

**Syllabus**  
**Music 126/Ethnic Studies 178**  
**The Blues: An Oral Culture**  
**Fall 2003**  
**University of California, San Diego**  
**Tuesday and Thursday 12:30-1:50**  
**Warren 2005**

**Instructor:** Dr. David Borgo  
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**Teaching Assistants:**

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**Course Objectives**

This course investigates the development of the blues from its beginnings to the present day. Students will learn to understand the history of the blues in terms of changes in musical techniques *and* social values and to recognize music as a site of celebration and struggle over relationships and ideals. Students will increase their ability to hear differences among performances and styles and to interpret the meanings of such differences. They will gain greater knowledge of U.S. History as it affects and is affected by musical activities and learn to appreciate the stakes and motives behind the controversies and debates that have always surrounded the blues and related forms of American popular music.

**Course Summary**

The blues made audible the struggles and the resilience of African Americans and its sonic history is inseparable from broader historical and social forces such as the legacies of the slave trade, the dehumanizing conditions of the Jim Crow South, and the urbanization of a largely rural black population. The blues took on additional meanings as it re-emerged first in the 1930s and 40s as part of a “leftist” trend in liberal politics and again during the socially conscious counterculture of the 1960s. Since that time the blues has continued to infuse and re-infuse American and global popular music styles. We will use a wide variety of readings, sound recordings, and videos to help us trace the development of the blues from its roots in Africa and in the spirituals, work songs and hollers of the antebellum South, through its initial flowering in the Mississippi Delta, to its eventual emergence as a form of mass culture. Along the way we will explore how the blues has influenced many forms of American music including jazz, country, rhythm and blues, zydeco, rock, and rap. But perhaps most importantly, this course will attempt to situate the blues within a broader investigation of the politics of race, class, and gender, and of the institutional arrangements that have shaped and continue to shape contemporary music making.

**Required Texts**

- A **reader** containing all of the assigned articles is available for purchase at Cal Copy – 3251 Holiday Ct. #103, behind the Mobil station at the corner of La Jolla Village and Villa La Jolla.

**Grading**

The course is divided into two units of equal weighting. For each unit, students will be assigned a set of take-home essays (2 or 3) and will take a concluding exam. Students are also required to attend one blues or blues-related concert during each unit of the course (for a total of 2; see details below). Exams will involve a variety of questions covering lecture materials and all reading and listening assignments. *There will be a significant listening portion to each exam.* Essay questions will be given to the class approximately one week prior to due date. Essays will generally involve a concise summary of, and detailed commentary on, one or more topics presented during the unit. Students are required to reference the assigned readings and follow style guidelines to be discussed in class. *There are no make-ups for missed exams* except under the most unusual circumstances. To request a make-up, a legitimate excuse must be submitted in writing before the exam, or no later than one class period after the exam and *must be accompanied by written evidence.* For example, if you were sick, you must provide a note from a doctor, with his/her name, address and phone number.

- UNIT I 50 % - Exam 25%, Essays 15%, Concert Attendance 10%
- UNIT II 50% - Exam 25%, Essays 15%, Concert Attendance 10%

### Grading Scale

98-100 A+	88-89 B+	78-79 C+	68-69 D+	59-below F
92-97 A	82-87 B	72-77 C	62-67 D	
90-91 A-	80-81 B-	70-71 C-	60-61 D-	

### Integrity of Scholarship

Please be aware that plagiarizing (or other forms of academic dishonesty) can result in an “F” for the course and can lead to further disciplinary action by the University. (For more information see the section entitled “UCSD Policy on Integrity of Scholarship” in the UCSD General Catalogue.)

### Listening

Listening to a wide variety of the blues and other related musics is an essential part of this course. All of the listening examples will be on reserve on the DARP system and may be found through:  
<http://reserves.ucsd.edu>

Please Note: The access to DARP is restricted to UCSD IP addresses. You can only access the required listening materials from computers on the UCSD network, including dial-in accounts provided by ACS Office of Network Operations (ONO). Please visit the Remote Access page on the DARP website for more details and links to instructions on how to configure your browser for remote access. You may also use computers located in the Audio Reserves section of the Music Library (first floor, Geisel Library) or those in many other computer labs around campus (there is a list of these labs on the DARP home page). If you have any questions about using DARP please contact Audio Reserves in the Music Library (858-534-8074).

### Attendance Policy

Students are expected to be at every class session.

### Concert Attendance

Students are required to attend one blues or blues-related concert for each unit of the course and hand in *proof of attendance* (a ticket stub, concert flyer signed by the artist or venue, etc.) attached to a short (no more than one page) *description of the event*. Concerts of interest will be mentioned from time to time in class. Please share with the class information on any events that you feel may be important or particularly relevant.

### Class Schedule

Please see the required course reader and the DARP website for related assignments. *All reading and listening assignments should be completed prior to the scheduled class meeting time.*

Unit I	Unit II
<b>September 22</b> – Introductions/Course Overview 27 – Defining the Blues: African American Aesthetics and Oral Culture 29 – Africa and the Roots of the Blues  <b>October 2</b> 4 – The Ritual (and Cycle) of Minstrelsy 6 – Rural Blues in the South 11 – (continued) 13 – Women and the Blues 18 – White Country Blues and Bluegrass 20 – Robert Johnson 25 – Leadbelly and the 1940s Blues Revival 27 – <b>UNIT I EXAM and Essays and Concert Reports DUE</b>	<b>November 1</b> – Chicago Blues 3 – (continued) 8 – Blues Rocks On 10 – (continued) 15 – The 1960s Blues Revival 17 – Psychedelic Blues: Jimi and Janis 22 – (continued) 24 – THANKSGIVING 29 – Rap Music and the Blues Today  <b>December</b> 1 – The State of the Blues Today – <b>Essays DUE</b>  7 (Wednesday) <b>11:30-2:30 UNIT II EXAM and Concert Reports Due</b>