

COMM 307 | SOUND CLASH

POPULAR MUSIC AND AMERICAN CULTURE

Professor Josh Kun

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 11-12:30

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Course Objective:

This course asks students to interrogate the idea of America and American identity through the comparative study of popular music. We will use music as a method for exploring issues of race and ethnicity in the constitution of American culture and in the making and unmaking of the American self. This is NEITHER a linear and comprehensive history of American music NOR is it a musicology course with attention to musical formalism and technique. Rather, it emphasizes music as inter-cultural communication, a living cultural space where ethnic, racial, national, and sexual identities are both formed and de-formed. While focusing on major musical movements throughout the 20th century (minstrelsy, blues, jazz, corridos, salsa, rock, punk, hip hop), we will root our thinking through several key critical rubrics: performance, community, memory, affect, and technology. What is music's role in the construction of "America" as a geopolitical idea as well as the notion of transnational, inter-American identities? We will also pay particular attention to the role of the music industry itself. How has the music industry changed from the days of vaudeville to the days of Myspace? Central themes considered all semester long will include immigration, assimilation, citizenship, and patriotism.

Learning Outcomes:

Students completing this course will learn:-how to think critically about popular music as sound and culture, with an emphasis on community, performance, history, and affect-the theoretical tools and concepts needed to understand popular music as sound, technology, industry, and culture-how to analyze the impact of popular music in the communication of racial and ethnic meanings and identities; how to study race and ethnicity as musical performances and structures-how to write about the role of music in their own lives and in the daily lives of others.

Required Texts:

Leroi Jones, *Blues People* (New York: Morrow, 1963)

Charles Mingus, *Beneath The Underdog* (New York: Vintage, 1991)

All Other Essays available on Blackboard

Course requirements/grading:

-mid-term paper 4-6 pp (30%)

-final project (30%)

-2 short music essays (15% each)—personal songbook & live review-- details TBA in class

-weekly reading/blog posts (10%); blog posts due by beginning of Thursday class each week

General Policies:

1. Attendance: Habitual tardiness and absence will result in a lower grade. More than 3 unexcused absences will result in failure of the course. If you must miss class, please let me know in advance. You will not, however, be excused from preparing the assignments.

2. Deadlines: Papers and assignments are due at the beginning of class. Unless I have granted an extension, I will grade late papers down 1/3 of a grade for each class period passed. I will not accept any papers more than one week late.

3. Format: All written assignments must be typed, double-spaced with one-inch margins, paginated and stapled (please do not use folders or report covers). Please use MLA format as outlined in *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (fifth edition).

Academic Integrity:

When taking this class, you enter into a contract that states that all the work you are turning in is your own and no one else's, and that you have not turned in any work for which you have received credit in another class. The appropriation of the ideas and/or words of others without proper citation is a serious violation. When citing texts in a paper, please use MLA format. The School of Communication is

committed to the highest standards of academic excellence and ethical support. It endorses and acts on the USC campus policies and procedures detailed in the section titled "University Sanction Guidelines." These policies, procedures and guidelines will be assiduously upheld. They protect your rights, as well as those of the faculty. It is particularly important that you be aware of and avoid plagiarism, cheating on exams, submitting a paper to more than one professor, or submitting a paper authored by anyone other than yourself. Violations of this policy will result in a failing grade in the course, and be reported to the Office of Student Conduct. If you have any doubts about any of these practices, you must confer with the professor.

Disability Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.- 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213)740-0776.

SCHEDULE OF LECTURES & READINGS

Blurred Lines

8/27 An Introduction to Critical Listening: Summertime Blues

8/29 An Introduction to Critical Listeners: Bob Dylan, from *Chronicles*; Questlove, from *Mo Metta Blues*; Michael Ventura, "The DNA of Pop"

Empire States of Mind

9/3 Simon Frith, "The Industrialization of Popular Music"; Ron Eyerman & Andrew Jamison, "Structures of Feeling and Cognitive Praxis"

9/5 Theodor Adorno, "On Popular Music"; Simon Frith, "Music and Identity"

New Slaves

9/10 Leroi Jones, *Blues People* ("Introduction" & Chapters 1 & 3)

9/12 Leroi Jones, *Blues People* (Chapters 4-6)

SONGBOOK ASSIGNMENT DUE

Mirrors

9/17 David Wondrich, "Minstrelsy, or get Out de Way" (20 pp.); Ralph Ellison, "Change the Yoke and Slip the Joke"

9/19 Robert Snyder, "Taming the Bowery Boys;" Krystyn R. Moon, "The Rise of Chinese and Chinese American Vaudevillians 1900-1920s" JAZZ SINGER
SCREENING TBA

After the Ball

9/24 David Suisman, "When Songs Became a Business"

9/26 John Szwed, "Improvisation, Composition, and Arranging"; "1900-1925 New Orleans;" "Beyond New Orleans"; John Storm Roberts, "The Foundations"

Swing Low, Sweet Cadillac

10/1 *Blues People*, Chapter 10

10/3 *Blues People*, Chapter 12

Freedom

10/8 Charles Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*

10/10 Charles Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*

I Don't Want Nobody to Give Me Nothing (Open up the Door I'll Get It Myself)

10/15 MIDTERM DUE; in class screening: *The Night James Brown Saved Boston*

10/17 Alice Walker, "Nineteen Fifty-Five;" "The Kingsmen and the Cha Cha Cha"

People Have the Power

10/22 Craig Werner, from *A Change is Gonna Come*; Anthony Heilbut, "Aretha: How She Got Over"

10/24 Simon Frith and Angela McRobbie, "Rock and Sexuality"; Patti Smith, from *Just Kids*; Tavi Gevinson, "Just Kidding Love Sucks: Notes on Taylor Swift"

Gente Batallosa

10/29 Americo Paredes, "The Legend," "The Corrido On The Border"

10/31 Sam Quinones, "The Ballad of Chalino Sanchez"; Josh Kun, "Death Rattle"

SELENA SCREENING TBA

Hips Don't Lie

11/5 Jenni Rivera, from *Unbreakable*; Lydia Mendoza & La Familia Mendoza, "La Alondra de la Frontera"

11/7 Maria Elena Cepeda, "Shakira as the Idealized, Transnational Citizen;" Ricky Martin, from *Me*

Last Night A DJ Saved My Life

11/12 Alice Echols, "One and Oneness in Gay Disco"

11/14 Mambo to Hip Hop Screening; LIVE REVIEW ASSIGNMENT DUE

Fear of a Black Planet

11/19 Tricia Rose, "All Aboard the Night Train: "Flow, Layering, and Rupture in Postindustrial New York

11/21 Jeff Chang, "The Culture Assassins"; "Kendrick Lamar and the Post-Hip Hop Generation"

Watch the Throne

11/26 Jay-Z, from *Decoded*

11/28 THANKSGIVING

Hot Cheetos & Takis

12/3 Isaac Miller, "Who Runs The World?: On Beyonce, Sampling, Race, and Power;" NPR Code Switch: "When Our Kids Run America"

<http://apps.npr.org/codeswitch-changing-races/>

12/5 Final Issues