

FMS 160 (section 2): Meaning and Memory in American Popular Music

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11:00-12:15

Classroom: Bryan 106

Professor Benjamin Filene

office hrs.: Thursdays 2:00-4:00 and by appointment: Moore Humanities Bldg., rm. 2137

office phone: 336/334-5645; home phone: 919/932-7722 (don't call after 10:00 p.m.)

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Course Description

Sometimes popular music is treated like disposable culture—the fad of the month—but a closer look shows that the most innovative figures in American music are sustained by a deep sense of history. How do artists draw on the past to create vibrant new musical styles? How do Americans' visions of “authentic” musical roots reflect their ideas about race, class, and identity? In this course, we will look at *and listen to* case studies in blues, rock, rap, and genres of your choice to understand how music is shaped by—and shapes—a vision of American history.

Student Learning Outcomes

The skills that you will be building in this seminar include

- **reading secondary sources** carefully and thoughtfully and with an eye for new ideas
- **reading primary sources, both written and non-written** (musical, visual) as cultural evidence
- **building, sustaining, and supporting a main idea or argument**
- **writing** in a clear and persuasive style
- **speaking** with passion and clarity
- **collaborating** with energy, sensitivity, and an awareness of how much you can learn from your peers
- **experimenting** fearlessly to build your skills

As a **Writing Intensive** class, you will turn in drafts of your main papers and provide a research update and a draft of the thesis paragraph for your final paper. The draft of your first essay will be read by a peer reviewer; the professor will comment on the other draft materials. The writing assignments vary in length and style. They are designed to make you comfortable communicating your ideas in writing and to help you try out different kinds of voice, evidence, and analysis in your writing.

Assignments**Class participation—15%**

—attending class, doing the reading, speaking up in discussions, and helping to foster a sense of shared exploration within the classroom

Weekly responses—10%

Each week requires short, informal reactions to that week's readings (roughly a couple of paragraphs). These must be posted on our class's Blackboard Discussion Board **by 8:00 a.m.** each Tuesday.

“Songbook”—personal reflective essay, 3-5 pp. —15%

Write in a first-person voice about a song that means something to you. Modeled on Nick Hornby's *Songbook*, this assignment asks you to explore connections between music and your personal life beyond music and to experiment with doing a close reading of a single song—why does this piece of music move you?

“Mashup”—analytical essay, 5-7 pp. —20%

Compare and contrast two versions of a single song from different eras and build an historical argument about how *and why* they differ from each other.

“Musical Roots”—original research and analysis, 8-10 pp. —30%

Choose a song that interests you and do secondary and primary source research to identify historical influences and antecedents that shaped the artist and this piece of music. How and why did the earlier music influence this artist?

Oral Presentation—10%:

—a 10-minute in-class presentation based on your research project.

Grading scale

A=93-100; A-=90-92; B+=87-89; B=83-86; B-: 80-82; C+=77-79; C=73-76

If things go awry...

...it's your responsibility to tell me—right away.

LATE PAPERS:

If a paper or project is late without direct, prior approval from me, I deduct ½ a letter grade per day (e.g., from A to A-)—no exceptions.

Academic Integrity Policy

All students have a responsibility to uphold the standards of “*Honesty, Trust, Fairness, Respect, and Responsibility*” detailed in the Academic Integrity Policy. Instances of cheating, plagiarism, misuse of academic resources, falsification of information, and facilitating of academic dishonesty are treated with utmost seriousness by the history department and dealt with severely by the University administration. The full policy appears in the *Student Calendar/Handbook* and at academicintegrity.uncg.edu.

Per university policy, you will be asked to sign a copy of the Academic Integrity Pledge for each major assignment in this class.

Special Needs

If you require accommodations for special learning needs, please do not hesitate to contact the Office of Disability Services, located within the Elliot University Center (334-5770)—and please let me know!

Books to Buy

Hornby, Nick. *Songbook*, 2003

Keyes, Cheryl L. *Rap Music and Street Consciousness*, 2004

Polizzotti, Mark. *Highway 61 Revisited*, 2006

Wald, Elijah. *Escaping the Delta: Robert Johnson and the Invention of the Blues*, 2004

Wald, Gayle F. *Shout, Sister, Shout!: The Untold Story of Rock-and-Roll Trailblazer Sister Rosetta Tharpe*, 2007

Essential Recordings

You will be required to listen to these recordings outside of class. Course readings won’t make much sense without them, and some out-of-class assignments will depend on them. All are available for in-library listening at UNCG’s music library or for purchase at local cd stores or via iTunes, amazon.com, etc. I’ll make other songs available to you on Blackboard during the course of the semester.

Robert Johnson: The Complete Recordings [2-cd set]

Rosetta Tharpe, *The Gospel of Blues*

Bob Dylan, *Highway 61 Revisited*

“ “ , *Time Out of Mind*

“ “ , *Love and Theft*

CLASS SCHEDULE AND READINGS

“The past is never dead. It’s not even past.”

-William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun*, 1951

“[N]othing in American vernacular music holds still,...every phrase and image, every riff and chime, is always moving, state to state, decade to decade, never at home with whoever might claim it, always seeking a new body, a new song, a new voice.”

-Greil Marcus, *Like A Rolling Stone*, 2005

Part I: Finding Your Voice

August 21—Definitions and Introductions: “Roots,” “Vernacular,” “Memory”
“This Land Is Your Land”

August 23—**Music, Personal Memory, and the Writer’s Voice**

Hornby, Nick. *Songbook*: 3-32.

August 28— **Music, Memory, and Voice** (continued)

Sanneh, Kelefa. “The Rap Against Rockism.” *The New York Times*
(October 31, 2004): 4 pp.

Nick Hornby. *Songbook*: 33-66 **and** 189-199.

Peer reviewing of two pages of “Songbook” essays

In class: Blackboard computer training

August 30—**Authenticity, Public Memory, and the Singer’s Voice**

Barker, Hugh and Yuval Taylor. “Where Did You Sleep Last Night? Nirvana, Leadbelly, and the Allure of the Primeval.” In *Faking It: The Quest for Authenticity in Popular Music*: 1-27.

Part II: The Blues and American Musical Memory

September 4 & 6—**Robert Johnson’s Roots**

Wald, Elijah. “The World Johnson Knew.” In *Escaping the Delta: Robert Johnson and the Invention of the Blues*: Introduction **and** 1-105.

9/6: “Songbook” essays due

[Class visits Writing Center at 11:50]

September 11 & 13— Robert Johnson’s Music

Wald. “Robert Johnson.” In *Escaping the Delta*: 105-192.

September 18 & 20—Robert Johnson in Memory

Wald. “The Blues Roll On.” In *Escaping the Delta*: 193-280.

9/18: In class: thesis-building writing exercise

September 25—Blues Women

Davis, Angela Y. “Introduction.” In *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*: xi-xx.

Davis, Angela Y. “Up in Harlem Saturday Night.” In *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*: 138-160.

September 27—Electric Blues

Rotella, Carlo. “Too Many Notes.” In *Good With Their Hands: Boxers, Bluesmen, and Other Characters from the Rust Belt*: 51-103.

Drafts of “Mashup” essays due

Part III: Rock ’n’ Roots**October 2—Rosetta Thorpe, Gospel and Rock**

Wald, Gayle F. *Shout, Sister, Shout!: The Untold Story of Rock-and-Roll Trailblazer Sister Rosetta Tharpe*. Preface, Chapters 1-9: 1-150.

October 4—Rosetta Thorpe and Revival

Wald, *Shout, Sister, Shout!*. Chapters 10-12, Epilogue: 151-219.

October 9—Introduction to library resources (Amy Harris)

Revised “Mashup” essays due

October 11—The King

Marcus, Greil. “Elvis: Presliad.” In *Mystery Train: Images of America in Rock ‘n’ Roll Music*: 120-171.

October 16—no class (fall break)**October 18—Bob Dylan: Folk Troubadour**

Pancake, Jon and Paul Nelson. “Bob Dylan.” In *The Dylan Companion*: A

Collection of Essential Writings about Bob Dylan, Elizabeth Thomson and David Gutman, eds.: 59-61.

Turner, Gil. "Bob Dylan—A New Voice Singing New Songs." In *The Dylan Companion*: 62-66.

Dylan, Bob. "River of Ice." In *Chronicles: Volume One*: 225-246.

1-page prospectuses for final papers due

October 23—Bob Dylan: Folk Troubadour (continued)

Dylan, Bob. "River of Ice." In *Chronicles: Volume One*, 246-293

October 25—"It Ain't Me Babe"--Bob Dylan: Traitor?

Hajdu, David. Excerpt from *Positively 4th Street: The Lives and Times of Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, Mimi Baez Farina, and Richard Farina*: 254-263.

Silber, Irwin. "An Open Letter to Bob Dylan" (1964). In *The Bob Dylan Companion: Four Decades of Commentary*: 26-28.

Marcus, Greil. "Another Country." In *Invisible Republic: Bob Dylan's Basement Tapes*: 3-38.

[In class: excerpts from *No Direction Home* DVD]

October 30— Bob Dylan: Still Rolling

Polizzotti, Mark. *Highway 61 Revisited*, 2006.

Springsteen, Bruce. Speech delivered at Rock-and-Roll Hall of Fame induction (January 20, 1988). In *The Dylan Companion*: 286-288.

November 1—Bob Dylan: Still Rolling (continued)

Gates, David. "Dylan Revisited." In *Studio A: The Bob Dylan Reader*, Benjamin Hedin, ed.: 235-243.

Wilentz, Sean. "American Recordings: On *Love and Theft* and the Minstrel Boy." In *Studio A*: 263-273.

On Blackboard: Research updates for final papers due

Part IV: Funk to Hip-Hop

November 6—Hip-Hop's Roots

Perry, Imani. "Hip Hop's Mama." In *Prophets of the Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip-Hop*: 9-37.

Keyes, Cheryl. "The Development of the Rap Music Tradition." In *Rap Music and Street Consciousness*: 39-66.

Thesis paragraphs for final papers due

November 8—Hip Hop As Art

Potter, Russell A. "Gettin' Present as an Art." In *Spectacular Vernaculars: Hip-Hop and the Politics of Postmodernism*: 25-54.

Keyes, Cheryl. "Street Production: The Aesthetics of Style and Performance in the Rap Music Tradition." In *Rap Music and Street Consciousness*: 122-153.

November 13— Hip-Hop As Protest

Keyes, Cheryl. "Issues, Conflicts, and Conspiracies: The Hip-Hop Nation at a Crossroad." In *Rap Music and Street Consciousness*: 157-185.

November 15—Hip Hop Women

Keyes, Cheryl. "Daughters of the Blues: Women, Race, and Class Representation in Rap Music Performance." In *Rap Music and Street Consciousness*: 186-209.

November 20—Hip-Hop As Memory (and Marketing)

Tanz, Jason. "Touring the 'Hood: Hunting for Reality in New York City." In *Other People's Property: A Shadow History of Hip-Hop in White America*: 22-45.

Tanz, Jason. "Selling Down: The Marketing of the Hip-Hop Nation." In *Other People's Property*: 178-199.

Drafts of final papers due

November 22—no class (Thanksgiving)

November 27 & 29—Oral Presentations

December 4 & 6—Oral Presentations

December 11: no class (“Reading Day”)

December 13: final papers due