

Comparative Studies 336

Cultural Studies of American Musics

Winter, 2008

JR 304

T/R 11:30-1:18

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Office hours: Tuesday, 2:00-4:30

*Have you seen Dylan's dog? It got wings; it can fly. If you speak of it to him, it's the only time
Dylan can't look you in the eye*

Patti Smith

*The music business is a cruel and shallow money trench, a long plastic hallway where thieves
and pimps run free, and good men die like dogs.
There's also a negative side.*

Hunter S. Thompson

*Commercial rock and roll music is a brutalization of the stream of contemporary Negro church
music—an obscene looting of a cultural expression.*

Ralph Ellison

Awop-bop-a-loo-bop awop-bam-boom

Little Richard

Course Description

This course engages undergraduates in the critical analysis of commercial popular music production in a pluralistic and multiply fragmented society. Students should come away from this class having developed skills of critical listening and thinking that allow them to trace musical influences through and across historical periods and musical genres, to understand the impact of systems of reproduction, communication, commodification and commercialization on the construction of the popular, to analyze the musical production of embodied identities (especially the production of gender, sexuality and race), and to discuss the social and political grounds of musical pleasure. We will begin by developing an interpretive model that will provide the tools for understanding popular music in its historical and cultural context. We will then read a set of case studies about topics in popular music, organized chronologically, including discussions of blues, early hillbilly music and the roots of rock, eighties and nineties rap and nineties post-punk and riot grrrl.

Course Objectives

This course is designed both for major credit in Comparative Studies and to fulfill the GEC Arts and Humanities, Visual and Performing Arts requirement; it fulfills the general goals of Arts and Humanities courses by bringing students into direct contact with major forms of American popular music. The course helps students develop the ability to analyze musical performances and changing forms of musical expression within historical, cultural, social, and political contexts. Students are expected to evaluate their own experiences in relation to those of other communities and to analyze popular music as an integral part of the experiences of diverse groups, e.g., those identified by race, gender, class, or ethnicity. Students are expected to become discerning analysts and critics of the changing forms of American popular music and to identify the various ways in which musical expression is interwoven with the social, political, and economic conditions of different groups and communities within the U.S.

The course also fulfills the GEC Social Diversity in the U.S. requirement. In its focus on the critical analysis of American popular musics, the course addresses the pluralistic nature of American society and culture, with particular attention to issues of race, class, gender, and ethnicity. Students are expected to develop their understanding of the diversity of American society and the ways in which that diversity, in particular the diversity of musical expression in the U.S., has shaped their own attitudes and values.

GEC Arts and Humanities coursework develops students' capacities to evaluate significant writing and works of art, and for aesthetic response and judgment; interpretation and evaluation; critical listening, reading, seeing, thinking, and writing; and experiencing the arts and reflecting on that experience. Expected outcomes are:

- Students develop abilities to be enlightened observers or active participants in the visual, spatial, musical, theatrical, rhetorical, or written arts.
- Students describe and interpret achievement in the arts and literature.
- Students explain how works of art and literature express social and cultural issues.

GEC Social Diversity in the United States coursework fosters students' understanding of the pluralistic nature of institutions, society, and culture in the United States. Expected outcomes are:

- Students describe the roles of such categories as race, gender, class, ethnicity, and religion in the institutions and cultures of the United States.
- Students recognize the role of social diversity in shaping their own attitudes and values.

Evaluation

There will be three exams, two midterms and one final exam, that will evaluate your understanding of the readings and of the material discussed in class. In addition your informed and enthusiastic class participation will contribute to your grade. Each of these evaluative practices will be worth 25% of your grade:

Class participation:	25%
Midterm 1:	25%
Midterm 2:	25%
Final Exam:	25%.

Extra Credit Option: If you are unsatisfied with the grades you have earned on the two midterms, you have the option of attending a concert/show during the quarter and writing a 4-6 page review of that concert. If you choose to complete this extra-credit assignment, the grade on this paper will be averaged with your grades on the two midterms. The average of the three grades will then equal 50% of your grade for the class. (Evaluation including extra credit option: Participation, 25%; Average of Midterms 1, 2, and Review paper, 50%; Final Exam, 25%). If you decide to use this option, you must meet with me to obtain approval of the concert/show you will attend and to discuss the format of the review-paper.

Required Books are available at SBX bookstore

Simon Frith, et al, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock*
 Greil Marcus, *Like a Rolling Stone: Bob Dylan at the Crossroads*
 Nadine Monem, *Riot Grrrl: Revolution Girl Style Now!*
 Eithne Quinn, *Nuthin' but a "g" Thang: The Culture and Commerce of Gangsta Rap*
 Elijah Wald, *Escaping the Delta: Robert Johnson and the Invention of the Blues*

Required Articles are available on Carmen.

Required Music is available through Library Reserves (on CD's).

Academic Misconduct

Plagiarism is the representation of another's works or ideas as one's own. Don't do it! All cases of suspected plagiarism, in accordance with university rules, will be reported to the Committee on Academic Misconduct. The term "academic misconduct" includes all forms of student academic misconduct wherever committed; illustrated by, but not limited to, cases of plagiarism and dishonest practices in connection with examinations. Instructors shall report all instances of alleged academic misconduct to the committee (Faculty Rule 3335-5-487). For additional information, see the Code of Student Conduct (http://studentaffairs.osu.edu/resource_csc.asp).

Students with disabilities that have been certified by the Office for Disability Services will be appropriately accommodated, and should inform the instructor as soon as possible of their needs. The Office of Disability Services is located in 150 Pomerene Hall, 1760 Neil Avenue, offers services for students with documented disabilities. Contact the ODS at 292-3307; TDD 292-0901. See <http://www.ods.ohio-state.edu/>.

Weekly Schedule

Week One:

Assigned Reading: None

Thursday, January 3: Introduction to course, outline of key terms, initial attempts at interpretation.

Week Two:

Assigned Reading: Chapters 1, 2, 3 in Frith, et al. [you might try to get ahead some as well]

Tuesday, Jan 8 **No Class**

Thursday, Jan 10: Discussion of Therberge, Frith, Straw

Week Three: Assigned Reading: Chapters 4, 5, 6, 10, 12 in Frith et al.

January 15: Discussion of Frith, Keightley and Potter

January 17: Discussion of Cohen and Shank – exam prep

Week Four: Assigned Reading: begin Wald

January 22: First Exam.

January 24: Viewing: *The Howlin' Wolf Story: The Secret History of Rock and Roll*, intro to Wald.

Week Five: Assigned Reading: finish Wald

January 29: discussion of parts one and two of Wald

January 31: discussion of part three of Wald

Week Six: Assigned Reading: Begin Marcus (pp.1-131)

February 5: viewing of portions of *Don't Look Back* and the Scorsese movie, intro to discussion of Bob Dylan

February 7: Bob Dylan and the invention of rock

Week Seven: Assigned Reading: Continue Marcus (pp.135-201), Star Profiles: The Beatles, Bob Dylan, Jimi Hendrix, The Rolling Stones.

February 12: Finish Discussion of Dylan and rock – exam prep

February 14: Exam Two

Week Eight: Assigned Reading: Quinn, Star Profiles: James Brown, Marvin Gaye, Public Enemy

February 19: View *Thug Angel*

February 21: Discussion of Tupac and Quinn

Week Nine: Assigned Reading: Julia Downes, “Riot Grrrl: The Legacy and Contemporary Landscape of DIY Feminist Cultural Activism,” Red Chidgey, “Riot Grrrl Writing,” (both in Monem) and Gottlieb and Wald, “Smells Like Teen Spirit: Riot Grrrls, Revolution, and Women in Independent Rock.” [CARMEN]; Star Profiles: Madonna, Nirvana, The Spice Girls.

February 26: View *Don't Need You* Intro to Punk, post-punk and the roots of riot grrrl

February 28: Revolution, grrrl style? Or post-modern marketing?

Week Ten: no assigned reading

March 4: The New Realism: Common, Kanye, MIA and Arcade Fire

March 6: Conclusions?

Final: Wednesday, March 12, 11:30-1:18.