

Call for Papers: “Theorizing African American Music”

Dates: June 16–18, 2022

Location: Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, U.S.

Proposal Submission Deadline: December 10, 2021

“Theorizing African American Music” highlights African American perspectives on music and music theory, perspectives that have historically been marginalized in the academic study of music in the United States. In our current environment, the situation is ripe for such perspectives to be heard. Because American music theory is deeply rooted in whiteness, African Americans have had virtually no agency in shaping how music theory, as a subdiscipline, is taught or how musical genres that are deeply rooted in African Americanism are presented. We intend to provide a new platform for all scholars interested in the theory and analysis of African American music.

This conference welcomes contributions from music theorists, musicologists, ethnomusicologists, music critics, and others invested in African American music. Scholars and performers of all identities are welcome to respond to the call and participate of course, however, we do wish to foreground Black voices with this conference, since for so long those voices were either marginalized or, worse still, erased from American music’s history. The intent of the conference is twofold. First, we seek to address this erasure of African American scholars and their perspectives from the discipline of music theory due to the field’s historic commitment to whiteness. Equally important, we seek to include musicological, ethnomusicological, and other perspectives on all American musics that can reasonably be said to have roots in African Americanism.

“Theorizing African American Music” will be an in-person conference at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, OH, from June 16 to 18, 2022. This could of course change due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, but we will hope for the best—if we are unable to convene in Cleveland, we will move to an online format. We intend to give small grants to certain participants—such as graduate students or contingent faculty for example—who may have trouble paying for the trip to Cleveland, and we believe that dormitory accommodations will be available for a nominal fee. So we hope to make this an affordable conference for all.

“Theorizing African American Music” invites proposals of no more than 300 words on topics including but not limited to:

- African American figures in music theory.
- African American and African diasporic figures in classical music.
- African American opera.
- This history of racial exclusionism in the American academic study of music, how this exclusionism affected African American music, and how this music adapted as a result.
- Analytical approaches to specific pieces/works, expressions, or musical genres with roots in African Americanism.
- Musical genres with roots in African Americanism, such as blues, boogie-woogie, disco, doo-wop, funk, gospel, hip-hop, jazz, Motown, ragtime, rap, rock, soul, among others.
- African American music’s reception in American music institutions.
- The intersection of African American musical traditions with other musics.

- American exploitation of African Americans and their musics.
- The history of racial segregationism in American music and music curricula.
- Racially desegregating our America music and music curricula.
- Allyship and coalition building with respect to African American music in the 21st century.
- Visions for an antiracist music curriculum and its meaning for African American music.

Possible presentation formats:

- Individual Papers (30-minute slot: 20-minute talk + 10-minute Q&A)
- Themed Panels of Papers (90 or 120 minutes) (consult committee chair beforehand)
- Performances or Lecture-Demonstrations (45 minutes) (consult committee chair beforehand)

All proposals should be submitted via [this Google Form](#) by 11:59 p.m. (EST) on December 10, 2021.

Please contact the Program Committee chair, Philip Ewell, with any questions about submitting a proposal to the conference at TheorizingAAMusic at gmail dot com. Receipt of all proposals will be confirmed, and applicants will be informed of decisions in late January 2022.

Program Committee:

[Naomi André](#)
[Philip Ewell](#) (Chair)
[Fredara Hadley](#)
[Marc Hannaford](#)
[Travis Jackson](#)

Steering Committee:

[Naomi André](#)
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