The writer Ralph Ellison wrote that “one of the chief values of living with music lies in its power to give us an orientation in time. In doing so it gives significance to all those indefinable aspects of experience which nevertheless help to make us what we are.” This course provides an introduction to major questions, debates, and concepts in African American music in order to analyze music as entertainment but also as a porthole into the African American experience. The course is organized around several themes, including authenticity, appropriation, signifying, censorship, and resistance, and students will grapple with several key questions to explore these themes: How do you define African American music? What is the interplay between music and its historical context? How has music affirmed the value of African American culture or sustained the black community through difficult times? How has African American music provided cultural expression for resistance? To what extent is music an art or an industry? Having grappled with these questions, students will come away from the course with a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which music has far-reaching consequences well beyond its entertainment value.