# Songs Of Resistance

**(Syllabus Subject to Change)**

*GESM 110, Seminar in the Arts (GE-A)*

Semester: Fall 2023
Location: DMC 152
Instructor: James Clements
Instructor Meetings: On Zoom, by request.
Email: jamescle@usc.edu

**Course Description:** This course explores the history of political song in order to explore an important question: Can art change the world? Popular music is a particularly useful avenue to explore this question, as it is considerably cheaper to produce and distribute than film, placing it in the reach of almost all interested creators; it is also less exclusive and requires less formal education than fine art and literature, which allows it to reach a wider audience.

It is because of this accessibility to both creator and consumer that the popular music of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has largely been the creation of oppressed peoples, those without a voice in other forms of media: rock and roll grew out of the musical traditions of formerly enslaved people; punk and post-punk from the impoverished council estates in the UK; disco and electronic dance music was born in underground clubs of the LGBTQ+ communities; hip hop was the result of block parties in American inner-cities.

While much of this music was created to fill dance clubs and provide escape, these communities also knew this was the only mainstream outlet where their voices could be heard. So -- sometimes obliquely and sometimes directly -- they would use their creations to share their anger, speak their mind, unite their communities, and fight their battles.

This class will explore these "protest songs" both historically and conceptually. Towards the former end, we will move through the history of resistance in the English-speaking world (and beyond), from the socialist worker's union music of Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger to the multimedia spectacles of Beyonce and Kendrick Lamar, tracing the ways in which form and content respond to the changing textures of culture and politics. And, as we go, we will look towards the bigger questions that have ramifications beyond this particular genre: What is art *for*? Can (and should) it make visible change in the world? If so, how?

**Content Warning:** Because the music we'll be looking at is tied inextricably to the great injustices of recent history, much of the subject matter we'll be considering is likely to elicit strong emotional and personal reactions. We will discuss difficult subjects including, but not limited to, racially-motivated violence and rape and sexual abuse. We will also be studying songs that use controversial language, such as the "n-word." It is essential that we approach these topics with sensitivity, open-mindedness, and a commitment to understanding the context and implications of the material. As a class, we will strive to create a safe and inclusive learning environment where everyone's experiences and perspectives are valued, and where respectful dialogue enables us to engage with these challenging issues thoughtfully and constructively.

If you have any concerns, I encourage you to talk to me about them. If there is a class you believe you will find too upsetting to attend, you are welcome to sit it out. You can also excuse yourself from a class session any time you feel too uncomfortable to proceed. Please just send me a message afterwards to let me know this was the reason for your absence so that I do not penalize you for the absence.

**Course Limitations:** Protest music exists in every culture, country, and language in the world. As much as I would love to cover everything, it is impossible, which means I've had to make some choices about what to include and what not to: the lectures will focus primarily on American history, and on music written in the English language (The major exceptions are the class on punk and post-punk, which will focus on the UK, and the class on reggae and afrobeat. Both are included because they strongly influence American music in the years that follow). This content limitation has led to some unfortunate omissions; you are more than welcome, however, to pursue these missing threads in your own writing.

**Learning Objectives:** USC's Arts GE programs introduce you to a broad range of courses and ways of thinking that will take you beyond the specialization of your major and significantly extend your ability to understand the human world and your place in it. The program will help you achieve five principal learning objectives, which are described below in italics. The writing below explains how our specific course will help you to meet these more general objectives.

> *Analysis: Increase the student's ability to analyze creative endeavors, including describing them with appropriate vocabulary, examining their formal elements, and engaging in research to understand their contexts.*

The readings and lectures will help you generate a lexicon for "writing about music," which we then apply in each class through close analysis of a particular song or group of songs. The instructor will lead some of these close-reading sessions; others will be led by the students in the class. In each case, the work will be considered both in context and "in-itself": we will look at how the works reflect and impact their cultural contexts, but also how they work (or fail to work, or refuse to work) towards making change in the world.

*Making: Expand the student's knowledge about the creative process, as exemplified by specific works studied and, in many cases, by the student's making creative work.*

The final paper will ask you to think about *why* these songs were written, *what* they attempt to achieve, and *how* they achieve (or fail to achieve) those goals through formal choices. Whenever possible, you will trace the songs' path from inspiration to release, sometimes going beyond to consider subsequent reinterpretations. Students are given the option of writing a protest song of their own, and will be required to accompany this submission with a reflection on their process.

*Connectivity: Deepen the student's appreciation of the connections between creative endeavors and the concurrent political, religious, and social conditions; show how these endeavors fulfill cultural functions or fill cultural needs.*

The connection between art and society is the heart of this class. Each song will be considered and understood in the light of the political, religious, and social conditions that gave rise to them, and these examples will provide the foundation for the exploration of questions such as "Who are protest songs for?," "What are protest songs supposed to do?,"and "Does art have a social/political obligation?"

*Context: Enrich the student's discernment of creative production by increasing knowledge of its theoretical, historical, and aesthetic bases across history and cultures.*

The "contexts" paper will ask you to look closely at the specifics of how a song or set of songs came into existence out of a particular set of cultural circumstances, both through extension and opposition. You will be encouraged to put two different eras or genres in conversation with one another, to understand what is universal, and what is unique. Discussions and lectures will cover a similar ground.

*Engagement: Increase the student's understanding of becoming a lifelong supporter or participant in the arts by exposure to creative production in the contemporary environment.*

At all times, the question of music's *importance* and *value* will be under discussion. While music's ability to cause social change is the most obvious source of exploration, we'll also talk about the more intimate way that songs impact individuals.

**Course Texts:**
- The primary texts for this class are the songs themselves. Students are strongly recommended to sign up for a Spotify account. Prior to each class, students will listen to three or four songs that will be discussed that day.
- Lynskey, Dorian. *33 Revolutions Per Minute: A History of Protest Songs from Billie Holiday to Green Day.* HarperCollins, 2011.
- Assorted other readings, shared through BlackBoard.

**Workload (In A Nutshell)**

<u>Before each class</u> you will:
1. Listen to approximately three songs.
2. Read approximately fifteen pages of related prose.
3. Complete a 200-word reflection on the songs and the reading.

<u>Over the semester, you will also:</u>
1. Write a 1000-word song analysis of a political song of your choice.
2. Write a 2000-word paper exploring a specific issue relating to the course content.
3. Give a ten-minute presentation on an assigned song.
4. Write one midterm exam and one final exam.

**Course Requirements:** Students are required to complete a midterm and final exam, two papers, and one oral presentation, as well as maintain a regular reading journal. You also have the option to produce a creative work in lieu of the presentation:

*Song Analysis Essay (15%):* The first essay asks you to look closely at a particular song to explain how it works (or how it fails to work).

*Conceptual Essay (30%):* This final essay asks you to take a strong position on a big-picture question relating to the place of political music within our culture.

*Examinations (Mid-Term 15% and Final 15%):* The course will have two examinations. Each will contain a mixture of short- and long-answer questions that ask students to engage critically with the material presented. The first exam will cover the material from the first half of the course (up to 1980); the final will cover the second half of the course (1980 to the present).

*Song Presentation (10%):* Each class has an assigned "Song of the Day." After the instructor's presentation, we will listen to the song, and then one student will provide a close analysis of the song, and then lead discussion of the song in relation to the day's lecture.

*Discussion Forum Participation (10%):* Each week, students will write an entry in their listening journal on that week's assigned songs.

*Participation (5%):* As this class is heavily discussion based, your active participation is imperative. "Participation" is *not* synonymous with attendance, as you could attend every day and not truly participate. Nor is it limited, however, to being super-talkative during class discussions (although this is always appreciated): you can also participate by by engaging fully with your listening journal; by offering your classmates and your professor your full attention; by reading the  assigned articles thoughtfully and carefully; by having meetings with me to talk about your work; by sending questions to myself and others

through email; by seeking the help of librarians; by helping your peers when working in small groups.

**Optional Creative Work:** If you have a creative interest, you can, in place of the final exam, write a protest song of your own. The only stipulations are as follows:
1. It must have original lyrics (original music is not necessary; if Bob Dylan can steal melodies, so can you).
2. It must be accompanied by a 500-word minimum artist's statement.
3. It must be recorded (you can get someone else to perform it if you're not a performer).
4. You must either play the recording for the class, or perform it live, on the last day of class.

## Communication

**Emails:** If you have any questions about the course at any point, *please* email me! My requests are as follows:

1) First, double-check that the answer to your question is not on the syllabus or on the assignment sheet.

2) I can answer short, specific questions about essays and assignments through email; if you want to discuss a paper or paper idea, let's have a meeting in office hours instead.

3) Have realistic expectations about my response time. I will usually respond within twenty-four hours during weekdays and forty-eight hours on weekends, but I rarely respond to emails after 6pm.

**Professor Chats:** I love talking to students about the class, the content, and their work, and anything else. I don't keep set office hours, but I'm available 9-5 when I'm not in class or in a meeting. If you want to have a chat, send me an email with a few days and times you're available, and I'll pick one that works for me and get back to you right away.

**Self-Advocacy:** The university, and everyone that works here, exists to support you, and to help you create your best work without enduring unnecessary stress and hardship. It's important that you understand it in this way. It's also important that you *advocate for yourself* when you need help and support, because I might not be able to tell on my own. It is not an imposition on me to ask for help with the course, and know that you should also have no reservations in approaching me or your advisor if you need help with any other issue that may arise that might interfere with your ability to create your best work. If I think the problem would be better addressed through other support resources at the college, I won't turn you away; I'll direct you towards the resources you need, and make sure you're taken care of.

## Course Policies

**Absences:** If you miss more than two classes, you receive a 2% deduction from your final grade for each class missed, up to a maximum of 10%. If you miss more than the equivalent of three weeks of class (six classes on a two-day-a-week schedule, or nine classes on a three-day-a-week schedule), you will be asked to withdraw from the course, or accept an "F" as your final grade.

You do not need to provide doctor's notes or anything of the sort because I do not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences; instead, I offer the three "free" absences. You can use these how you see fit, whether it's because you're ill or because you need to study for another class. I consequently recommend you save the "free" absences for when you really need them (if you miss three classes to catch up on sleep, and then miss more later because you're ill, you'll still be penalized for these later classes, even with a doctor's note).

**Tardiness:** Class starts on the hour at the assigned time. If you are not there when the class begins, you will receive a late penalty, and three late arrivals count as one absence. Because I cannot disrupt the class by updating my attendance sheet every time someone arrives late, it is your responsibility to talk to me after class to make sure I haven't marked you as absent. If you don't do this and you find that, at the end of the semester, you've been marked absent from classes that you were just late for, it's too late to appeal it.

**Academic Integrity:** Breaches of academic integrity will result in serious penalties at both the program and university levels. Remember that it does not matter if academic integrity violations are intentional or not; it is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with the relevant section *SCampus* in Part B, Section 11, "Behavior Violating University Standards." Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct. Academic integrity violations include, but are not limited to, the following:

- ✗ unacknowledged and inappropriate use of ideas or wording of another writer.
- ✗ submitting a paper written or obtained from another person, or by AI software.
- ✗ using a paper or essay (or portion thereof) in more than one class (even if you wrote it yourself) without the permission of both instructors involved.
- ✗ allowing another student to use your work as though it were his or her own.

Make sure that you cite everything in your paper that is not common knowledge or your own invention. If in doubt, cite! For the purposes of this class, "common knowledge" is defined as something that is known by most Americans, regardless of their level of education. So, "Paris is the capital of France" is common knowledge; "The molecular formula for glucose is $C6H12O6$" is not, even though it's widely known in scientific communities.

If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism (or are feeling desperate enough to plagiarize), please contact me. I would much rather spend extra time helping you (or grant you

an extension) than deal with the consequences of plagiarism. Please note that I will reserve the right to reject essays for which you cannot provide substantial evidence of preparatory work (invention activities, rough plans, rough drafts, etc.).

**Freedom of Thought and Classroom Etiquette**:  Everyone in this class should feel free to share their thoughts and ideas, and should do so in a conscientious and respectful manner. One of the norms of the academic discourse community is respect for others' racial, ethnic, and class backgrounds, religious and political beliefs, sexual orientations, and gender. This norm should be respected in your written work, as well as in class discussion.

**ChatGPT:** ChatGPT is here to stay, and it has many positive, practical applications for the college student. It can be great for finding articles, generating citations, helping you locate that word that's on the tip of your tongue, getting grammar advice, and so on. Used inappropriately, however, it can interfere with your ability to learn and develop your own skills and abilities. Unfortunately, the technology is so new, and the uses are so vast, that it's impossible to give a comprehensive list of what's okay and what isn't. Here, though, are a few words of advice:

1. Don't use it to generate complete or partial drafts. All first drafts should be written on your own, using your own head and your own words. If you want to use ChatGPT to provide advice on grammar, syntax, or wording improvements after you've written a draft, that's fine.
2. Don't rely on ChatGPT to generate ideas. While ChatGPT can be useful if you hit a wall, or if you want to hear different perspectives on thoughts you've generated, you ultimately need to practice thinking, reflecting, and applying the ideas in our course. If you always reach for ChatGPT to do this for you, you'll never make the connections you need to truly understand the material.
3. Be careful with fact-checking and source citation. ChatGPT often invents information, so make sure you consult reliable sources to verify it. Please also remember that ChatGPT is a source, so, if you're borrowing ideas or words from it without citation, you're plagiarizing.
4. Always write in Google Docs, or a program that automatically tracks changes. If I suspect that you've used ChatGPT inappropriately, I will ask for access to the version history. If it does not look like it was written in a mostly-traditional way, I may award an "F" for the assignment.
5. Ask if you're unsure if your use is appropriate. If you want to use ChatGPT for a particular purpose, and you're not sure if it's acceptable or not, ask me!

### Advice and Support

**Writing Center:** Here at USC, you have a terrific – and totally free – resource.  The Writing Center offers writing workshops, as well as one-on-one appointments with Writing Consultants (and, yes, it's operating online). The staff at the Writing Center will not proofread your paper, but they will help teach you the skills you need to improve your own work.  They can also help with

any other stage of the writing process.  You can check out the Writing Center's website where you can schedule an appointment, and I'll provide more detail in class.

**Time-Management:** Time-keeping, time-management:
- You need a calendar, and you need to copy everything in every syllabus and schedule into it.
- Don't just write in deadlines; write in when you have to DO the work in advance of the deadline.
- Try to keep your work between certain hours of the day (like 9-5). Think of it this way: For every one hour you spend in class, put aside two hours to work on that class. Know when NOT to work.

**Getting to know the professor:** Reach out! Set up a time to talk with me. You don't need a reason; just come to introduce yourself. Don't worry, it doesn't look like sucking up; it looks like someone who wants to get the most out of the course. We can also chat over email.

**Academic Conduct:** Plagiarism has been explained above, but there are other forms of academic dishonesty that are equally unacceptable.  See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct.

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**Support Systems**

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*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. You can call them *at any time* for *any reason,* and they will let you know what your options are, and direct you towards help.
https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa/

*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.
https://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. 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. https://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: 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.
https://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.
https://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.
http://dsp.usc.edu

*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.
https://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, http://emergency.usc.edu

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

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**Schedule (Subject To Change)**

Note: All readings are from the textbook *33 Revolutions Per Minute* by Dorian Lynskey, unless otherwise specified.

**1.1 Tuesday August 22nd**
*Introduction to Course*

**1.2 Thursday August 24th**
*Writing About Music*
Readings: "How It Sounds" from *How To Write About Music,* on Blackboard, "A Glossary of Confusing Musical Terms Explained with Pop Music"by Chris Rooney, on BlackBoard.

**2.1 Tuesday August 29th**
*Union Music: Joe Hill, Aunt Molly Jackson, Sarah Ogan Dunning.*
Reading: Chapter 3, pp. 33-50.
Song of the Day: "The Preacher and the Slave (Pie In The Sky) by Joe Hill, performed by Utah Phillips.

**2.2 Thursday August 31st**
*The First Protest Songwriters: Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, and Paul Robeson.*
Reading: Chapter 2, pp. 14-32.
Song of the Day: "Deportees" by Woody Guthrie, performed by Pete Seeger.

**3.1 Tuesday September 5th**
*Songs of Strength: Black Songs for Black Audiences in the Jim Crow Era.*
Reading: Chapter 5, pp. 70-86.
Song of the Day: "Mississippi Goddam" by Nina Simon

**3.2 Thursday September 7th**
*Strange Fruit: The Songs of the Civil Rights Movement.*
Reading: Chapter 1, pp. 3-13.
Song of the Day: "Strange Fruit" by Abel Meeropol, performed by Billie Holiday.

**4.1 Tuesday September 12th**
*The Folk Revival: Greenwich Village, Joan Baez, and Phil Ochs.*
Reading: Chapter 4, pp. 51-69.
Song of the Day: "Love Me, I'm A Liberal" by Phil Ochs

**4.2 Thursday September 14th - CLOSE READING PAPER DUE**
*The Voice of a Generation: Bob Dylan*
Reading: None.
Song of the Day: "The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll" by Bob Dylan.

**5.1 Tuesday September 19th**
*The Summer Of Love: Peace, Love, and the Hippies.*
Reading: Chapter 8, pp. 126-142.
Song of the Day: "Revolution" by The Beatles.

**5.2 Thursday September 21st**
*Kill For Peace: Vietnam, the Yippies, and the End of an Era.*
Reading, Chapter 6, pp. 87-108.
Song of the Day: "I-Feel-Like-I'm-Fixin'-To-Die Rag" by Country Joe & The Fish.

**6.1 Tuesday September 26th**
*The King Of Love Is Dead: The Rise of the Black Panthers, Nina Simone, The Lumpen, The Watts Prophets.*eading: Chapter 11, pp. 180-194.

Song of the Day: "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised" by Gil Scott-Heron

**6.2 Thursday September 28th**
*The Voices of Black Power: Marvin Gaye, Stevie Wonder, James Brown, and Curtis Mayfield.*
Reading: Chatter 12, pp. 195-212.
Song of the Day: "Living For The City" by Stevie Wonder

**7.1 Tuesday October 3rd**
*Mid-Term*

**7.2 Thursday October 5th**
*Fight The Power: The Socially-Conscious Hip-Hop of Grandmaster Flash and Public Enemy*
Reading: Chapter 20, pp. 329-339 and Chapter 27, pp. 429-446.
Song of the Day: "Fight The Power" by Public Enemy

**8.1 Tuesday October 10th**
*Political Performance Art: The Sex Pistols and the Avant-Garde.*
Reading: Chapter 16, pp. 265-282.
Song of the Day: "Anarchy in the UK" by the Sex Pistols

**8.2 Thursday October 12th - Fall Break**

**9.1 Tuesday October 17th**
**Reggae, Ska and World Music:** Bob Marley, The Clash, The Specials, Fela Kuti.
Reading: Chapter 15, pp. 245-260.
Optional reading: Chapter 14, pp. 231-244 and Chapter 24, pp. 386-399.
Song of the Day: "I Shot The Sheriff" by Bob Marley

**9.2 Thursday October 19th**
*We Are The World: Live Aid and the Age of Activism*
Reading: Chapter 23, pp. 368-385.
Song of the Day: "Do They Know It's Christmas" by Band Aid

**10.1 Tuesday October 24th**
*The Rise of LGBTQ+ Protest Music: Glam Rock, David Bowie, Lou Reed, Wayne County*
Reading: TBA
Song of the Day: "Glad To Be Gay" by the Tom Robinson Band

**10.2 Thursday October 26th**
*The Rise of LGBTQ+ Protest Music: Disco and British Synth Pop*
Reading: Chapter 17, pp. 283-298.
Song of the Day: "Smalltown Boy" by Bronski Beat

**11.1 Tuesday October 31st**

*The Roots of Feminist Song: From Loretta Lynn to Madonna.*
Song of the Day: "Harper Valley PTA" by Jeannie C. Reilly

**11.2 Thursday November 2nd**
*Underground and Alternative Feminist Rock: Riot Grrls and 90s Alternative Rock.*
Reading: Chapter 28, pp. 447-461.
Song of the Day: "Rebel Girl" by Bikini Kill

**12.1 Tuesday November 7th**
*Fuck The Police: NWA and Police Brutality*
<mark>Reading: TBA</mark>
Song of the Day: "Fuck The Police" by NWA

**12.2 Thursday November 9th**
*It Was A Good Day: Gangsta Rap and the LA Riots.*
<mark>Reading: TBA</mark>
Song of the Day: "The Day The Niggaz Took Over" by Dr. Dre

**13.1 Tuesday November 14th**
*Introduction to Final Paper*

**13.2 Thursday November 16th**
*Political Music After 9/11: Green Day, Bruce Springsteen, The Dixie Chicks*
Reading: Chapter 32, pp. 506-520.
Song of the Day: "John Walker's Blues" by Steve Earle

**14.1 Tuesday November 21st**
*Black Lives Matter and #MeToo: Kendrick Lamar, Beyoncé, Kesha, and Katy Perry*
<mark>Reading: TBA</mark>
Song of the Day: "Alright" by Kendrick Lamar

**14.2 Thursday November 23rd**
*Thanksgiving Break*

**15.1 Tuesday November 28th**
*Conclusion and Review.*

**15.2 Thursday November 30th**
**Final Exam**