HISTORY 49500-002  
POLITICS AND POPULAR MUSIC: 1945-1969

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Course Description:  
Popular culture at times reflects and interprets the temper of society and politics; at other times it challenges social and political norms. This interdisciplinary course will assess and analyze the complex relationship between national politics and popular music (R&B, Rock and Roll, Soul, Folk, and Acid Rock) broadly defined from the end of World War II through the Vietnam War era. The course is a mix of power point presentations, films, documentaries, and discussion-based class meetings. Students will undertake a variety of writing assignments (including a semester-long research paper or multi-media project based on primary sources) whose main purpose is to promote critical thinking as well as a working knowledge of main events and issues in politics and popular music in the postwar era.

Required Readings:  
Glenn C. Altschuler, All Shook Up: How Rock ‘n’ Roll Changed America  
James M. Salem, The Late Great Johnny Ace and the Transition from R&B to Rock and Roll  
Michael T. Bertrand, Race, Rock, and Elvis  
Gerald Early, One Nation under a Groove: Motown and American Culture  
Ronald D. Cohen, Rainbow Quest: The Folk Music Revival in American Society, 1940-1970  
Timothy Miller, The Hippies and American Values

The assigned readings are available for purchase at Follett’s and University Bookstores. You may also be able to find the other readings on half.com and other such web sites.

Course Outline:  
Monday, August 22: Course Introduction and Overview  
Wednesday, August 24: 1950s: Historical Context

Monday August 29: Rhythm and Blues: Musical Context  
Wednesday, August 31: “That Rhythm, Those Blues” documentary: first in-class response quiz  
Monday, September 5: Labor Day: No Class ☺  
Wednesday, September 7: Discussion: The Late Great Johnny Ace: first in-class quiz

READINGS  
• Altschuler, Chapters 1 and 2  
• Salem, Chapters  
• Bertrand, Chapter 2

Part II: “Good Rockin’ Tonight”: Elvis and Rock’s Threat to 1950s Politics, Society and Culture  
Monday, September 12: Elvis and the Promise of Rock: Musical Context  
Wednesday, September 14: “Elvis-1956” documentary: second in-class response quiz  
Monday, September 19: Discussion: Race, Rock, and Elvis: second in-class quiz

READINGS  
• Altschuler, Chapters 3 and 4  
• Bertrand, Chapters 3, 4, and 5

Part III: “Beauty is only Skin Deep”: The Civil Rights Movement and the Sounds of Soul  
Monday, September 26: Motown and Southern Soul: Musical Context
Wednesday, September 28:  “Respect” documentary: third in-class response quiz
Monday, October 3: Discussion: One Nation under a Groove: third in-class quiz

READINGS
- Altschuler, Chapter 5
- Early, whole book

Wednesday, October 5: Individual meetings to discuss possible final projects (optional)

Part IV: “The Times They Are A-Changin’: The Politics of Folk Music
Monday, October 10: Fall Break: No Class 😊
Wednesday, October 12: The Politics of Folk Music from Woody Guthrie to Bob Dylan
Monday, October 17: “Don’t Look Back” documentary: fourth in-class response quiz
Wednesday, October 19: Discussion: Rainbow Quest: fourth in-class quiz

READINGS
- Cohen, Chapters 2, 3, 6, 7, and 8

Monday, October 24: Individual meetings to discuss possible final projects (optional)

Part V: “We Want the World and We Want It Now”: The Counterculture and Acid Rock
Wednesday, October 26: Counterculture and the Ethos of Acid Rock
Monday, October 31: “My Generation” documentary: fifth in-class response quiz
Wednesday, November 2: Discussion: The Hippies and American Values: fifth in-class quiz

READINGS
- Altschuler, Chapters 5 and 6
- Miller, Chapters 2, 4, 5 and 6

Part VI: Research
Monday November 7: No class: research
Wednesday, November 9: No class: research
Monday, November 14: No class: research
Wednesday, November 16: No class: research

Monday November 21: No class: individual meetings to discuss research projects (optional)
Wednesday, November 23: No class: Thanksgiving Day Break

Monday, November 28: Drafts of Final Projects due in class
Wednesday, November 30: No class

Monday, December 5: Drafts of Final Projects returned with comments

Wednesday, December 7: No class: revisions

Monday, December 12: Final Projects due in class

Grading:
- In-Class Responses

Over the course of the semester, you will write five informal in-class response essays reacting to questions based on the discussion of the readings, documentaries, and movies we will see during the course of the semester. These in-class responses will be done at the end of each scheduled discussion. The purpose of these short responses is not to improve your writing skills but to stimulate thinking about issues, questions, and problems raised by your study of popular culture and politics, and to serve as a summary of your reflections on class discussions. So you will be judged not on things like spelling, organization, and grammar but instead on things like the process and quality of thought. I will be looking for evidence that you are thinking seriously about history and wrestling with concepts and issues raised in the readings, class presentations and discussions, and other class materials, such as videos. Each of these in-class essays will be worth 0-5 points and a maximum of 25 points over the course of the, ah, course.
- **Class Participation and Attendance:**
The success of a small honors course depends greatly on the willingness of everyone to participate actively in discussion. It also depends on everyone having read the assigned material. The quality as well as the frequency of your participation in discussion will be factored into your grade for the course. Approximately one week before the discussion you will receive discussion prompts or guidelines to help you sort through the readings and stimulate your thinking about the possible tangents of our in-class discussions. There are five scheduled discussion days. I will use the following system in grading class participation: failure to attend class will earn an F (or 0) for that day; attendance without any participation in the discussion will earn a C (or 6) for that day; and participation in discussion will earn a score ranging from B- (8) to A+ (10) for that day. The discussion component of the course will be worth a maximum of 50 points (five discussions @ possible ten points each).

- **Quizzes**
At the end of every discussion period, there will be a short quiz based on the readings and the discussion prompts that will be distributed the week before our discussion section. This will be another way to participate, albeit indirectly, in our discussion of the course topics and related readings. It also will be of benefit to those who are by nature reticent and thus not as “vocal” or “active” in the discussion sessions. Each of these quizzes will be worth a maximum of 50 points (five quizzes @ possible ten points each).

- **Bibliography**
Each student will compile a bibliography of primary and secondary sources to be used in the research for her/his project. I will describe the nature and specifics of the bibliography later in the semester. It will be due to me **November 7 by midnight; a late delivery will be penalized 5 points.** The bibliography is worth a maximum of 25 points.

- **Final Project**
All students will be required to complete a final project—a paper or a multimedia presentation that reflects one of the many themes of the course. The paper or the multimedia presentation will be worth 50 points.

The following are options for a Final Project paper, which should be seven-to-ten pages double spaced: **A research project** in primary sources (contemporary newspapers, magazines, etc.) that examines public reaction to one of the events covered in this course. You might see what the hue and cry was over Elvis’s various television appearances in 1956. Another topic might be an analysis of the payola scandal either at the popular level (press coverage) or a look at the congressional hearings. You might also think about the way music was used in antiwar rallies or during the Civil Rights movement. Another paper done in the past looked at *Rolling Stone Magazine* and how it linked drug use to the counterculture movement—and music in the (very late) 1960s.

**A paper that is based on a careful reading of memoirs of significant and not-so-significant historical actors in and around the music scene from the end of World War II to roughly the Woodstock era.** These can be grouped in a particular time period (say the 1950s or the 1960s) or they can follow a topical thread—beats and counterculture figures and the emergence of Acid Rock in San Francisco, or musicians (Guthrie, Dylan, Pete Seeger, etc.) who made the music of protest—or protest music.

**A paper that analyzes the many, many documentaries made about rock—and the political implications of race music and the music of protest.**

The following are options for a Final Project **multimedia presentation:**
This option may take many different shapes. In the past, students have approached it from very different angles. One semester a student did a **Power Point presentation** on the HUAC investigation of the “Hollywood Ten” that was of sufficient length and analytical quality to be used in a classroom lecture on the topic. You might substitute instead the Congressional hearings into the alleged payola scandal. Another student did a **film** in which he analyzed science fiction movies of the 1950s, relating each in its own way to the Cold War. The student interspersed clips from the movies with “talking head” shots of himself analyzing the contents of the film. You might look at rock films from the 1950s (“High School Confidential,” “Don’t Knock the Rock”) or the early rumblings of surf music heard in Beach Party movies or contemporary movies that try to recapture the essence of an era
(“American Graffiti,” “American Hot Wax,” “Almost Famous” etc.). That same semester another honors student created an audio/visual presentation in which she compared protest songs from the Vietnam era and more patriotic tunes from the Iraq War. The student spliced together a medley from each period and overlaid the audio with visuals from scenes of combat from both theaters of operation. Finally yet another student in the class created her own documentary on the evolution of jazz in the 1920s as it was an extension of the Harlem Renaissance and a reflection of the more rebellious dimension to a decade characterized both by conservative politics and a “roaring twenties” popular culture. You might do the same for the 1950s. You might also do a documentary on an artist whose music had a significant political impact, whether intentional (Dylan) or not (Presley). This list of projects is meant to be suggestive; you may have your own ideas about a multimedia presentation.

**Final Projects will be due to me on the Monday of exam week, December 12.**

To summarize:

- In-Class Responses: 25 points
- Discussion 50 points
- Discussion Quizzes 50 points
- Bibliography 25 points
- Final Project 50 points

**Final Grade Calculations:**

- A range: 200-180 points
- B range: 179-160 points
- C range: 159-140 points
- D range: 139-120 points
- F(ailing): 119 and (look out) below

In the event of a major campus emergency, course requirements, deadlines and grading percentages are subject to changes that may be necessitated by a revised semester calendar or other circumstances. Here are ways to get information about changes in this course: my email address: mmorrison@purdue.edu, and my home phone: 463-0087.