

HIS 330
American Popular Music and Social Change Since 1900
Fall 2013

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11:00-12:15
Classroom: **Gatewood Arts Building (STAC) 204**

Professor Benjamin Filene

office hours: Tuesdays: 3:30-5:00 and by appointment,
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Credit structure: 3:3

Prerequisites: None

For Whom Planned: This course is designed for undergraduate students. Although the history department does not formally restrict admission to its courses, it recommends its 300-level courses to sophomores and above.

Catalog Description: Explores how musical movements—including jazz, folk, soul, rock, and hip hop—shaped new visions of America, from the Great Depression to the Civil Rights movement to the present day.

Course Description:

Popular music is often described as the soundtrack of our times, but can it *shape* our times as well? This course explores the relationship between music and resistance, reform, and rebellion across twentieth-century America. We will consider key historical moments when change was in the air—the Jazz Age, the Great Depression, the Civil Rights movement, and on to the present day—and explore musical genres linked to these moments, including jazz, blues, folk music, soul, rock, punk, and hip hop. Throughout, we will trace not only changes in musical genres but, centrally, the historical context from which the new sounds emerged and music's broader social impact. We will consider music written expressly to spark social or political movements and music *appropriated* by such movements. Key subjects will be the historical role of music in reshaping the culture and politics of race, class, and gender.

In tracing the relationship between music and rebellion, the course becomes an exploration, more broadly, of the links between culture and power. The class tells stories of how individuals reimagined their world and found ways to express their visions; in doing so, it invites students to consider how change occurs in American society.

Student Learning Outcomes:

Upon successful completion of this course, you will be able to

1. **identify** key moments in the history of American popular music and American social movements;
2. **explain** connections between musical trends and their broader historical contexts;

3. **analyze** primary sources (including music and images) for cultural and historical meanings; and
4. **compare** and **contrast** the relationship between popular music and social change in different historical eras.

Teaching Methods:

This is a lecture course with regular opportunities for discussion and collective exploration. In addition to learning a body of content, we will be exploring how to “read” music and other cultural texts to glean historical insights. In every class period, time will be reserved for group consideration of a piece of music, a set of lyrics, photographic images, or video. Frequently students will form smaller groups in the classroom to consider a question, an article excerpt, or a primary source.

Assignments and Evaluation:

- **Midterm exam (October 1):** 30%—including short-answer identifications and an in-class essay that involves interpreting a primary source (learning outcomes #1, 2, and 3)

- **Analytical Essay (due October 24):** 25%

“**Sounds of Protest in the Air**” (learning outcomes #2, and 3)

How has the legacy of protest songs evolved, thrived, or dwindled in the present day? Consider these questions through the examination of a single song, *written in the last five years*. Across the semester, students will be contributing to a list of potential song candidates to consider.

In examining your song, consider: How does it seem similar and different to how a contemporary newspaper account would chronicle the event? How has the singer/songwriter rewritten or reshaped the story? What messages does the performer convey through the way he or she tells it, and what musical strategies (sound, lyrics, rhythm, tempo, etc.) does the performer use to convey them? Finally, how does the song seem similar and different from the historical examples we have considered so far this semester?

- **Final exam (December 10):** 35%—including short-answer identifications and an in-class essay that invites synthesis of themes across different historical eras (learning outcomes #1, 2, and 4)
- **Reading Quizzes:** 5%—Each week, I will give a short quiz on the most recent readings, to assess reading comprehension and to ensure that each student is prepared to participate fully in our in-class discussions. For each student, I will drop the term’s lowest quiz grade. (learning outcome #1)
- **Class participation: 5%**—regular class attendance, attentiveness, and engagement with in-class discussions

Grading scale:

A=93-100; A-=90-92; B+=87-89; B=83-86; B-=80-82; C+=77-79; C=73-76; C-=70-72; D+=67-69; D=63-66; D-=60-62; F=59 and below

If things go awry...

...it's your responsibility to tell me—right away.

Lateness Policy:

It is important to turn in assignments on time so as to be fair to other students and to ensure timely grading. I am receptive to *advance* requests for extensions; however, if an assignment is turned in late without an agreed-upon extension, I will deduct 1/3rd of a letter grade per day (e.g., A to A-) unless an appropriate written excuse (e.g., medical, counselor's, dean's) is provided.

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!

Required Texts:

Across the semester, short excerpts will be assigned from this textbook, which may be purchased at the UNCG bookstore:

Starr, Larry and Christopher Alan Waterman. *American Popular Music: From Minstrelsy to MTV* (Fourth Edition, 2013).

E-reserves: In addition to the textbook, the discussion for each class session will also draw on required primary source readings and articles. All of these materials will be made available on electronic reserve on Blackboard.

Attendance policy: Students need to attend all class meetings and are encouraged to meet individually with the instructor as needed.

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

Outline/Calendar:

Setting the Stage:

**August 20: Listening to Learn/Learning to Listen:
“This Land is Your Land”**

August 22: Love and Theft: Minstrelsy

Secondary Source:

Starr: 45-50.

Primary Source:

Nevin, Robert P. "Stephen C. Foster and Negro Minstrelsy." *Atlantic Monthly* 20, no. 121 (f 1867): 608-610 [excerpt].

Charles Townsend, "Negro Minstrels". (1891). In *Inside the Minstrel Mask: Readings in Nineteenth Century Blackface Minstrelsy* (1996): 121-125.

Part I

Resisting Between the Lines, 1890-1920s

Can making and listening to music be political acts even if the musicians and audiences don't think they are being political?

**August 27: Making New Worlds through “Folk” and Popular Culture:
Ragtime, Spirituals, Cowboy Songs, and Folk Schools**

Secondary Sources:

Starr: 7-9; 61-68.

Brackett, David. "Music Basics," In the online companion to *The Pop, Rock, and Soul Reader* (2009): 24 pp.

Primary Source:

Joplin, Scott. *School of Ragtime: 6 Exercises for Piano* (1908): 5 pp.

August 29: The Blues and Jim Crow

Secondary Source:

Starr: 134-146.

September 3: The Jazz Age, Youth Culture, and Flappers

Secondary Source:

Starr: 78-81; 85-104.

Primary Source:

Street, Julian. "The Jazz Baby." *Saturday Evening Post* (July 15, 1922): 6-7, 73-81.

Part II**Reconstructing American Culture during the Great Depression**

Can music reshape a country's sense of itself and make a more equitable society or is that as silly as dreaming of a Big Rock Candy mountain?

September 5: Lead Belly, the Lomaxes, and "Ballad for Americans"***Primary Source:***

Lomax, John and Alan. "Preface," In *Our Singing Country* (1941): xxi-xxviii.

September 10: The Labor Movement and the Folk Revival:**Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, and People's Songs*****Secondary Source:***

Starr: 151-153.

Primary/Secondary Source:

"Revolutionary Music." In *Singing Out: An Oral History of America's Folk Music Revivals*, David King Dunaway and Molly Beer, eds. (2010): 37-48.

Primary Source:

Guthrie, Woody. "Workers of the World..." (ca. 1939). In *Woody Sez* (1975): 152-154.

September 12: Testing Racial Barriers: John Hammond, "From Spirituals to Swing," Café Society, and "Strange Fruit"***Primary Source:***

Dugan, James and John Hammond. "An Early Black-Music Concert: 'From Spirituals to Swing.'" *The Black Perspective in Music 2* (autumn 1974) [1938]: 191-207.

Part III**Finding Countercultures in the 1950s**

Can music help us find seeds of resistance in an "apolitical" time?

September 17: Preludes: Frank Sinatra, Rhythm and Blues, and the Creation of Teen Culture***Secondary Source:***

Starr: 199-209; 220-231.

Primary Sources:

Pop, Rock, and Soul Reader, David Brackett, ed. (2009), Excerpt A: 23-26.

Pop, Rock, and Soul Reader, Excerpt B: 99-106.

September 19: Elvis and Rock 'n' Roll***Secondary Source:***

Starr: 240-245; 258-273.

Primary Sources:

Pop, Rock, and Soul Reader, Excerpt C: 119-131.

September 24: The Beats and Bebop***Primary Sources:***

Gillespie, Dizzy (with Al Fraser), "The Cult of Bebop" (1979), In *Keeping Time: Readings in Jazz History*, Robert Walser, ed. (1999): 155-171.

Mailer, Norman. "The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the Hipster," *Dissent* 4 (summer 1957). In *Keeping Time*: 242-246.

September 26: Cold War Tunings: Pete Seeger, McCarthyism, Van Cliburn***Primary Source:***

House Un-American Activities Committee, testimony of Pete Seeger (August 18, 1955): 15 pp.

October 1: Midterm Exam**Part IV****Singing at the Front Lines of the 1960s**

Can music overthrow the powers that be and make a new world?

A: The Civil Rights Movement**October 3: Spirituals, Gospel, and the Civil Rights Music*****Primary Source:***

Appleton, Clyde R. "Singing in the Streets of Raleigh, 1963: Some Recollections" (1975). In *From Jubilee to Hip Hop: Readings in African American Music*, Kip Lornell, ed. (2010): 188-193.

October 8: Bob Dylan and the Folk Revival***Secondary Source:***

Starr: 339-345.

Primary Sources:

Pancake, Jon and Paul Nelson. "Bob Dylan" (1962). In *The Dylan Companion: A Collection of Essential Writings about Bob Dylan*, Elizabeth Thomson and David Gutman, eds. (2001)a: 59-61.

Turner, Gil. "Bob Dylan—A New Voice Singing New Songs" (1962). In *The Dylan Companion*: 62-66.

Dylan, Bob. "River of Ice." In *Chronicles: Volume One* (2004): 225-248 and 280-286.

October 10: Bob Dylan as Traitor?

[No reading]

October 15: No class (Fall break)

B: The Counterculture

October 17: The Blues Revival, the British Invasion, and the Counterculture

Secondary Source:

Starr: 348-352.

Primary Source:

Anderson, Chester. "Rock and the Counterculture" (1967), In *The Rock History Reader*: 99-102.

October 22: Woodstock, Vietnam, and "Waist Deep in Big Muddy"

Secondary Source:

Starr: 362-366.

Primary Source:

Pop, Rock, and Soul Reader, Excerpt D: 264-270.

C: Black Pride/Black Power

October 24: The Politics of Soul

(*Analytical Essay Due*)

Secondary Source:

Starr: 334-336.

Primary Source:

Pop, Rock, and Soul Reader, Excerpt E: 202-207.

Extra class session: October 24 (replacing October 29), 5:00-6:15: The Politics of Funk

Guest lecture: Watson Jennison

Secondary Source:

Starr: 332-334; 434-437.

Primary Source: Barry, Thomas. "The Importance of Being Mr. James Brown"

Look 33 (February 18, 1969): 56-62.

October 29: No class (see 10/24)

Part V

A: The 1970s-2000s: Searching for Sounds of Change “After the Revolution”

Did politics die with the 1960s?

October 31: Sounds of Feminism

Secondary Source:

Starr: 368-373.

Primary Source:

Pop, Rock, and Soul Reader, Excerpt F: 279-283.

November 5: Punk I

From the Ramones to Riot Grrrl

Secondary Source:

Starr: 423-432.

Primary Sources:

Pop, Rock, and Soul Reader, Excerpt G: 363-373.

November 7: Punk II

Primary Sources: [no readings]

Pop, Rock, and Soul Reader, Excerpt H: 507-510.

November 12: The Reagan Era and Bruce Springsteen’s America

Secondary Source:

Starr: 450-454; 467-470.

Primary Source:

Will, George F. “Bruuuuuce” (September 13, 1984). In *Racing in the Street: The Bruce Springsteen Reader*, June Skinner Sawyers, ed. (2004): 107-109.

November 14: Hiphop I:

Public Enemy and “Black America’s CNN”

Secondary Source:

Starr: 491-509.

Primary Source:

Pop, Rock, and Soul Reader, Excerpt I: 457-462.

November 19:-Hiphop II: Is Hiphop Still Political?

Secondary Sources:

Dyson, Michael Eric and Kevin Powell. "Is Hip-Hop Dead? Two Sides" *Ebony* 62 (June 2007): 60-61.

Tanz, Jason. "Selling Down: The Marketing of the Hip-Hop Nation." In *Other People's Property* (2007): 178-199.

Rose, Tricia. "Six Guiding Principles for Progressive Creativity, Consumption, and Community in Hip Hop and Beyond." In *The Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk About When We Talk About Hip Hop--and Why It Matters* (2008): 261-273.

November 21: 9/11 and the Sound of Patriotism

[no readings]

November 26: Contemporary Resonances: Musical Visions in a Post-Identity White House, DIY and Occupy

Primary Sources:

Senator Barack Obama, speech re: race (March 18, 2008)

- transcript: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=88478467>
- video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pWe7wTVbLUU>

will.i.am: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2fZHou18Cdk>

President Barack Obama, speech re: Trayvon Martin (July 19, 2013): <http://www.businessinsider.com/obama-trayvon-martin-race-speech-video-text-2013-7>.

November 28: No class (Thanksgiving)

December 3: No class (Reading Day)

Tuesday, December 10 (12:00-3:00): Final Exam