP) and Albert Murray, from *Stomping the Blues* (online)

Week 12: Sun Ra’s film, *Space is the Place* and Hughes’ *Ask Your Mama* (CP)
Week 13: Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo*

Week 14: Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo*, his poems and Al Young’s work from *MN*

Week 15: Mackey’s *Atet A.D.* and his poems from *MN*

Week 16: Jayne Cortez, Wanda Coleman & Ntozake Shange (all in *MN*)