History 385
Sounds of the Century:
Understanding 20th Century US History through Popular Music

Course Description
This course examines 20th century United States history through the lens of popular music, including blues, jazz, rock, R&B, disco, hip-hop and musicals. Thematically speaking, this course explores how our notions of race, gender, sexuality, class, and nation are reflected in and produced by people’s interactions with music. Special attention is given to the relationship between popular music and social change as well as the role of popular music in shaping the United States’ relationship with the rest of the world.

Required Course Material

Readings
Students are required to purchase two books


All other readings will be available on Canvas.

Musical Material
Because this is a course on music, you’ll be listening to songs for every class. You can listen to them by finding songs on Spotify [http://www.spotify.com/].

You will be watching a lot of video clips as well, and most of them are already available on Youtube. For those clips that are not available in the public domain, I will post them on Canvas.

Movies
These movies will be made available online.

- Flower Drum Song (1961)
- Hedwig and the Angry Inch (2001)

Grading:

Participation: 20%
Attendance at class meetings and active participation in class discussions are critical components of the course.
Ethnographic Essay Assignment (3-4 pages): 20%
Find a music video of your least favorite musician on YouTube, look through the comments section for positive comments, and use these comments to write an ethnographic essay that explains why the fans find these artists appealing.

Take-Home Midterm Essay (4-5 pages): 25%
Students will write an essay on the relationship between popular music and an American social movement of their choice: civil rights movement, women’s liberation movement, Asian American movement, Chicano movement, anti-war movement, etc.

Oral Presentation of Research Paper: 10%
In the final two weeks of the class, each student will do a 10-minute presentation of the final project to the class. This is an opportunity to get group feedback on your project before you turn in your final research paper. Students in the audience are expected to actively listen to the presentations and will be also be graded based on their engagement during Q & A.

Final Research Paper (8-10 pages): 25%
Building on the concepts, themes, and methods you have learned in the course, write an original research paper on the subject of popular music and US history that is not covered in this course. Students will identify a paper topic with the instructor by Nov. 11 at the latest.

Accessibility and Inclusion
This course will make sure that all students feel welcome and receive the necessary accommodations to get the most out of their time in the classroom. This means that all members of the class—the students and instructor—will be respectful of others’ views, backgrounds, and goals.

Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must register with the Office of Accessibility Services (OAS). Students should contact the OAS as early as possible in the semester to ensure they receive the necessary accommodations. In addition, students should feel free to contact me to let me know if there is anything I can do to facilitate their learning.
Class and Reading Schedule (Preliminary)

8/28: Introduction

9/2: Labor Day (no class)

9/4: Taking Popular Music Seriously, Studying Popular Music Historically
Reading:

Unit I: Race, Gender, Sexuality, and Class in Popular Music

9/9: Race & The Question of Authenticity
Reading:
• Benjamin Filene, “Creating the Cult of Authenticity” in Filene, Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and American Roots Music (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 47-75

Music:
• Listen to Leadbelly, “Governor O. K. Allen,” “Irene,” and “New York”
• Watch: Leadbelly, March of Time newsreel (1935)

9/11: Gender & Sexuality
Reading:

Music:
• Listen to Bessie Smith, Ethel Waters, “No Man’s Mamma Now” (1925); Bessie Smith, “Young Woman’s Blues” (n.d.); Ma Rainey, “Prove It On Me Blues”

9/16: Class
Reading:

Music:
• Watch Bruce Springsteen, “Born in the U.S.A.” on YouTube.

9/18: Race, Gender, Class and Nation in Hamilton the Musical
Reading:

Music:

9/23: Understanding Your Least Favorite Musicians and Their Fans

** Ethnographic Essay Assignment Due**

In class, we will discuss what you learned through this ethnographic exercise.

Unit II: Popular Music and Social Change

9/26: Rock & Roll and Racial Integration

Readings:

Music:
• Watch Chuck Berry, “Maybelline,” live on American Bandstand (1955)
• Stevie Wonder, “Happy Street,” a scene from Muscle Beach Party (1964)
• Listen to Chuck Berry, “Sweet Little Sixteen” (1958)

9/30: Jazz, Soul, and the Civil Rights Movement

Readings:

Music:
• Watch Nina Simone, “Mississippi Goddam” (1963)

10/2: Motown and Socio-Economic Mobility

Reading:
• Jack Hamilton, Just Around Midnight, 121-168.

Music:
• Listen to Barrett Strong, “Money (That’s What I Want)” (1959)
• Watch Martha and the Vandellas, “Dancing in the Street” (1964)

10/7: Musicals and Asian Immigration

Reading:

Music:
• Watch Flower Drum Song (1961)
• **Read** the *Flower Drum Song* fact sheet on Rodgers and Hammerstein musical, on American Musical Theater History, [http://www.theatrehistory.com/american/musical025.html](http://www.theatrehistory.com/american/musical025.html)


### 10/9: Classical Music and Upward Social Mobility

**Reading:**


**Music:**


### 10/14: Fall Break (No Class)

### 10/16: Girl Groups and Sexual Imagination during the Cold War

**Readings:**


**Music:**

- The Supremes, “Baby Love,” live, (1964)
- **Listen** to The Shirelles, “Will You Love Me Tomorrow” (1960)

### 10/21: Disco and Women’s Liberation Movement

**Reading:**


**Music:**

- **Watch** Helen Reddy, “I Am Woman (Hear Me Roar)” (1971)
- Chaka Khan, “I’m a Woman (I’m a Backbone)” (1974)
- **Listen to** Chaka Khan, “I’m Every Woman” (1978)
- Donna Summer, “Bad Girls” (1979)

### 10/23: Rap as Social Protest

**Readings:**

- Jeff Chang, *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation*
Music:
• *Watch* Tupac, Speech at the Malcolm X Grassroots Meeting (1992)
• *Listen* to N.W.A., “To Kill the Minority” (1988)
• Public Enemy, “Fight the Power” (1989)
• Tupac feat. Dramacydal, “Me against the World” (1995)
• Rage Against the Machine, “Sleep Now in the Fire” (1999)

**Unit III: Popular Music and the United States in the World**

10/28: Jazz as Cold War Diplomacy

**Take-Home Midterm Essay Due**

Reading:

Music:
- *Listen* to Dave Brubeck and Louis Armstrong, “The Real Ambassadors” (1962) and “Cultural Exchange” (1962)

10/30: Musicals and Transnational Families

Reading:

Music:
• *Watch* selections from *South Pacific* (1958)

11/4: Rock ‘N’ Roll and Transsexuality across Borders

Reading:

Music:

11/6: The British Invasion

Reading:

Music:
• *Watch* The Beatles, Live on the Ed Sullivan Show (2/9/1964)

11/11: Japanizing “American” Music
Reading:

Music:
• Watch Art Blakey and the Messengers, Live in Tokyo, 1961
• Akiyoshi Toshiko Piano Trio, live, 1958

11/13: Music at the US-Mexico border
Reading
• Deborah Vargas, Dissonant Divas in Chicana Music: The Limits of la Onda, 179-215

Music:
• Selena, “Amor Prohibido” (1994)

11/18: Global Hip Hop
Reading:

Music:
• Listen to Dabo, “Hitman” (2002) [Japan]
• Anónimo Consejo, “El Mundo No Se Para” (2011) [Cuba]

11/20: K-Pop in the United States
Reading:

Music:
• Psy, “Gangnam Style” (2012)
• BTS, “DNA” (2017)

11/25: **student presentations**

12/2: **student presentations**

12/4: **student presentations**

12/9: **student presentations**

Exam Period (12/11-12/21): Research Papers Due