

**COMM 307**  
**SOUND CLASH**  
**Popular Music and American Culture**

Spring 2018, (4.0 units)  
Tue./Thurs., 12:30 - 1:50 pm  
Wallis Annenberg Hall, ANN 309  
USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism

**Instructor:** Perry B. Johnson

**Office:** [Kerckhoff Hall](#), KER 211, 734 W. Adams Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90007

**Office Hours:** Wednesdays, 10 am - 1 pm, and by appointment

**Email:** [pjohnso@usc.edu](mailto:pjohnso@usc.edu)

*Please note: I work to reply to email within 24 hours during the week (Mon. - Fri.) and 48 hours over the weekend (Sat. & Sun.). Unless urgent, please allow for this time to pass before sending a follow-up email.*

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**Course Description:**

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, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality 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 intercultural communication, a living cultural space where ethnic, racial, national, gender and sexual identities are both formed and de-formed. While focusing on major musical movements throughout the twentieth--and into the twenty-first--century (minstrelsy, blues, jazz, *corridos*, salsa, rock, punk, hip hop, pop, etc.), we will root our thinking through several key critical rubrics: Performance, community, activism/protest, industry, memory, affect, power, and technology. This course is guided by the following key questions: 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 today? Central themes considered all semester long will include immigration, assimilation, citizenship, and patriotism. Together, we will learn to listen critically to the music that shapes the experiences of who we think we are, as well as impacts our engagement with and socio-cultural understandings of particular historical and political moments.

This course will mix lectures, listening/viewing activities, class discussions, student presentations and collaborations, guest speakers, and at least one (1) required off-campus exhibition visit (additional, optional off-campus visits will be scheduled and announced throughout the semester, which you are strongly encouraged to attend). You will be required to actively and critically read, listen to, and engage with course material, and to focus on developing your research and analytical skills. There are several writing assignments for this course, in addition to weekly reading response blogs, so it is critical that you work to keep up

with the assigned course reading schedule, submit assignments on time, and attend class regularly.

### **Learning Objectives:**

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 gender, and racialized and gendered 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.

### **Course Spotify [Playlist](#)**

### **Course YouTube [Playlist](#)**

### **Required Texts:**

1. *Blues People*, LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka (New York: Morrow, 1963)
2. *Beneath the Underdog*, Charles Mingus (New York: Vintage, 1991)

All other assigned readings will be posted to the course Blackboard under “Content.”

*Blues People* is available to purchase at the USC Bookstore, or through a vendor of your choice. *Beneath the Underdog* was not ordered through the USC bookstore, so you will need to acquire a copy of this text on your own. If you are looking to support a local, community bookstore, please consider [Eso Won Books](#) or [The Last Bookstore](#).

### **Course Requirements and Grade Breakdown:**

<b>Participation</b>	<b>(10%)</b>
<i>Not based solely on in-class participation or attendance</i>	
<b>Weekly blog posts</b>	<b>(10%)</b>
<i>Due Wednesdays by 10 pm, beginning Week 2</i>	
<b>Reading presentation</b>	<b>(5%)</b>
<i>Sign-up for presentations will be distributed Week 2; presentations begin Week 3</i>	
<b>Songbook essay</b>	<b>(15%)</b>
<b>Analytical essay</b>	<b>(20%)</b>
<b>Critical Playlist essay</b>	<b>(20%)</b>
<b>Final project</b>	<b>(20%)</b>

In order to pass the class, **ALL** assignments must be completed. Failure to complete **one or more** will result in an “F” in the course.

All assignment prompts/instructions will be posted on Blackboard under “Assignments” and will be discussed individually in class.

**Weekly blog posts are due Wednesdays by 10 pm** (beginning Week 2, January 17). NO late blog posts will be accepted. Blogs should be submitted via Blackboard (“Tools” > “Discussion Board” > “Blog #”).

### **General Policies:**

- 1. Attendance:** Active participation and engaged discussions and debates are central to the success and development of this course. Repeated tardiness and multiple absences will detract from our collective learning experience, and your individual success, in class. Please come to class on time and prepared to participate. **You are allowed two (2) unexcused absences;** for *each* additional unexcused absence, half ( $\frac{1}{2}$ ) a grade will be deducted from your final grade in the course. Please note: You are responsible for the material covered in any class you miss.
- 2. Participation:** Your participation is key. The participation grade for this course will not be based solely on attendance; instead, it will take into consideration your attendance along with in-class participation, office hour meetings, and a live performance blog post (more details will be distributed in class). Each week, I will call on a selection of you to discuss key ideas/insights from your weekly reading blogs, so please come prepared ready to discuss your observations/connections/responses. If you have any concerns or questions about the course, please reach out to me as soon as possible; I understand unforeseen conflicts arise and I will work with you to ensure your success in the course, but such matters cannot be resolved at the end of the semester.
- 3. Class Atmosphere and Discussion:** I am committed to working to ensure that our time together is generative and engaging and that our classroom remains a respectful and open space for the exchange of diverse opinions, ideas, and perspectives. Disagreements are welcome, and can indeed lead to productive and informed discussions and debates, but disrespect or hostility of any kind will not be tolerated. Please work with me to ensure that this class is a mutually supportive space for the expression of differing ideas, values, and beliefs.
- 4. Assignment Deadlines:** The deadline for each assignment will be specified in the corresponding prompt (all posted on Blackboard under “Assignments”). When submitting assignments, please be sure to **budget time for potential technology issues and save your Turnitin confirmation emails as proof of submission.** Late papers will receive a one-third ( $\frac{1}{3}$ ) grade reduction for each day late (including weekends). Extensions on assignments must be granted and approved by me in advance of the assignment deadline. Please do not wait until the end of the semester to sort things out.
- 5. Assignment Format:** All written assignments must be typed in 12-point font, double-spaced, and have 1-inch margins. Please make sure to spell-check and proofread all papers for spelling and grammar. All assignments should include a “Works Cited” (including for music/media examples), page numbers, and follow a style guide consistently for citations and references (e.g., APA or MLA). For a helpful style guide/writing reference, see [Purdue’s OWL](#). Assignments should be submitted via

Turnitin under “Assignments” in the course Blackboard. Assignments should be saved and submitted in .doc or .docx format, so I may return your graded papers to you with feedback and comments in “Track Changes.”

6. **Technology in the Classroom:** We live in a digital age; indeed, the development of sonic technologies and the digital creation/dissemination of popular music will be an integral part of this course. I will, at times, ask you to conduct online searches for information using your personal laptops, and to collaborate on mini-projects with classmates during lecture. However, technology can also become a distraction--both for you as well as others in the class. I welcome the use of laptops, tablets, and other appropriate note-taking technologies. Phone use of any kind in class is prohibited (in the case of an emergency, please alert me ahead of time). The temptation to check email, social media, messenger, text messages, etc. is strong (I am with you on this), but please respect our time together in class; we have less than three hours together each week, so please join me in committing this time to our course discussions, engagement with lecture material, and the relevant texts and media examples at hand. (You will be provided with ample opportunity to incorporate technologies/social media in your weekly blog posts and course assignments.)

### **Course Grading Policy:**

I will work to grade and return all assignments to you with feedback within two (2) weeks of submission; all graded assignments will be returned to you individually via your USC email. Papers will be evaluated on the clarity and development of their thesis and central arguments, use of clearly-cited evidence from appropriate course readings (and supporting external sources, as relevant), depth of analysis, and critical engagement with/consideration of the topics at-hand. If you have concerns regarding a grade on a specific assignment, you must appeal the grade in writing within one (1) week of receiving your graded assignment from me. Your appeal must state why/how you feel your grade is inaccurate, providing specific examples. No appeals will be accepted for assignments submitted late, or after the one-week appeal deadline. Paper revisions/resubmissions will be reviewed and approved on a case-by-case basis, and must include an in-person meeting with me to discuss the relevant assignment.

For assistance with written assignments, I strongly encourage you to visit and take advantage of resources and services provided by [The Writing Center](#) at USC.

Grades will be assigned according to the following breakdown:

A/A-	Outstanding, thoughtful, and enthusiastic work
B+/B	Above average work, demonstrating good insight into assignment
B-/C+	Needs improvement on ideas, argument, and follow-through
C and below	Fulfills the bare minimum/misses the mark, showing little understanding of material

Each assignment will be worth 100 points and will be converted to a percentage score, depending upon the weight assigned to each. Your percentage scores on the assignments will be totaled and translated to a letter grade per the scale detailed below:

A = 100 - 94	C = 76 - 74
A- = 93 - 90	C- = 73 - 70
B+ = 89 - 87	D+ = 69 - 67
B = 86 - 84	D = 66 - 64
B- = 83 - 80	D- = 63 - 60
C+ = 79 - 77	F = 59 - 0

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## **Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems**

### **Statement for Students with Disabilities**

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 (or to TA) 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. Website for DSP and contact information: (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 740-6948 (TDD only), (213) 740-8216 (FAX) [ability@usc.edu](mailto:ability@usc.edu).

### **Statement on Academic Integrity**

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. [SCampus](#), the Student Guidebook, contains the University Student Conduct Code (see University Governance, Section 11.00), while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A.

### **Emergency Preparedness/Course Continuity in a Crisis**

In case of a declared emergency if travel to campus is not feasible, USC executive leadership will announce an electronic way for instructors to teach students in their residence halls or homes using a combination of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technologies. See the university's site on [Campus Safety and Emergency Preparedness](#).

### **Academic Conduct:**

Plagiarism – presenting someone else's ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Part B, Section 11, "Behavior Violating University Standards" [policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b](http://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b). Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

## **Support Systems:**

### ***Student Counseling Services (SCS) – (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call***

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

[engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling](http://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling)

### ***National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 1 (800) 273-8255***

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. [www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

### ***Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) – (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call***

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. [engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp](http://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp)

### ***Sexual Assault Resource Center***

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: [sarc.usc.edu](http://sarc.usc.edu)

### ***Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086***

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. [equity.usc.edu](http://equity.usc.edu)

### ***Bias Assessment Response and Support***

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. [studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support](http://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support)

### ***The Office of Disability Services and Programs***

Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. [disability.usc.edu](http://disability.usc.edu)

### ***Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710***

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. [studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa](http://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa)

### ***Diversity at USC***

Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. [diversity.usc.edu](http://diversity.usc.edu)

### ***USC Emergency Information***

Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible. [emergency.usc.edu](http://emergency.usc.edu)

***USC Department of Public Safety – UPC: (213) 740-4321 – HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24-hour emergency or to report a crime.*** Provides overall safety to USC community. [dps.usc.edu](http://dps.usc.edu)

## **Course Schedule and Assigned Readings**

*Please note: The schedule is subject to change to accommodate guest speakers and off-site course visits, as well as current events/developments related to course material. I will notify you of any changes if and as they arise; **please check the reading schedule and content on Blackboard regularly.***

*All readings should be completed by the class for which they are assigned.*

### **Week 1**

#### **Tues., Jan. 9: An Introduction to Critical Listening**

1. Daphne A. Brooks, "How #BlackLivesMatter Started a Musical Revolution"
2. Ann Powers, "Should Anyone Expect Pop Stars to Lead the Resistance?"
3. Ann Powers, "A New Canon: In Pop Music, Women Belong at the Center of the Story"

#### **Thurs., Jan. 11: An Introduction to Music and Communication**

1. Stan Denski, "One Step Up and Two Steps Back: A Heuristic Model for Popular Music and Communication Research"
2. Jonathan Sterne, "There is No Music Industry"

### **Week 2**

#### **Tues., Jan 16: The Musician as Cultural Theorist**

1. Bob Dylan, excerpt from *Chronicles*
2. Questlove, excerpt from *Mo Metta Blues*
3. Michael Venture, "The DNA of Pop"

#### **Thurs., Jan 18: Industry, Identity, and Power, Part I**

1. Simon Frith, "The Industrialization of Popular Music"
2. Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, "Structures of Feeling and Cognitive Praxis"

### **Week 3**

#### **Tues., Jan. 23: Industry, Identity, and Power, Part II**

1. Theodor Adorno, "On Popular Music"
2. Simon Frith, "Music and Identity"

#### **Thurs., Jan 25: Black Music and the Legacy of Slavery, Part I**

1. LeRoi Jones, *Blues People* (Introduction, Chapter 1, and Chapter 3)

### **Week 4**

#### **Tues., Jan. 30: Black Music and the Legacy of Slavery, Part II**

1. LeRoi Jones, *Blues People* (Chapters 4, 5, and 6)

#### **Thurs., Feb. 1: The Minstrel Mask**

1. David Wondrich, "Minstrelsy, or Get Out de Way"
2. Ralph Ellison, "Change the Yoke and Slip the Joke"
3. **SONGBOOK ASSIGNMENT DUE**

## Week 5

### **Tues., Feb. 6: The Vaudeville Mask**

1. Robert Snyder, "Taming the Bowery Boys"
2. Krystyn R. Moon, "The Rise of Chinese and Chinese American Vaudevillians, 1900 - 1920s"

### **Thurs., Feb. 8: Jazz Up North: Tin Pan Alley Days**

1. David Suisman, "When Songs Became a Business"

## Week 6

### **Tues., Feb. 13: Jazz Down South: New Orleans**

1. Greg Tate, "Why Jazz Will Always Be Relevant"
2. John Szwed, "1900 - 1925 New Orleans"
3. Matt Sakakeeny, "Onward and Upward"
4. In class screening: Excerpts from Ken Burns' PBS documentary, *JAZZ*

### **Thurs., Feb. 15: Swing: From Verb to Noun to Verb**

1. LeRoi Jones, *Blues People* (Chapter 10)

## Week 7

### **Tues., Feb. 20: Bebop: From Verb to Noun to Verb**

1. LeRoi Jones, *Blues People* (Chapter 12)

### **Thurs., Feb. 22: The Race of Rock**

1. Alice Walker, "Nineteen Fifty Five"
2. Ned Sublette, "The Kingsmen & the Cha Cha Cha"

## Week 8

### **Tues., Feb. 27: Autobiographies of Music, Race, and Power, Part I**

1. Charles Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, Part I

### **Thurs., Mar. 1: Autobiographies of Music, Race, and Power, Part II**

1. Charles Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, Part II

## Week 9

### **Tues., Mar. 6: There's a Riot Goin' On: Songs for Change, Part I**

1. Craig Werner, excerpt from *A Change is Gonna Come*
2. Anthony Heilbut, "Aretha: How She Got Over"

### **Thurs., Mar. 8: There's a Riot Goin' On: Songs for Change, Part II**

1. In-class screening: *The Night James Brown Saved Boston*
2. **ANALYTICAL ASSIGNMENT DUE**

**SPRING BREAK**



## Week 10

### **Tues., Mar. 20: Music, Gender, and Power, Part I**

1. Simon Frith and Angela McRobbie, "Rock and Sexuality"
2. Patti Smith, excerpt from *Just Kids*
3. Tavi Gevinson, "Just Kidding Love Sucks: Notes on Taylor Swift"
4. Jessica Hopper, excerpt from *The First Collection of Criticism by a Living Female Rock Critic*
5. Gayle Wald, "I Want it That Way"
6. "The Story of Feminist Punk in 33 Songs"

### **Thurs., Mar. 22: Music, Gender, and Power, Part II**

1. *Selena* (please screen in advance of class)
2. Jenni Rivera, excerpts from *Unbreakable*
3. Lydia Mendoza & La Familia Mendoza, "La Alondra de la Frontera"
4. Deb Paredez, "Remembering Selena, Re-Membering Latinidad"

## Week 11

### **Tues., Mar. 27: The *Corrido* of America, Part I**

1. Americo Paredes, "The Legend" and "The Corrido on the Border"

### **Thurs., Mar. 29: The *Corrido* of America, Part II**

1. Sam Quinones, "The Ballad of Chalino Sanchez"
2. Josh Kun, "Death Rattle"

## Week 12

### **Tues., Apr. 3: The Latin Tinge: Heard and Unheard**

1. Josh Kun, excerpt from *The Tide Was Always High*
2. Murray Forman, "Maracas, Congas, & Castanets"
3. Ricky Martin, excerpt from *Me*

### **Thurs., Apr. 5: Love Will Save the Day**

1. Alice Echols, "One and Oneness in Gay Disco"
2. Luis Alfaro, "Circus Disco"
3. Justin Torres, "In Praise of Latin Night at the Queer Club"

## Week 13

### **Tues., Apr. 10: South Bronx, Part I**

1. In-class screening: *Mambo to Hip Hop*
2. **CRITICAL PLAYLIST ASSIGNMENT DUE**

### **Thurs., Apr. 12: South Bronx, Part II**

1. Tricia Rose, "All Aboard the Night Train: Flow, Layering and Rupture in Postindustrial New York"

## Week 14

### **Tues., Apr. 17: South Los Angeles**

1. Jeff Chang, “The Culture Assassins” and “Kendrick Lamar and the Post-Hip Hop Generation”

**Thurs., Apr. 19: Watch the Throne**

1. Jay-Z, from *Decoded*
2. Isaac Miller, “Who Runs the World?: On Beyoncé, Sampling, Race, and Power”
3. NPR Code Switch, “When Our Kids Run America”

**Week 15**

**Tues., Apr. 24 - TBD**

**Thurs., Apr. 26 - TBD**

1. Live Performance Blog - LAST day to submit by the start of class (12:30 pm)

**FINAL PROJECT - Due: Wednesday, May 9 by 4 pm.**

- **NO** late projects will be accepted.
- (All final projects can be submitted electronically; you do not need to attend class on the day of the final exam.)