

COMM 307

SOUND CLASH **Popular Music and American Culture**

Mondays 3:30-6:20 ASC 204

Professor Josh Kun

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Office Hours: Mondays 10:00-1:00 or by appointment

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

Larry Starr and Christopher Waterman, *American Popular Music: From Minstrelsy to MTV* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003)

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

Charles Mingus, *Beneath The Underdog* (New York: Vintage, 1991)
Course reader (available at Magic Machine, University Village)*

Course requirements/grading

- mid-term paper 4-6 pp (30%)
- final paper 4-6 pp. (30%)
- 2 short music projects (10% each)—live songbook & live review-- details TBA in class
- class blog (10%)
- class participation (10%)

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

1/14

Course Introduction / How To Talk About Pop Music

- Nick Hornby, "I'm Like A Bird;" "Samba Pa Ti;" "Caravan;" "Puff The Magic Dragon;" "Royksopp's Night Out"
- Steven Feld, "Communication, Music, and Speech About Music"
- William Brooks, "On Being Tasteless"
- Heavy Metal Parking Lot*- in class screening

1/28

Critical Terms / Music and Identity

- Starr and Waterman, Chapter 1
- Michael Ventura, "The DNA of Pop"
- Russell Potter, "Race"
- Holly Kruse, "Gender"
- Mark Fenster & Thomas Swiss, "Business"
- Simon Frith, "Music and Identity"
- Theodor Adorno, "On Popular Music"

2/4

Music and "America"

- Leroi Jones, *Blues People* ("Introduction"; Chapters 1 & 3, 4-6)

2/11

Performing Race & Ethnicity

- Starr and Waterman, Chapter 2
- David Wondrich, "Minstrelsy, or get Out de Way"
- Robert Snyder, "Taming the Bowery Boys;" "The Players and Their World"
- Eric Lott, "Love and Theft: The Racial Unconscious of Blackface Minstrelsy"
- Ralph Ellison, "Change the Joke and Slip The Yoke"

2/25

The Legacy of Jazz Singing

- Michael Rogin, "Blackface, White Noise: The Jewish jazz Singer Finds His Voice"

- Starr & Waterman Chapters 2-3
- The Jazz Singer*- in class screening

3/3

The Legacy of Jazz: New Orleans, Swing, and the Politics of Appropriation

- John Storm Roberts, "The Foundations"
- John Szwed, "Improvisation, Composition, and Arranging" ; "1900-1925 New Orleans;" "Beyond New Orleans"
- Starr and Waterman, Chapter 6
- Blues People*, Chapter 10

FIRST PAPER DUE

3/10

The Colorless Island

- Charles Mingus, *Beneath The Underdog*
- Blues People*, Chapter 12
- Graham Lock, "Astro Black"
- Space Is The Place*- in class screening

3/24

Whose Rock Is It?

- Starr and Waterman, Chapter 7 & 8
- Alice Walker, "Nineteen Fifty-Five"
- Ned Sublette, "The Kingsmen and the Cha Cha Cha"

3/31

Revolution Rock

- Starr and Waterman, Chapter 10
- George Lipsitz, "Cruising Around the Historic Bloc"
- Simon Frith and Angela McRobbie, "Rock and Sexuality"
- Sheryl Garrett, "Teenage Dreams"
- Gayle Wald, "I Want It That Way: Teenybopper Music and the Girling of Boy Bands"

4/7

Border Ballads 1

- Americo Paredes, "The Legend," "The Corrido On The Border"
- Sam Quinones, "The Ballad of Chalino Sanchez"
- Josh Kun, "What is an MC if He Can't Rap to Banda?"
- Al Otro Lado*- in class screening

4/14

Border Ballads 2

- Manuel Pena, "The Emergence of Conjunto Music"
- Lydia Mendoza & La Familia Mendoza, "La Alondra de la Frontera"
- Deb Paredez, "Remembering Selena, Re-Membering Latinidad"

-Selena-- in class screening

4/21

Hip Hop America

-Starr and Waterman, Chapter 14

-Tricia Rose, "All Aboard the Night Train"

-Keith Negus, "The Business of Rap"

-Jeff Chang, "The Culture Assassins"

-William Upski Wimsatt, "We Use Words Like Mackadocious"

4/28

MP3 America

-Chris Anderson, "The Rise and Fall of The Hit," "The New Tastemakers"

- Siva Vaidhyanathan, "The Peer-to-Peer Revolution and the Future of Music"

-Jonathan Sterne, "The MP3 as Cultural Artifact"

SECOND PAPER DUE DAY OF FINAL