SOC410 The Music of Oppressed Minorities

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SB2 155

For historically oppressed minorities such as African Americans and the Roma (also referred to as “Gypsies”), popular music has been an essential means of expression, survival, and resistance. Not coincidentally, both minorities have been typecast as "natural" musicians. But what happens when the music gets re-appropriated by the mainstream as entertainment and becomes a global commodity? How do minorities engage the culture of Whites crossing the boundaries between folk and popular, rural and urban, entertainment and art? This course explores the social, economic, and cultural forces behind such phenomena. Focusing on case studies, we look at how musical genres such as blues, jazz, hip hop, Balkan folk and world music have forged racial/ethnic identities, served as political and social commentary, and shaped the world's musical landscape.

Course Requirements

Exams: (70 per cent): We will have a take-home midterm (30 per cent) consisting of two essay questions and 8 identifications. A week prior to the exam I'll send out a study guide to help you prepare for it. You will write a final research project (40 per cent) preceded by a one-page proposal. (Check the syllabus for due dates). Detailed guidance for the research project will be posted in the 2nd week of classes..
Assignments: (15 per cent): Weekly written, memo-style, 1 to 2 page-long reflection papers or web-related assignments and 1 final oral presentation of your research project on the last week of classes.

Participation (15 per cent): Class and small group discussions are vital parts of this course! Please come to class with questions and comments to share about the readings music, and films. Voluntary oral presentations will count toward participation grade as well.

Required Texts:

3. Journal articles and chapters (online)

Both books are available in the PSU Book store. (You may obtain them from Amazon as well.)

Films: Do the Right Thing (dir. Spike Lee),
Blues: A Musical Journey (dir. Martin Scorsese),
Latcho Drom (dir. Tony Gatlif),
Black Cat, White Cat (dir. Emil Kusturica)

WEEK 1

Introducing the course and ourselves.

Music, Power, Race, and Identity: An overview of the themes, issues, and questions of the course.
Ramsey, ch. 1, 1-17

Assignment: Pick a piece of music (preferably on YouTube video) deemed to represent a marginalized minority in the US or another society. Explain your choice by briefly describing the musical piece in its social and cultural context. What's the music's significance for you personally or for the larger culture or society? Be ready to discuss it in a small group setting due (3/31).

WEEK 2

Blues and the African-American Experience: Contesting Approaches
- LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), ch.6, 7, & 8. of Blues People.
- Ramsey, ch. 3,'Race, Entertainment, and the Blues Muse', 44-67.
· Keil, *Urban Blues*, ch. 1-2. 30-68 (online, R)

Film: 'Feel Like Going Home' (from the series: *Blues: A Musical Journey*, 2002, excerpts)

‘Lady Sings the Blues’: Gender Issues

O’Brien, “‘Riffin’ the Scotch’: From Blues to the Jazz Age” in *SheBop: The Definitive History of Women in Rock, Pop + Soul*. 1995, 7-37. (online)


Film:  *The Ladies Sing the Blues*

‘How to prepare your research paper?’ will be posted.

WEEK 3

4/12 *Jazz: From Entertainment to Modern Art*
· Ramsey, ch. 5. ‘We Called Ourselves Modern’, in *Race Music*.
· Recommended: Gendron, “‘Moldy Figs” and Modernists: Jazz at War (1942-46)” in Krin Gabbard (ed) *Jazz among the Discourses*. 1995 Duke U Press, 31-57. (online, R)

*Race Music Into Youth Culture: the Case of Rock’n’Roll*

· Film: Renegades (episode 1 in the series PBS *Rock’n’Roll*, 1995)

WEEK 4

Politics and Resistance in the 60s: Funk and the Black Arts Movement

· Hip Hop: Its Uses and Meaning on Film
Ramsey, ch. 7 'Scoring a Black Nation: Film and Identity in the Age of Hip-Hop', 163-189.

1-page research proposal due.
Midterm study guide posted.

WEEK 5

Black or White? Intrusions and Crossovers in the 2000s


MIDTERM

WEEK 6

Who Are Roma? Conflicting Approaches

· Silverman, [Review of the Film Latcho Drom.] Ethnomusicology, Vol. 44, No. 2 (Spring - Summer, 2000), pp. 362-364 (online)
  Film: Latcho Drom (Part 1)

The Romani Diaspora Across Borders

· Lemon, ‘What Is Your Nation?’ ch 3 in Between Two Fires: Gypsy Performance and Romani Memory. 80-105. (online)
  Film: Latcho Drom (Part 2)

WEEK 7

Roma, the Shadowy “Other” in the Music Culture of Central and Eastern Europe
Romania
• Beissinger, ch. 3 “‘Musica Orientala’: Identity and Popular Culture in Postcommunist Romania”, Balkan Popular Culture, 95-135. (online)

• Szeman, “Gypsy Music” and Deejays: Orientalism, Balkanism and Romani Musicians. TDR: The Drama Review 53:3 (T203) Fall 2009. (online, R)

WEEK 8

Bulgaria
• Kurkela, ‘Bulgarian Chalga on Video: Oriental Stereotypes, Mafia Exoticism, and Politics’ Balkan Popular Culture, ch. 4, 143-172.

Hungary

WEEK 9

The Gender of Roma Music
• Silverman, "The Gender of the Profession: Music, Dance, and Reputation among Balkan Muslim Rom Women"

Assignment: Identify a Romani-music-related website of 1] a musical performing ensemble; 2] a record label; 3] a festival; 4] a radio station or program; 5] television station or program 6] a social network site (Facebook, MySpace) or a magazine. Write a 2-page description of the musicians, the genre and style of their music, the media used, the audiences targeted, and any other social aspect of the music activity disclosed.

WEEK 10

Roma in the Global Circuit of Popular Music
• Silverman, Trafficking in the Exotic with “Gypsy” Music: Balkan Roma, Cosmopolitanism, and “World Music” Festivals in Balkan Popular Culture, ch. 10, 335-358. (online)

Guest speaker: Kathy Fors, former show host on Romani music @ KBOO, musician and Paul Beck, musician (tentative)
Pulling the Two Threads Together: Music As a “Zone of Negotiation”: African-Americans and Roma in a Comparative Perspective

Student presentations.