

## **MHST 519: Jazz Outside the United States**

### **Week 1 Notes: Overview of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Global History**

#### **Summary**

The 20<sup>th</sup> Century has been described as a century of extremes, and a century of paradoxes. On one hand, the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw wars with unprecedented scale and brutality. On the other hand, it saw great strides in diplomacy, strategies for negotiating peace, and revolutions in human rights. The history of jazz outside the United States is very much a global history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

One of the key tenets of this class is that music always reflects the culture that births it and sustains it. The global history of jazz, as a 20<sup>th</sup> century music, is therefore very much a history of the world in a time of great change. Throughout this course you will be asked to consider the social, cultural and political context of the music we discuss. A familiarity with the basic trends of 20<sup>th</sup> century world history will be a great support to the work we do this semester.

What follows is a subjective and limited list of key terms, concepts and historical processes with which you should be familiar. We will return to throughout the semester. There's substantial overlap among them, and one of the tasks for work together will be puzzling together the interconnections.

#### **Major Themes and Concepts**

**Imperialism:** The forceful economic and political dominance of one nation over another, as for example, in the British rule in India from 1858 – 1947. In general, this connotes the dominance of Western nations over non-Western nations. A secondary meaning denotes the imperialistic attitude of superiority of one nation over its subordinate people. The 20<sup>th</sup> century sees a major rebalancing in world power, and the relative decline of Western empires.

**Decolonization:** Following the Second World War, colonial societies' struggle for self-determination and independence leads to a rebalancing of West-East and North-South power relationships. By 1980, nearly all of the Western colonial empires had been disbanded. Most historical accounts we access are written from the vantage point of the West, in which actions, ideas and development flow from a Western center to the margins (the rest of the world). Postcolonial studies analyze the legacies of colonialism, the politics of knowledge and representation, power relationships, and so forth to provide more nuanced and complete accounts. Of interest in this class is the direction of influence: in our case studies we will consistently see that jazz did not spread from the centre to the margins, but rather that there are mutual and complex networks of cultural influence.

**Conflict:** The major wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – the First World War, the Second World War, and the Cold War – had far-reaching implications for global history and society. We will see this consistently in all our case studies.

**Geopolitical rebalancing:** We see a decline in the dominance of the West, relative to the other societies. Two great wars, declines in Western population growth, the movement towards decolonization, and the development and industrialization of non-Western societies play major parts in this. By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, significant economic rivals in trade and manufacturing, such as India and China, had joined the United States.

**International cooperation:** Here, I wish to draw attention to the manner in which the human condition (human rights, culture, security) became the shared project of peoples of many nations in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. 20<sup>th</sup> century war posed an unprecedented threat to human civilization. International organization like the League of Nations, the United Nations and the International Monetary Fund seemed to unite the world community and usher in a new era of international cooperation.

**Human rights:** As a consequence of the unprecedented scale and brutality of the First and Second World Wars, human rights emerge as a major theme of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Major themes: civil rights in the US, womens' right to personhood, the workers' movement and labour rights, anti-Imperialism and national independence, land rights, genocide, reproductive rights for women, political repression, access to education, access to medical care, food rights, peace and justice. As we'll see, these issues continue to the present day. The important point here is that an awareness of human rights emerges in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in both individual consciousness and as an international project.

**Freedom, Democracy, Capitalism.** Disillusionment in the wake of the wars led to revolution in many societies. Seeking a better standard of living, people of many nations began to seek change in the governing structures of their nations and national economies. Ideas of democracy emerge as closely linked to free market economies, with the US assuming a position as a global leader in political and economic freedom. As we'll see, jazz presents an especially fruitful perspective from which to question this.

**Cultural contact:** The 20<sup>th</sup> century saw an astonishing increase in the intensity and extent of contact among the world's civilizations. Innovations in communications technology – from the phonograph to the Internet – saw cultural contact spread more rapidly than ever before. I don't believe that we can speak of a single world culture, but we now share an unprecedented degree of common reference points.

**Research and Technology:** Both the First and Second World Wars gave a substantial boost to research and technology. The impacts of technological developments transformed the world after the Second World War. Some examples: railway, automotive and aviation; radio and wireless communications giving rise to television; machines of mass production that transformed our relationship to labour; medical technology developed to fight disease during war resulted in lowered mortality rates and soaring population growth outside the West; developments in electronics and computing; the

development of weapons of mass destruction (chemical weapons, nuclear weapons) that transformed the nature of war.

**Globalization.** In business or commerce, this describes the emergence, since the 1980s, of a single world financial market that is dominated by a small number of multinational companies, resulting in less control over economies at the national level. Culturally speaking, globalization describes a process of shared awareness across national and cultural borders. Atkins, in “Towards a Global History of Jazz” critiques existing accounts of globalization and music for their bias towards the present-day: these accounts seem to suggest that globalization is something that happened recently, and is happening to all of us in the same way. As we’ll see throughout the semester, globalization is both irregular and uneven, and is not experienced equally by all people in all places. It is also a much longer process, with roots extending to the very beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**Nationalism** is an important theme in 20<sup>th</sup> century, and can be used in various ways. At heart, it means a focus on the interests of one’s own nation, as opposed to international interests; a kind of patriotism. But it also stands for a process and drive towards self-determination, as in countries seeking to overthrow Colonial rule or military occupation. Jazz, seen through an American nationalist lens, is a symbol of American freedom, achievement, and power. But seen through the nationalist lens of a different country, jazz could be seen as an imposition of American power, or a pathway towards asserting pride in one’s own national heritage.