FMS 160 (section 2): Meaning and Memory in American Popular Music
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11:00-12:15
Classroom: Bryan 106

Professor Benjamin Filene
office hrs.: Thursdays 2:00-4:00 and by appointment: Moore Humanities Bldg., rm. 2137
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Course Description
Sometimes popular music is treated like disposable culture—the fad of the month—but a closer look shows that the most innovative figures in American music are sustained by a deep sense of history. How do artists draw on the past to create vibrant new musical styles? How do Americans’ visions of “authentic” musical roots reflect their ideas about race, class, and identity? In this course, we will look at and listen to case studies in blues, rock, rap, and genres of your choice to understand how music is shaped by—and shapes—a vision of American history.

Student Learning Outcomes
The skills that you will be building in this seminar include
- reading secondary sources carefully and thoughtfully and with an eye for new ideas
- reading primary sources, both written and non-written (musical, visual) as cultural evidence
- building, sustaining, and supporting a main idea or argument
- writing in a clear and persuasive style
- speaking with passion and clarity
- collaborating with energy, sensitivity, and an awareness of how much you can learn from your peers
- experimenting fearlessly to build your skills

As a Writing Intensive class, you will turn in drafts of your main papers and provide a research update and a draft of the thesis paragraph for your final paper. The draft of your first essay will be read by a peer reviewer; the professor will the comment on the other draft materials. The writing assignments vary in length and style. They are designed to make you comfortable communicating your ideas in writing and to help you try out different kinds of voice, evidence, and analysis in your writing.
Assignments

Class participation—15%
—attending class, doing the reading, speaking up in discussions, and helping to foster a sense of shared exploration within the classroom

Weekly responses—10%
Each week requires short, informal reactions to that week's readings (roughly a couple of paragraphs). These must be posted on our class’s Blackboard Discussion Board by 8:00 a.m. each Tuesday.

“Songbook”—personal reflective essay, 3-5 pp. —15%
Write in a first-person voice about a song that means something to you. Modeled on Nick Hornby’s *Songbook*, this assignment asks you to explore connections between music and your personal life beyond music and to experiment with doing a close reading of a single song—why does this piece of music move you?

“Mashup”—analytical essay, 5-7 pp. —20%
Compare and contrast two versions of a single song from different eras and build an historical argument about how and why they differ from each other.

“Musical Roots”—original research and analysis, 8-10 pp. —30%
Choose a song that interests you and do secondary and primary source research to identify historical influences and antecedents that shaped the artist and this piece of music. How and why did the earlier music influence this artist?

Oral Presentation—10%:
—a 10-minute in-class presentation based on your research project.

Grading scale
A=93-100; A-=90-92; B+=87-89; B=83-86; B-: 80-82; C+=77-79; C=73-76

If things go awry…
…it’s your responsibility to tell me—right away.

LATE PAPERS:
If a paper or project is late without direct, prior approval from me, I deduct ½ a letter grade per day (e.g., from A to A-)—no exceptions.
**Academic Integrity Policy**
All students have a responsibility to uphold the standards of “Honesty, Trust, Fairness, Respect, and Responsibility” detailed in the Academic Integrity Policy. Instances of cheating, plagiarism, misuse of academic resources, falsification of information, and facilitating of academic dishonesty are treated with utmost seriousness by the history department and dealt with severely by the University administration. The full policy appears in the *Student Calendar/Handbook* and at [academicintegrity.uncg.edu](http://academicintegrity.uncg.edu).

Per university policy, you will be asked to sign a copy of the Academic Integrity Pledge for each major assignment in this class.

**Special Needs**
If you require accommodations for special learning needs, please do not hesitate to contact the Office of Disability Services, located within the Elliot University Center (334-5770)—and please let me know!

**Books to Buy**
Hornby, Nick. *Songbook*, 2003

Keyes, Cheryl L. *Rap Music and Street Consciousness*, 2004


Wald, Gayle F. *Shout, Sister, Shout!: The Untold Story of Rock-and-Roll Trailblazer Sister Rosetta Tharpe*, 2007

**Essential Recordings**
You will be required to listen to these recordings outside of class. Course readings won’t make much sense without them, and some out-of-class assignments will depend on them. All are available for in-library listening at UNCG’s music library or for purchase at local cd stores or via iTunes, amazon.com, etc. I’ll make other songs available to you on Blackboard during the course of the semester.

*Robert Johnson: The Complete Recordings* [2-cd set]
Rosetta Tharpe, *The Gospel of Blues*
Bob Dylan, *Highway 61 Revisited*
  ““*, *Time Out of Mind*
  ““*, *Love and Theft*
CLASS SCHEDULE AND READINGS

“The past is never dead. It’s not even past.”
-William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun*, 1951

“[N]othing in American vernacular music holds still,...every phrase and image, every riff and chime, is always moving, state to state, decade to decade, never at home with whoever might claim it, always seeking a new body, a new song, a new voice.”
-Greil Marcus, *Like A Rolling Stone*, 2005

Part I: Finding Your Voice
August 21—Definitions and Introductions: “Roots,” “Vernacular,” “Memory”
“This Land Is Your Land”

August 23—Music, Personal Memory, and the Writer’s Voice

August 28—Music, Memory, and Voice (continued)


Peer reviewing of two pages of “Songbook” essays
In class: Blackboard computer training

August 30—Authenticity, Public Memory, and the Singer’s Voice

Part II: The Blues and American Musical Memory
September 4 & 6—Robert Johnson’s Roots

9/6: “Songbook” essays due

[Class visits Writing Center at 11:50]
September 11 & 13—Robert Johnson’s Music

September 18 & 20—Robert Johnson in Memory

9/18: In class: thesis-building writing exercise

September 25—Blues Women
Davis, Angela Y. “Introduction.” In Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: xi-xx.

Davis, Angela Y. “Up in Harlem Saturday Night.” In Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: 138-160.

September 27—Electric Blues

Drafts of “Mashup” essays due

Part III: Rock ‘n’ Roots
October 2—Rosetta Thorpe, Gospel and Rock

October 4—Rosetta Thorpe and Revival

October 9—Introduction to library resources (Amy Harris)
Revised “Mashup” essays due

October 11—The King

October 16—no class (fall break)

October 18—Bob Dylan: Folk Troubadour
Pancake, Jon and Paul Nelson. “Bob Dylan.” In The Dylan Companion: A


1-page prospectuses for final papers due

October 23—Bob Dylan: Folk Troubadour (continued)
Dylan, Bob. “River of Ice.” In Chronicles: Volume One, 246-293

October 25—“It Ain’t Me Babe”—Bob Dylan: Traitor?


[In class: excerpts from No Direction Home DVD]

October 30—Bob Dylan: Still Rolling


November 1—Bob Dylan: Still Rolling (continued)


On Blackboard: Research updates for final papers due
Part IV: Funk to Hip-Hop

November 6—Hip-Hop’s Roots


*Thesis paragraphs for final papers due*

November 8—Hip Hop As Art


November 13—Hip-Hop As Protest

November 15—Hip Hop Women

November 20—Hip-Hop As Memory (and Marketing)


*Drafts of final papers due*

November 22—no class (Thanksgiving)

November 27 & 29—Oral Presentations
December 4 & 6—Oral Presentations

December 11: no class ("Reading Day")

December 13: final papers due