American Popular Music (01:512:392)

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This course will focus on the role of popular music in American history and its relevance to American society and culture from the late-19 to late-20th century. Students will critically discuss genres like the blues, jazz, country, musical theatre, rock and hiphop as historical text and marks of cultural and political identity. While the course will discuss the stylistic evolution of American popular music, the main focus will be on reading, or listening to, music as a historical text as a key to understanding the major themes of American history in the 20th century.

We will focus on a number of themes: popular music as a mode of dissent, the influence of mass media and technology and the emergence of the music industry, as well as race, class and gender.

READINGS

There is no text book for this course. All readings will be available on Sakai and on Library databases.

Students will also be required to listen to selected pieces of music for this course. It is highly recommended that you spend some of the money you save on a textbook on an iTune, or similar, card, to download MP3s.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Attendance: Attendance is mandatory, and everyone is both expected and required to participate in class discussions. The attendance and grade will reflect your attendance in class and the participation grade will reflect the quality of your in-class participation.

Journal: Students will keep a journal relating the music selections to issues discussed in class and in the readings.

Presentation: Students will choose a song not on the syllabus and give a ten-minute presentation on its significance in American history.

Paper: Students will write a 2500-word biography of an American popular song, album, CD or musical of their choice (other than the song chosen for their presentation), discussing its musical genealogy and situating it historically.

There will be a final exam.

Attendance ................................................................. 10%
Class Participation ....................................................... 10%
Journal ................................................................. 20%
Presentation .......................................................... 10%
Term Paper ............................................................ 25%
Final Exam ............................................................. 25%
TOTAL ........................................................................ 100%
CLASS SCHEDULE:

27 – May – What is popular music ... and is it art?
Reading: Tia De Nora, “Music and Self-Identity”

28 – May – Origins
Reading: TBD

29 – May – Union Songs and Parlor Music

2 – Jun – Hellhound on my Trail: The Blues
Reading: Ralph Ellison, “Blues People”

3 – Jun – Black, Brown and Beige: Jazz and the Great Divide
Reading: Harvey G. Cohen, "Duke Ellington and Black, Brown and Beige: The Composer as Historian at Carnegie Hall”

4 – Jun – I Got Rhythm: Broadway and Tin Pan Alley
Readings: John Bush Jones, Introduction to Our Musicals, Ourselves: A Social History of the American Musical Theater, Sean Griffin, "The Gang's All Here: Generic versus Racial Integration in the 1940s Musical"

5 – Jun – Roll Along, Kentucky Moon: Down home country
Readings: Pamela Grundy, "We Always Tried to Be Good People": Respectability, Crazy Water Crystals, and Hillbilly Music on the Air, 1933-1935”
Music: TBD

9 – Jun – Straight, no Chaser: Jazz as Art

10 – Jun – Fly Me to the Moon: Pop, Swing and the Construction of Whiteness

11 – Jun – That’ll be the day: Rock and Roll and Rebellion
Readings: Deena Weinstein, “Rock is Youth/Youth is Rock”

12 – Jun – Back in the USSR: American Music in the Cold War
Reading: Graham Carr, “Diplomatic Notes”

16 – Jun – Old, Weird America: The Folk Revival

Michael Haralambos, “Changing With the Blues,” in Soul Music: The Birth of a Sound in Black America

18 – Jun – Shake! From the garage to the Love-In
Reading: TBD

19 – Jun – Say it Loud: Soul and Black Pride

23 – Jun – Woodstock
Film: Woodstock
Reading: Sheila Whiteley, “Wonderful World, Beautiful People” from Women and Popular Music: Sexuality, Identity and Subjectivity

24 – Jun – The Music Industry
Reading: George M. Plasketes, “Taking Care of Business: The Commercialization of Rock Music”

25 – Jun – Blank Generation: Punk and the Politics of Diminished Returns
Reading: TBD

26 – Jun – The Decline of Western Civilization
Film: The Decline of Western Civilization

30 – Jun – Planet Rock: Hiphop and Urban America

1 – Jul – Video Killed the Radio Star: Mediatized Music and the Postmodern Consumer Society

2 – Jul – Smells Like Teen Spirit: Grunge and Alternative
Music: Nirvana, “Smells Like Teen Spirit,” REM, “It’s ten End of the World as we Know It (and I Feel Fine),”
3 – Jul – Thug Life: Gender and Authenticity on the Dance Floor and in the Hood
Reading: Annette J. Saddik, "Rap's Unruly Body: The Postmodern Performance of Black Male Identity on the American Stage"