I. Course identity, teaching staff, and logistics

**PS 399 Music and Politics**
**Teaching Staff:**
Professor Anita Chari  
Department of Political Science  
anitac@uoregon.edu  
Office Hours: TBD
This class is online, conducted via Canvas and is entirely asynchronous, for 4 weeks during the summer.

No prerequisites needed for this class

Required course materials:  
All texts are on Canvas.

II. Course description

How does music relate to politics and power in social movements, subcultures, and the marketplace? This course will explore the relationship of music to politics, primarily in the US context. We will read about, write about, and listen to music from across genres and political moments including labor and civil rights songs, blues, R&B, hip hop, and pop, and we will look at the political contexts in which these forms of music are produced, performed, and consumed. We will be asking questions about what is political about music of these various musical styles and from diverse historical periods. We will not focus solely on music produced as an intervention into particular political movements, though we will look at examples of this kind (music from the American civil rights movement, for example). Rather, we are interested in how music of any and every kind is involved in the production of subjectivity, how changing formats of sound production and technology affect our sensory capacities as social and political subjects, how music structures collectivity, and how the relationship between form and content in music can be analyzed in ways that are useful for social and political critique. Our interests here are in the “micropolitics” of music. Above all, we will be learning tools for listening to music more deeply, so that we can have a deeper understanding of the ways that music impacts us and moves us, whether that be to action, inaction, political struggle, complacency, or emotion.
III. Expected learning outcomes

Skills
In this class you will learn:
• Analytical writing ability, including exposition, and analysis of philosophical arguments
• How to effectively read philosophical/theoretical texts
• How to connect theory with everyday experience
• How to integrate analysis with personal and creative reflection.

Content
• You will learn about a significant literature in the field of Political Theory about the relationship between music, culture and politics.
• You will learn about the following concepts: race, culture, subcultures, capitalism, commodity fetishism, cultural appropriation.
• You will learn how to use the theories studied in class to perform analyses of media and artworks, as well as of contemporary political events.
• You will learn how to participate effectively in online discussion boards.

IV. Estimated Student Workload

You are expected to spend about 6-10 hours per week outside of class on your coursework, including reading and writing assignments. In this class, you will write two 5-page papers, and one 7-10 page paper. You will also submit a weekly discussion assignment based on your response to class readings and discussions. Finally, class participation is a significant part of your work in this class. The breakdown of hours of work is as follows per week:

Per week one can expect:
1. Online lectures: 2 hours/week (20 total for the quarter)
2. Course reading: about 4 hours/week (40 hours total for quarter)
3) Writing Assignments: average 3 hours/week (30 hours total for quarter)
4) Listen to weekly playlist: average 1 hour/week (10 hours total for quarter)
4) Discussion boards online: about 1 hour per week (20 hours total for quarter)

V. How Grades Will Be Determined

Your grade will be based upon the following:
1) Assignment 1: 20% 5 page paper
2) Assignment 2: 20% 5 page paper
3) Discussion boards: 30% (assessed via Canvas discussion board).
4) Final writing assignment: 30% 7-10 page paper

The assignments are located in the appendix at the end of this syllabus.
Assignment of final grades: Students will receive grades based on their grades for each assignment, the percentage weights given in the table above, and the following criteria:

- **A+:** if given at all, given to 1 or 2 students whose performance stands out as significantly stronger than all other students in the course
- **A:** all assignments completed in ways that demonstrate a strong and nuanced understanding of almost all course concepts and the ability to clearly connect theories from the course to empirical evidence
- **B:** all assignments completed in ways that demonstrate a solid understanding of most course concepts and the ability to adequately connect theories from the course to empirical evidence
- **C:** completed assignments demonstrate only a basic understanding of course concepts and/or one or more assignments missing
- **D:** missing many assignments and completed assignments demonstrate little understanding of material covered
- **F:** assignments completed account for less than 80% of total grade.

VI. Course schedule and assignments

**Reading/Listening Schedule:**
[Note: All readings will be available at the course Canvas site]

**Module 1:**

1.1: Introduction

1.2: Music and Society
Plato, *The Republic*, Book III (pp. 398-403)
Homer, *The Odyssey* (Book 12, excerpt on the Sirens) (no page numbers—html file).

Listen to weekly playlist

**Module 2:**

2.1: Principles and Tools for Listening
Listen to playlist 2.1 linked on Canvas and come to class prepared to listen, take notes, and to learn techniques for musical and cultural analysis.

Listen to weekly playlist

2.2: Pop I
Simon Frith, “Pop Music,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock* (pp. 93-108)
Listening selections linked on Canvas.
Module 3:

3.1: Pop II
Adorno, “The Fetish Character of Music and the Regression in Listening” (PP. 270-299)
In-class listening selections drawn from class participants

Listen to weekly playlist

3.2: R & B, Race, Black consciousness I
Raymond Williams, “Notes on Deconstructing the Popular” pp. 442-453
Film: Twenty Feet from Stardom (2013)

Module 4:

4.1: R & B, Race, Black consciousness II
*Just My Soul Responding*, Brian Ward, Ch. 1 (pp. 19-55)
Listen to weekly playlist

4.2: Music and Civil Rights
*Just My Soul Responding*, Brian Ward, Ch. 3 (90-122)
“Black is a Country” BBC 4 podcast on the music of the Black Power Movement (to be listened to as homework)

Module 5:

5.1: Music of the 1960’s (and beyond)
Eyerman and Jamison, *Music and Social Movements*, Ch. 3-5 (emphasis on 3 and 5).
(pp. 48-139)
Joan Didion, “Slouching Toward Bethlehem” (pp. 5-35)

Listen to weekly playlist

5.2: Music of the 1960’s II
Peter Doggett, *There’s a Riot Going On: Revolutionaries, Rock Stars and the Rise and the Fall of the 1960’s*, Ch. 3 (pp. 133-218)

Assignment 1 due
Module 6:

6.1: Hip Hop: “The Most Dangerous Art Form”
Jeff Chang, Can’t Stop, Won’t Stop (PP. 89-211, 215-229)
Listen to weekly playlist

6.2: Hip Hop: Politics of Form
View Documentary at home: Scratch (2001) (linked on Canvas). We will discuss this film in class along with other reading.
Michael Eric Dyson, “Know What I Mean?: Reflections on Hip Hop” (pp. 41-58)

Module 7:

7.1: Black Culture, Agency, Resistance
Everything But the Burden: What White People are Taking from Black Culture
Intro, Ch. 1, Ch. 10 (PP. 1-38, 124-135)
Eric Lott, “Love and Theft: The Racial Unconscious of Blackface Minstrelsy” (pp. 23-50)
Listen to weekly playlist

7.2: Global hip hop
Watch at home: Hip hop: the furious force of rhymes (2010)
We will discuss this film in class.

Module 8:

8.1: Format I
Michael Bull, “The Audio-Visual Ipod” (pp. 197-208)
Listen to weekly playlist

8.2: Format II
Shuhei Hosokawa, “The Walkman Effect” (pp. 104-116)

Assignment 2 Due

Module 9

9.1 The Ringtone
Listen to weekly playlist

9.2 The Ringtone Continued

Module 10

10.1 Country Music and the Rise of the Right
Listen to weekly playlist

10.2 Final discussion
We will have a broad discussion of the themes of the entire course

Assignment 3 Due

VII. Course Policies

**Safe Space:** My intention is to create an environment that is inclusive and safe for diverse voices. This means that we will create parameters as a class together for the norms of our discourse in discussion boards. I address this topic in the getting started module so you are aware of your responsibilities for creating that space.

**Late paper policy:** *Please note that I will not accept late papers. Late papers receive a 0.* Papers must be dropped off in hardcopy form into my mailbox as well as electronically via Vericite. More specific directions will follow. Only cases of documented family or personal injury (death in the family or extreme personal accident/illness) will be accepted as exceptions to this rule and only in very very rare cases. Please do not use computer failure as an excuse, you should use an application like dropbox to backup your files at all times. Do not attempt to get in touch with me to receive an excuse unless you have documented proof of your situation in hand.

**Email correspondence:** Please identify yourself and the name of our course in all correspondence with the instructor and GE. Also, when you email, please be aware that you should write grammatically. You should act professionally in this medium like in all communication. Please do not expect an immediate response to your email—it is not appropriate to ask a question about a paper the night before it is due. We will aim to respond to emails within 1 day.

**Academic Misconduct**
The presentation of someone else's words or ideas as your own is plagiarism and is a serious offense. The University of Oregon takes a very hard line in questions of academic misconduct. It is never tolerable to present someone else’s work as your own. Sources: The failure to provide proper acknowledgment of your use of outside sources constitutes plagiarism. You must name all sources you are paraphrasing or quoting. Please consult with me if you are confused about how to make a proper citation. You can also consult Charles Lipson, Doing Honest Work in College: How to Prepare Citations, Avoid Plagiarism, and Achieve Real Academic Success (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), or the Dartmouth College’s “Sources: Their Use and Acknowledgement” (http://www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/sources/). Both manuals offer a full explanation of what constitutes plagiarism and how to cite sources, including documenting sources taken from the web. In this class we will very seldom use secondary sources. Nevertheless, if you ever consult a secondary source you must cite to it.

Student Resources

Accessible Education: The University of Oregon is working to create inclusive learning environments. Please notify me if there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in disability-related barriers to your participation. You are also encouraged to contact the Accessible Education Center in 164 Oregon Hall at 541-346-1155 or uoaec@uoregon.edu.

Academic Support: The University Teaching and Learning Center provides numerous resources to help University of Oregon students succeed. Programs, workshops, courses, tutors, and mentors are among the many resources they provide to help with educational pursuits at the University of Oregon. For the services offered by the center see http://tlc.uoregon.edu/index.html

University of Oregon Crisis Center: A student-funded organization that provides students with confidential telephone crisis intervention 24/7 at (541) 346-4488.

Title IX Information:

Please find the university's policy at the following website:

https://titleix.uoregon.edu/resources

Resources:

SAFE website
Office of Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity
Office of the Dean of Students
University Counseling and Testing Center
University Health Center
University of Oregon Police Department
Appendix:

1. Assignment 1

Instructions:
Choose a song from within the field of “pop music” broadly construed to write about. List its full bibliographic information (year, artist) and provide a Spotify link under question 1 (unless it isn’t on spotify, then provide another link, Apple Music or whatnot). Fill out this sheet for your analysis
Think carefully about which song you are choosing, because the narrative you construct will be impacted by which song you choose. Some songs will simply not be worthy of this kind of analysis, so steer clear of songs that aren’t going to yield anything useful in terms of analysis.

Assignment 1 is due on **Friday, May 5 by 5 pm** [Please note the changed due date]. Please hand in a HARD COPY of the paper to my mailbox on the 9th floor of PLC, AND simultaneously upload the paper to Canvas. If you don’t submit a hard copy it will not be graded. Please use Times New Roman, 12 pt, and double space your responses. Please type your responses into this template. Please make sure to cite all sources consulted, either parenthetical or footnote citation is fine. A paragraph should consist of at least 3-4 sentences.

1. List the song you chose and explain why you chose them, include your links and bibliographic info.

2. Analyze this song in terms of FORM and CONTENT, and to relate these two levels. When writing about this dimension, feel free to be creative, sensual, and expressive in your language. Try to relate to the music as sound, as well as to its meaning. Consult the earlier class handout for a description of form and content. Take some time with this part. [3 paragraphs]

4. As we discussed in class, pop music expresses the “sound of universality.” Explain how we might understand this song in light of this idea. [2 paragraphs]. To do so, refer to some aspect of Brian Ward’s analysis of the complex interplay between racial and gender politics, “perceptual learning” on the part of audiences, and broader social and political dynamics in society. You will probably need to do a bit of extra historical research here unless you use pieces from the period discussed by Ward. Cite to any sources used.
5. Stuart Hall argues that “almost all cultural forms will be contradictory ... composed of antagonistic and unstable elements,” in relation to the dominant culture (Hall p. 449). How might we understand this song in light of Hall’s statement? Do some extra research on the song or artist if needed to answer the question. Cite to all sources used. [2 paragraphs]

6. Explain how we might understand this song through the lens of the critical concepts introduced by Adorno, such as musical fetishism, or the “regression in listening.” In order to do this you will need to first give an exposition of the concept from Adorno, and then explain how we might understand the song in this light. [2 paragraphs].

2. Assignment 2:

Choose ONE of the following questions on which to write a 5 page essay. Follow the instructions in the prompt. Please make sure to cite to all sources used.

Submit electronically via Canvas by the deadline.

1. R & B, Black Aesthetics, and the Integration of popular music

In Just My Soul Responding, Ward argues that the increasing popularity of black r & b among an increasingly interracial audience in the 1950’s and 60’s was a complex phenomenon that had to do with changes in racial politics, changes in black artists relationship to earlier African-American musical forms like the blues, changing aesthetics of r & b itself as a response to the attempt by record companies and artists to reach white audiences, and “perceptual learning” on the part of audiences (Ward 50).

Select two contrasting songs from this period of r & b (feel free to use songs and artists that Ward himself mentions in our readings). Write a 5 page essay that addresses the following:

a) How do these two songs illustrate or complicate the history outlined by Ward regarding the shifts in r & b, shifts in race relations, and shifts in black musical aesthetics? Make an argument in response to this question and include a thesis statement in the first paragraph of your essay.

b) Include in your essay an in-depth analysis of each of the songs in terms of 1) form and 2) content. Relate these two levels.

2) Music of the 1960’s

Eyerman and Jamison refer to the songs of the 1960’s as “seeking to ‘redefine the role of the individual in the context of a new mythic vision,’ adding to the critical language of radical dissent a new kind of existential pathos. The exemplary songs were of ‘individuals who wandered on the borders of an absurd technocracy, which threatened them with a loss of freedom, equality,
opportunity, and individuality ... the message that was projected in the topical songs of the 1960’s reflected the growing sense of alienation in American society. And a resistance to ... the ‘machine.’” (Eyerman and Jamison 123). On the other hand, Joan Didion’s essay “Slouching Towards Bethlehem” and Peter Doggett’s work, are arguably critical of these wide-eyed wanderers.

Select two contrasting songs from the 1960’s. Write a 5 page essay that addresses the following:

a) How do these two songs illustrate or complicate the debate between Eyerman and Jamison on the one hand and Didion/Doggett on the other hand regarding the critical and/or political potential of music from the 1960’s? Make an argument in response to this question and include a thesis statement in the first paragraph of your essay.

b) Include in your essay an in-depth analysis of each of the songs in terms of 1) form and 2) content. Relate these two levels.

3. Assignment 3

5 page paper on the Ethics/Politics of Music

In this class we’ve discussed several issues regarding the relationship between music, politics, and society. These issues have included: the politics of cultural appropriation and race in various periods in the history of American music, the relationship between music and commodification, the impact of capitalism upon listening, the status of “the popular” and its relationship to cultural expressions of universality, class dynamics and the way they express themselves in pop music, the relationship between technological form and modes of listening, and the use of sound in modes of domination and warfare. In all of these explorations, we have raised questions about the ethical and political status of music, as well as our relationship to it through modes of consumption, listening, and perception.

Write a 5 page paper addressing a theme that is significant for you about the relationship between politics/ethics on the one hand, and music/sound on the other. This is your chance to write about an issue that compels you and with which you feel deeply engaged.

Observe the following guidelines:
1) Your paper should make an argument and must contain a thesis statement.
2) Your paper must address 3 texts from the quarter IN DEPTH. This means you must use quotes from these texts and interpret them. Your grade will depend largely on your ability to effectively interpret, analyze, and summarize these texts that you have chosen, and to apply them to the ethical/political theme that you are discussing.
3) Your paper must include a reference at least 2 pieces of music, which should include some analysis of form and content.

Please submit on Canvas.