

Communication and popular music

Comm 4221

Prof. Gil Rodman

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office hours (253 Ford): TuTh 10:00-11:15a, W 10:00-11:30a, and by appointment

Syllabus

Fall 2009

Course description

Popular music -- from hip-hop to hard rock, from torch songs to techno, from bluegrass to bebop -- is an important source of pleasure in many people's daily lives, but it's much more than just entertainment. Music is also a form of cultural expression that is deeply intertwined with a host of social, cultural, and political issues that can't be reduced to questions of taste, aesthetics, or authorial intentions. Our primary focus this semester will be on the cultural politics of popular music. In particular, we will examine a range of critical and analytical issues related to the production, distribution, consumption, circulation, and regulation of a wide variety of different musics.

You may be tempted to think that, because we'll spend the semester studying something commonly regarded as "fun," this will be a "party" course that you can coast through effortlessly. While I hope the course will be interesting (and even fun), it will also demand a great deal of work on your part, none of which will go smoothly if you try to simply bull your way through because it's "just entertainment." Please also bear in mind that few (if any) of the questions we'll address this semester have easy answers. How well you do in this class will depend on your ability to think critically about the role of popular music in contemporary society and your ability to argue your position(s) well.

Grading

Ideally, final course grades will be calculated as follows:

Thought paper	10%
Discussion questions	20%
Critical response papers	30%
Take-home final exam	40%

This is not a lecture-driven course. Our class meetings will primarily be structured around discussions. As such, this is not a course where passive spectators are likely to do well, and you will be expected to make significant contributions to our discussions on a regular basis. You can meet those expectations simply by (1) attending class regularly, (2) doing the required reading, and (3) coming to class prepared to discuss those readings. Consistently lackluster discussions, however, will lead me to add quizzes to our class meetings. Should quizzes become necessary, final grades will be calculated on a revised schedule:

Thought paper	0%
Discussion questions	10%
Quizzes	20%
Critical response papers	30%
Take-home final exam	40%

Final grade point totals will translate to letter grades as follows:

A	93-100	B+	87-89	C+	77-79	D+	67-69
A-	90-92	B	83-86	C	73-76	D	60-66
		B-	80-82	C-	70-72	F	0-59

- "S/N" grades will only be given to students who have registered for the course on an S/N basis.
- "I" grades will only be given under extraordinary circumstances (i.e., major life emergencies).

Written assignments: general rules

(a) Where/how to submit assignments. With the exception of Discussion Questions (which should only be submitted via email), all written assignments must be submitted in both printed and digital versions, and the text of each version must be identical.

- Printed versions should be double-spaced and stapled (do not use plastic covers/binders).
- Digital versions should be emailed to rodman@umn.edu.
- Acceptable digital formats are OpenOffice, WordPerfect, Word, RTF, PDF, HTML, and plaintext.
- I will not print out hard copies of digital submissions, and so you will not receive written feedback unless you submit both versions.
- If you submit printed versions of assignments outside of class, either hand such work directly to me or place it in my campus mailbox in 250 Ford. Do not submit work under my office door.

(b) Deadlines. Except as noted below or on relevant handouts, both the printed and digital versions of any assignment must be submitted by 12:30 pm on the relevant due date. The minimum penalty for late work (including circumstances where one of the two required versions is late) will be one full letter grade deducted from that assignment's grade.

(c) Grammar/spelling/etc. Grades for written assignments will be based primarily on content, rather than form: insightful, smartly argued essays that contain a few spelling errors will receive higher grades than grammatically flawless papers that have weak arguments. Nonetheless, grammar, spelling, and style still matter to the effective presentation of a strong argument, and assignments suffering from significant "form" problems will be penalized accordingly.

Thought paper

This assignment (~1000-1250 words, due 15 Sep) will be ungraded. Assuming you turn the paper in, you should receive full credit for doing so . . . though I reserve the right to give partial (or even no) credit to papers that fail to meet the assignment's requirements. Further details about this assignment are available on a separate handout.

Discussion questions

You will write and submit (via email only) discussion questions, each of which should be able to serve as a productive conversation starter for one of our assigned readings. Each discussion question is due by 11:15 am the day before the class period for which the reading in question is assigned. Further details about this assignment are available on a separate handout.

Critical response papers

You will write and submit at least three essays (~1000-1250 words each), each of which should be a critical (i.e., thoughtful and analytical) response to one or more of our assigned readings. Further details about this assignment are available on a separate handout.

Take-home final exam

This exam (due by 4:00pm on 19 Dec) will require you to write three essays (~1000-1250 words each), and will be based on the assigned readings and our in-class discussions. Further details about the exam will be made available later in the semester. The actual exam will be made available to you at least two weeks prior to the deadline.

Senior paper

Thanks to a recent shift in departmental policy (and contrary to the original information posted on OneStop), you can write your senior paper in this course. Students hoping to pursue this opportunity must meet with me no later than 24 Sep to discuss their project. Senior paper projects will not be factored into your grade for this course, nor will they exempt you from any of the required assignments for this course. Further details about the senior paper option for this course are available on a separate handout.

Academic integrity

The following is a partial list of major examples of academic dishonesty:

- plagiarism in any of its forms,
- copying assignments (in whole or in part) written by other students,
- having someone else research and/or write substantial portions of any graded assignment, and
- knowingly assisting someone else in their efforts to engage in any of the above practices.

The minimum penalty for academic dishonesty is a zero for the assignment in question.

Please bear in mind that ignorance (real or feigned) of what actually counts as academic dishonesty will not allow you to avoid any penalties levied against you for any such offenses. You would be wise to familiarize yourself with the University's official policies with respect to academic dishonesty -- including detailed explanations of what constitutes "plagiarism" and "cheating" -- which can be found online at <http://writing.umn.edu/tww/plagiarism/>

Miscellaneous

- If you feel sick, do not come to class, especially if your symptoms are flu-like. This is the University's official policy with respect to a possible outbreak of the H1N1 flu virus.
- I will make every reasonable effort to accommodate individual student needs relating to religious holidays and/or documented disabilities. Please note that, by University policy, my ability to make such accommodations requires you to provide me with written notice (for religious holidays) or official documentation (for disabilities) in advance.
- From time to time, our class sessions may cover topics that provoke strong differences of opinion within the group. I do not expect our class meetings to produce unanimous agreement about the issues under discussion, but I do expect all of our conversations to be characterized by mutual respect and collegiality. Strongly expressed opinions are acceptable in this class; verbal bullying and personal attacks, on the other hand, will not be tolerated under any circumstances.
- Significant disruptions of the normal flow of course-related business -- e.g., using cell phones in class, excessive side chatter -- may result in grade penalties.
- If you wish to, you may make audio recordings of our class meetings, provided you can do so without disrupting the ordinary flow of the class. The purchase and/or sale of either written notes or audio recordings of our class meetings, however, is strictly prohibited.

Reading/assignment schedule

[All the required readings are available on the course CD-ROM, which will be made available in class.]

Sep 8

no reading

Sep 10

Simon Frith, "Towards an Aesthetic of Popular Music"

Susan McClary and Rob Walser, "Start Making Sense!"

Sep 15

Thought paper due

Greg Seigworth, "Sound Affects"

David Sanjek, "I Give It a 94. It's Got a Good Beat and You Can Dance to It"

Sep 17

Nick Hornby, *High Fidelity* [excerpts]

Nick Hornby, *Songbook* [excerpts]

Sep 22

Michael Ventura, "Hear That Long Snake Moan"

Sep 24

Rian Malan, "In the Jungle"

Sep 29

Gilbert Rodman, "Histories"

Michael Jarrett, "Concerning the Progress of Rock and Roll"

Greil Marcus, "Hibbing High School and 'the Mystery of Democracy'"

Oct 1

Keith Negus, "Industry"

Simon Frith, "The Popular Music Industry"

Courtney Love, "Courtney Love Does the Math"

Oct 6

Andrew Goodwin, "Sample and Hold"

Paul Théberge, "'Plugged In': Technology and Popular Music"

Oct 8

Jonathan Sterne, "The Social Genesis of Sound Fidelity"

Oct 13

Last due date for Critical response paper #1

Philip Auslander, "Tryin' to Make It Real"

Oct 15

Malcolm Gladwell, "Something Borrowed"

Kembrew McLeod, "Copyright Criminals"

Oct 20

David Shumway, "Performance"
Robert Drew, "Anyone Can Do It"

Oct 22

George Lipsitz, "Foreword" [*My Music*]
Will Straw, "Sizing Up Record Collections"
Greil Marcus, "Another Country"

Oct 27

John Street, "Rock, Pop, and Politics"
Reebee Garofalo *et al.*, "Who Is the World?"

Oct 29

Tricia Rose, "Fear of a Black Planet"
Todd Boyd, "Check Yo Self Before You Wreck Yo Self"

Nov 3

Greil Marcus, "Prologue" [*Lipstick Traces*]
Steve Waksman, "Kick Out the Jams!"
Tricia Rose, "Soul Sonic Forces"

Nov 5 -- NO CLASS**Nov 10**

Sheryl Garratt, "Teenage Dreams"
Susan McClary, "Same As It Ever Was"

Nov 12

Jim Walsh, "Baptism by Bruce"
Trent Hill, "Why Isn't Country Music 'Youth' Culture?"

Nov 17**Last due date for Critical response paper #2**

Cheryl Cline, "Little Songs of Misogyny"
Norma Coates, "Can't We Just Talk About Music?"
Daphne Brooks and Gayle Wald, "Women Do Dylan: The Aesthetics and Politics of Dylan Covers"

Nov 19

Gayle Wald, "Just a Girl?"
Lisa Henderson, "Justify Our Love"

Nov 24

bell hooks, "Madonna"
Gayle Wald, "From Spirituals to Swing"

Nov 26 -- NO CLASS**Dec 1**

Gilbert Rodman, "A Hero to Most?"
Norma Coates, "Elvis From the Waist Up and Other Myths: 1950s Music Television and the Gendering of Rock Discourse"

Dec 3

Trent Hill, "The Enemy Within"

Martin Cloonan, "Call That Censorship?"

Robert Wright, "I'd Sell You Suicide"

Dec 8

bell hooks, "Gangsta Culture"

Gilbert Rodman, "Race . . . and Other Four Letter Words"

Dec 10

Lee Marshall, "For and Against the Record Industry"

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

Dec 15

Gilbert Rodman & Cheyanne Vanderdonckt, "Music for Nothing"

Dec 19 -- NO CLASS

Take-home final exam due