



History 125

The Social History of Popular Music in Twentieth Century America



Professor

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Course Subject: The history of popular music is often presented as a sequence of innovations by inspired and inspirational individual artists. The aim of this course, in contrast, is to study popular music in the United States in order to understand significant social, economic and cultural transformations during the past century. We will trace important developments in technology, business, social life, and popular culture through American popular music. Simultaneously, we will discuss how popular music has reflected shifting attitudes about race, region, gender, and class. Particular attention will be devoted to the role that popular music played in the forging of a mass culture that Americans, regardless of class, region, race, and gender, participated in.

COURSE GOALS

Analyze historical events and change

Historians have a distinctive way of thinking about the past. By learning to ask how and why (as well as who, what, where, and when) we will develop our abilities to think “historically.” Our goal is not mere command of “facts,” but rather the capacity to use history to understand how American society has evolved during the past century. Examples of the sorts of historical questions that will arise in this course include: how did the “Great Migration” of African Americans during and after World War One influence popular music? Why have some genres of music been vehicles for women artists while other genres have not? How did changing ideas about masculinity and femininity in the 1950s affect popular music? Arguably the most important question we will address is how music became a central component of American mass culture.

Apply analytical models to historical and cultural change

In order to think critically about the past, we will develop analytical models that we will use to make sense of technological developments, the “music business,” the evolution of musical genres, and the public’s reaction to technological and stylistic changes. Each recitation and lecture will provide us with opportunities to apply these analytical models to specific topics and problems.

Analyze diverse cultural “artifacts”

Our analytical models will be applied to the “artifacts” of the past century, such as sound clips, sheet music, liner notes, lyrics, advertisements, and contemporary music criticism. Our goal, again, is not to compile arcane knowledge about genres, artists, or events in the history of American popular music, but rather to use these “artifacts” to chart and make sense of political, social, cultural, and economic change in twentieth century America.

Demonstrate the “historical way of thinking”

The recitations and written assignments in this course will provide you with an opportunity to hone your skills of critical historical analysis. The measure of success in both recitation and written work will be creativity and precision. The “historical way of thinking” is dynamic, meaning, in other words, that historical events and issues are open to a range of possible interpretation. The best historical thinking takes into account the range of possible interpretations and advances an argument that does the best job of clarifying the significance of an event or issue. It encourages us to see an event or issue in a new light. Good historical thinking requires clear expression, whether orally in recitation or on paper. Our attention to the clarity and precision of your writing is a reflection of the importance we attach to the best possible expression of your ideas.

REQUIRED READING:

Glen Altschuler, All Shook Up: How Rock 'N' Roll Changed America

David W. Stowe, Swing Changes

Elijah Wald, Escaping the Delta: Robert Johnson and the Invention of the Blues

David Wondrich, Stomp and Swerve

Additional reading are available at the course Blackboard site.

COURSE BLACKBOARD SITE

The course Blackboard site is an essential resource for this class. Detailed information about each recitation and assignment, as well as assigned readings and external web links, are available at the course Blackboard site. Recitation music samples and lyrics are also stored on the site. All updates about the class will be posted there. Please consult the site at least weekly in preparation for recitation. If you have difficulty gaining access to the Blackboard site, let us know immediately. You may access the course site at: **<https://blackboard.unc.edu/>**

LISTENING TO MUSIC SAMPLES ON THE COURSE BLACKBOARD SITE

In order to enjoy problem-free listening to this course's music samples make sure that you have Real

Player ver. 10 installed on your computer. You can download Real Player at:
<http://www.freedownloadhq.com/RealPlayer.html>

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING:

Interpretation of Sheet Music Assignment – 15%	DUE DATE: Thursday, September 24
Concert Review – 15%	DUE DATE: Tuesday, October 20
Family Music History – 25%	DUE DATE: Tuesday, December 1
Final Exam – 25%	EXAM DATE: Saturday, December 12, 12pm
Recitation Participation – 15%	
Recitation Reading Quizzes – 5%	

A note on recitation participation – **Recitations are an essential part of this course.** They provide an opportunity for you and your classmates to apply analytical models and the knowledge that you are acquiring in this course to specific topics and issues. Because historical analysis is dynamic and open-ended, shared analysis can generate fresh and deeper insights into a historical problem. Recitations are the setting for just such interactive learning with your classmates and TAs. Your participation, therefore, is important not only for you but also for your fellow students. Each of you is a resource for your peers.

Recitations are intended to provide you with an opportunity to display mastery of the readings and lecture materials. Recitations also provide an opportunity to delve into topics raised in the readings and in lecture in greater detail. In short, recitations are about active learning.

Assessment of recitation participation will be made on the basis of the quality of your contributions. There is no set formula to measure quality participation, but you are likely to make a valuable contribution any time that you advance discussion by directing your peers' attention to a theme that warrants more attention than it received in lecture, the readings, or in recitation. Or you may advance the classes' understanding by offering an alternative reading of a song's lyrics or an argument in the texts. In short, if you prepare for recitation and then engage the class materials and your classmates, you are likely to do well in recitation. We will provide you with a mid-semester assessment of your recitation participation.

We will give quizzes in recitation. The quizzes will test your knowledge of the assigned readings. If you have done the readings you should have no difficulty with the quizzes. The quizzes are intended to provide an incentive to complete the assigned readings in a timely fashion so that you will be prepared to participate actively in recitation.

WEEKLY READING ASSIGNMENTS

WEEK ONE

1) David Wondrich, Stomp and Swerve: American Music Gets Hot, 1843-1924, 1-42

WEEK TWO

1) David Wondrich, Stomp and Swerve: American Music Gets Hot, 1843-1924, 43-113

WEEK THREE

1) David Wondrich, Stomp and Swerve: American Music Gets Hot, 1843-1924, 114-188

WEEK FOUR

1) David Wondrich, Stomp and Swerve: American Music Gets Hot, 1843-1924, 189-240

2) Elijah Wald, Escaping the Delta: Robert Johnson and the Invention of the Blues, 3-42

WEEK FIVE

1) David W. Stowe, Swing Changes: Big-Band Jazz in New Deal America, 17-140

2) Elijah Wald, Escaping the Delta: Robert Johnson and the Invention of the Blues, 70-130

WEEK SIX

1) David W. Stowe, Swing Changes: Big-Band Jazz in New Deal America, 221-245

2) Gary Gerstle, American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century, 128-186

WEEK SEVEN

1) Elijah Wald, Escaping the Delta: Robert Johnson and the Invention of the Blues, 186-276

WEEK EIGHT

WEEK NINE

1) Glen Altschuler, All Shook Up: How Rock 'N' Roll Changed America, 3-129

WEEK TEN

1) Glen Altschuler, All Shook Up: How Rock 'N' Roll Changed America, 130-192

WEEK ELEVEN

- 1) Bryan K. Carman, A Race of Singers: Whitman's Working-Class Hero From Guthrie to Springsteen, 135-163
- 2) Robert Cantwell, When We Were Good: The Folk Revival, 313-381

WEEK TWELVE

- 1) Allen Matusow, The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s, 275-307

WEEK THIRTEEN

- 1) Nelson George, The Death of Rhythm & Blues, 121-170
- 2) Brian Ward, Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness, and Race Relations, 217-252, 388-416

WEEK FOURTEEN

- 1) Bruce Schulman, "*E Pluribus Plures*: From Racial Integration to 'Diversity'", in The Seventies, 53-77
- 2) Bryan K. Carman, A Race of Singers: Whitman's Working-Class Hero From Guthrie to Springsteen, 195-252
- 3) Rachel Rubin, "Sing Me Back Home: Nostalgia, Bakersfield, and Modern Country Music," in Rubin and Melnick, American Popular Music: New Approaches to the Twentieth Century, 93-109

WEEK FIFTEEN

No Assigned Readings

LECTURE AND RECITATION TOPICS

WEEK ONE

Thursday August 25: Introduction – What Popular Music Can Reveal About Twentieth Century America

Thursday August 27: Nineteenth Century American Popular Music and Minstrelsy

Week One Recitation Topic: Introductions and Course Expectations

WEEK TWO

Tuesday September 1: Sheet Music and the Commodification of Popular Music

Thursday September 3: Music in an Age of High and Low Culture, 1880-1910

Week Two Recitation Topic: Critical Approaches to Popular Music

Before attending your recitation, please visit “Making Sense of American Popular Songs,” by Ronald G. Walters and John Spitzer at <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/Songs/>

(The link is available through the external links tab on the course Blackboard site.)

This website offers a productive approach to the historical study of popular music, one that we will apply throughout the remainder of this course. In recitation, be prepared to share your ideas about the challenges involved in tracing the history of popular music. What approaches to the study of popular culture/music have you encountered in the past? What sources do you think are likely to be helpful in clarifying the meaning and impact of popular music? What assumptions do you have about the history of twentieth century American popular music? What are some of the possible challenges in interpreting popular music that we should keep in mind?

WEEK THREE

Tuesday September 8: Ragtime Challenges High Culture, 1900-1920

Thursday September 10: The Social Dance Revolution, 1900-1920

No Recitation

WEEK FOUR

Tuesday September 15: Technological Innovation and the Dissemination of Popular Music, 1890-1920

Thursday September 17: Jazz Challenges High Culture, 1915-1925

Week Four Recitation Topic: Sheet Music and Popular Music

In addition to providing an opportunity to develop our analytical skills, this recitation should help you organize your ideas for your first written assignment.

In this recitation, we will apply the methods that we discussed in the previous recitation to early twentieth century sheet music. Before attending recitation, visit at least one sheet music website and select a theme in or genre of pre-1920 popular music. For example, you might focus on love songs, patriotic songs, or comedic songs. Or you might prefer to select a genre, such as marches, ragtime, or “old time” nostalgia. Or you might select a theme evident in some songs. Pay close attention to both the lyrics and the visual images of the sheet music. If you are musically literate, you can also incorporate the music itself into your analysis.

WEEK FIVE

Tuesday September 22: Blues Singers and Cultural Boundaries During the 1920s

Thursday September 24: “Hillbilly” Music and Cultural Boundaries During the 1920s

First Assignment Due

Week Five Recitation Topic: What Made Music “hot”?

Before attending recitation, listen to the song samples available at the course website. Work on developing your ear so that you can recognize the characteristics of “hot” music. Come to recitation prepared to work on defining the characteristics of “hot” music. What are its tell-tale sounds? What makes some lyrics “hot”? What are some of the other markers of “hot” music? After defining “hot” music we will discuss why the advent of “hot” music and dance was a watershed in twentieth century American popular culture. We will also discuss how the “blues,” no less than jazz, came to define “hot” music.

WEEK SIX

Tuesday September 29: George Gershwin and the Golden Age of the American Standard

Thursday October 1: Swing: America’s Popular Music During the 1930s

Week Six Recitation Topic: Swing, Popular Music, and Shared National Identity

Drawing on both the Stowe and Gerstle readings, we will discuss how popular music, especially swing, contributed to a common culture that bridged racial, ethnic, and class divisions during the 1930s. What characterized swing music? What about swing made it susceptible to or appropriate for incorporation into other genres of music? Did swing fans, regardless of class or ethnicity, share any values or modes of behavior? How much common ground could swing provide the nation’s diverse population?

WEEK SEVEN

Tuesday October 6: Woody Guthrie, Folk, and the Politics of Cultural Dissent During the 1930s-1940s

Thursday October 8: Zoot Suits, Be-Boppers, and Cultural Dissent during the 1940s

Week Seven Recitation Topic: The Concert Experience

This recitation will provide you with an opportunity to sharpen some of your ideas for your second written assignment

Come to recitation prepared to talk about your concert experiences. Among the elements of your concert experiences that you might talk about are performing space, audience, atmosphere, extent

and manifestations of commercialism in the concert setting and performance, performance rituals, and crowd response. You should also give thought to the place of live music in daily life in contemporary America. .

WEEK EIGHT

Tuesday October 13: Technological Innovation and Popular Music , 1945-1960

Thursday October 15: Crossing Over: Country Music in the Age of the Nashville Sound, 1930-1955

No Recitation

WEEK NINE

Tuesday October 20: Black Music in Postwar America

Second Assignment Due

Thursday October 22: **No Class (Fall Break)**

No Recitation

WEEK TEN

Tuesday, October 27: Pop Divas and the Place of Women in Postwar America

Thursday October 29: Elvis, Rock 'n' Roll, and Youth Identity

Week Ten Recitation Topic: Rock 'n' Roll, Conformity, and Dissent in 1950s America

In recitation we will discuss the social, economic, and political context in which rock 'n' roll music emerged. Among the important questions we will consider is why rock 'n' roll was perceived to be dangerous to acceptable values and behavior? To what extent did rock 'n' roll represent a significant manifestation of youth dissent? Was rock 'n' roll an important agent or catalyst for change in American society? In what ways did rock 'n' roll differ from previous forms of popular music (e.g., swing, jazz, blues) that were both controversial and highly popular?

WEEK ELEVEN

Tuesday November 3: Folk Music and the Politics of Authenticity, 1945-1965

Thursday November 5: Jazz and the Politics of Authenticity, 1945-1965

No Recitation

WEEK TWELVE

Tuesday November 10: Rock, the Counterculture, and the Politics of Authenticity

Thursday November 12: The Business of Rock

Week Twelve Recitation Topic: The Pursuit of Authenticity and Idealism in 1960s America

We will explore the meanings attached to artistic expression and “authenticity” in various styles of music during the 1960s. Come to recitation prepared to discuss the ideas about authenticity and about the larger purpose of music that informed popular music during the 1960s. Was there a coherent thread in the apparent alienation expressed by musicians in different genres of music? What was the target of their discontent? Why did they believe that music was peculiarly suited to expressing and redressing their discontent? What did they feel was the proper relationship of the artist/musician to mainstream society? Did musicians during the 1960s presume too much of their music and its impact? Is “authenticity” still a valued attribute of contemporary popular musicians?

WEEK THIRTEEN

Tuesday November 17: The Business of Rock, Part II

Thursday November 19: Black Music and the Politics of Race in the Age of Rock, 1965-1980

No Recitation

WEEK FOURTEEN

Tuesday November 24: Outlaws and Country Divas

Thursday November 26: **No Class (Thanksgiving holiday)**

No Recitation

WEEK FIFTEEN

Tuesday December 1: Popular Music and the Fragmentation of American Mass Culture since the 1970s

Third Assignment Due

Thursday, December 3: Popular Music and the Fragmentation of American Mass Culture since the 1970s, Part II

Week Fifteen Recitation Topic: The Declension of Rock and the Possibilities of Popular Music

This recitation is an opportunity to discuss major themes of the course and to engage in freewheeling analysis and synthesis. How much and in what ways can popular music be a vehicle for dissent? Is popular music ultimately a commodity that by definition cannot be a vehicle for

profound or enduring creative expression? Or is popular music an exceptional venue in which marginal groups in the United States have a greater voice than in most other arenas? Come to recitation prepared to discuss your ideas and to work collectively to find answers to these questions.

WEEK SIXTEEN

Tuesday, December 8: Final Review

FINAL EXAM

Thursday December 11, 12pm

COURSE POLICIES

- 1) You will need to attend recitation in order to develop the skills and knowledge that will determine your final grade in this course. In addition, your participation is important not only for you but also for your fellow students. Consequently, more than one (1) absence for any reason may affect your final grade (up to a full letter grade reduction). Request permission to be absent from your TA.
- 2) You will need to complete the assigned reading(s) before each recitation so that you can share your ideas with your fellow students and contribute to the common learning experience. Because we believe that sharing is important to the goals of this course, part of your recitation grade will reflect our assessment of how well you prepared for recitation. If deemed necessary, pop quizzes will be used to encourage good work habits.
- 3) Recitations work best when students engage a problem together and discuss collectively how to make sense of it. In this context, you should feel empowered to engage in intellectual risk taking and educated guessing. Our hope is that most, if not all, of the recitations will inspire you to participate easily and with confidence. With that goal in mind, you should respect the ideas of all participants. If you have difficulty participating for whatever reason, you should discuss the matter with your TA and/or with me.
- 4) Written assignments are due on the assigned day. I have adopted this policy in the interest of fairness and so that all students labor under the same expectations and constraints. In addition, the TAs have busy lives and late assignments can interfere with their own work and other obligations. Extensions may be granted, but only as circumstances warrant. Late assignments will be penalized 1/3 of a letter grade per day.

PLAGIARISM POLICIES

The UNC Honor Court defines plagiarism as "the deliberate or reckless representation of another's words, thoughts, or ideas as one's own without attribution in connection with submission of academic work, whether graded or otherwise." (Instrument of Student Judicial Governance, Section II.B.1.).

We take plagiarism very seriously and will impose appropriate sanctions when we identify instances of plagiarism in this course. If you are unclear about what practices constitute plagiarism, we will be glad to discuss the topic with you. We also strongly encourage you to visit the Writing Center's website where you can learn more about plagiarism and how to avoid it. Visit <http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/plagiarism.html>

Interpretation of Sheet Music Essay
DUE DATE: Thursday, September 24 in class
LENGTH: 1250-1500 words
15% of Final Grade

Assignment objective:

Apply the method of analysis that you discussed during the Week Two recitation to turn-of-the-twentieth-century sheet music

This assignment will allow you to offer your analysis of some of the questions and issues that we discussed in the Week Three recitation.

To complete this assignment you should:

Visit the Lester S. Levy Collection of Sheet Music linked to the class website (the same site that we visited prior to the Week Three recitation).

Select a theme in sheet music published between 1890 and 1920 that interests you. You might focus on a specific thematic genre, such as love songs, patriotic songs, nostalgic “old home” songs, or comedic songs. Or you might prefer a musical genre, such as marches, ragtime, or waltzes. Or you might select a topic evident in the lyrics from various genres, such as “home,” love, women, men, racial stereotypes, ethnic characteristics, or crime.

Suggestions for completing this assignment:

In this brief assignment, you will be able to discuss only a very few examples of whatever theme or topic you have selected. An essay of this length should have a strong opening paragraph in which you state the focus of your essay and your conclusions. Given the length of this assignment, you’ll probably only have space for between three and five paragraphs illustrating your argument before your conclusion. Therefore you should select a topic that allows you to avoid sweeping generalizations based on only a few examples of sheet music. Instead, address a topic that is appropriate for a short essay. Whereas, for example, the topic of women in sheet music is almost certainly far too large for an essay of this length, the topic of “mother” may be ideal.

Whatever topic/theme you select, be sure to discuss both the lyrics and the visual images of the sheet music that you have viewed.

Don’t hesitate to ask your TA or me for advice either while selecting your theme or writing your essay.

Concert Review Essay
DUE DATE: Tuesday October 20 in class
LENGTH:1250-1500 words
15% of Final Grade

Assignment objective:

Apply the method of analysis that you have used in recitation and your first essay assignment to a contemporary concert.

Conceive of this project as an exercise in music ethnography. We encourage you to observe and assess a concert not as an aesthetic experience but rather as a social ritual and commercial enterprise. Your aesthetic evaluation is not irrelevant, but it is the context of the performance that this assignment focuses on. The social ritual of concerts is manifest in the attire of the audience, their behavior, and the traditions of crowd response. Audiences at Wynton Marsallis, Phish, Alan Jackson, and Joan Baez concerts all have distinctive modes of behavior. Similarly, the settings for and commercialization of these concerts vary significantly. If you attend a concert with the eye of an ethnographer, you may develop a deeper appreciation of how audiences experience performed music and how music is marketed to its audiences. In short, a single concert may provide a revealing moment in which the composition of an audience, the venue of performance, and the relationship between audience and musicians exposes many of the larger themes about American popular culture.

To complete this assignment you should:

Attend either a concert devoted to a genre of music that you do not commonly listen to or a concert in an unfamiliar venue. We propose these two options so that you will be able to observe the performance, audience, and setting with a fresh, analytical perspective. However, the choice of the concert is entirely up to you. And keep in mind that you need not attend a commercial concert. A church revival, a free concert, or a high school music recital are just a few on the “non-commercial” concert settings you might attend.

Suggestions for completing this assignment:

When conceiving of your class presentation and essay regarding the concert, consider the following questions and/or topics.

First, pay attention to the audience. Who constitutes the audience (class, race, gender, etc.)? Are there stylized behaviors associated with the audience (e.g., Deadheads, Buffett’s “Parrot Heads,” panty-throwing women at Tom Jones’ concerts)? How does the audience comport itself? Is the music the center of attention or just a part of a broader social experience (e.g., sedate jazz audience, the lawn behavior at a large outdoor concert, the antics in the mosh pit at a neo-punk show)?

Second, pay attention to the market aspects of the performance. Where and how large is the venue? How was the concert advertised? How conspicuous is the “commercialization” of the experience (e.g., rock tours sponsored by multinational corporations vs. gospel groups performing in churches)?

Third, what are the apparent conventions of interaction between musician and audience? Is there a clear distance between artist and audience? In what ways is the audience incorporated and/or acknowledged by the musicians (besides the obvious acknowledgment of applause)?

This assignment will enable you and the class to better understand what role concerts play in satisfying the needs and desires of audiences. Virtually all audiences want to be “transported” by music, but different audiences expect to be transported in different ways. Understanding these differences is one important step in understanding the varieties of musical tradition in the United States and their connection to the nation’s history.

Family Music History
DUE DATE: Tuesday December 1 in class
LENGTH: 1500-1750 words
25% of Final Grade

Assignment objective:

To apply the analytical models used previously in this course to trace the role of music and the music preferences of your ancestors.

Your charge is to reconstruct the music performance and music listening habits of your parents, grand parents, and ancestors. This assignment offers an opportunity to situate your family in the history that we have traced in this course.

To complete this assignment you should:

Discuss your idea(s) with your TA. You may also find it helpful to discuss your research with Professor Brundage. Because this essay is a significant component of your grade it is important for you to take the assignment seriously and to begin work on it sooner rather than later.

Identify the music listening habits of your parents. What role did (does) popular music play in their lives? What role did it play at different stages of their lives? Are live performances an important aspect of their music listening? If so, what sort of venues? How did your parents relate to their parents' (your grandparents') music? Apply these same questions to your grandparents.

Suggestions for completing this assignment:

This assignment is intended to provide you with an opportunity to apply all of the analytical/interpretative skills that you have developed during this semester. But in addition to the normal text-based sources that we routinely use in history essays – books, journal articles, magazines, newspapers, etc. – we also want you to incorporate oral history into your research.

The point of this exercise is not a compilation of arcane information about your parents' and grandparents' music preferences, but rather to identify how your ancestors created and consumed popular music. In what ways was your parents' and grandparents' participation in American popular music culture typical or atypical of the trends and history that we have traced in this course. In addition, another aim of this assignment is to provide you with a deeper understanding of the extent and the manner in which your relationship to popular culture differs from that of your ancestors.

Checklist for Written Assignments

This checklist is intended to help you write the best possible essay. If you pay attention to each of the points listed on this checklist, you will produce a clear, crisp, and forceful essay. If you are unsure of any of the points on the checklist, by all means discuss your concerns with either your TA or Professor Brundage. We're eager to help you hone your prose skills.

- 1) Is there a clearly stated thesis at the beginning of your opening paragraph? _____
- 2) Does every paragraph begin with a strong topic sentence? (The content of each paragraph should be obvious from the first sentence of each paragraph.) _____
- 3) Does every paragraph logically lead to the next? (Avoid abrupt paragraph transitions.) _____
- 4) Does the essay have an effective conclusion? _____
- 5) Is the prose of the essay clear, concise, and free of needless verbiage? _____
- 6) Do you generally use the active voice rather than the passive voice? (Avoid sentences constructions with the passive voice. For example, avoid writing "The blacks were savagely beaten" when you can write "The white policemen savagely beat the black protesters." The passive voice obscures who is acting upon whom.) _____
- 7) Are the antecedents to the pronouns in your essay clear? (Avoid using pronouns when the preceding noun that the pronoun refers to is not clear.) _____
- 8) Have you proofread the essay to eliminate typographical errors, misspellings, and errors of punctuation? _____
- 9) Are the pages numbered? _____
- 10) Is your name prominently displayed on your essay? _____