

Music 126/Ethnic Studies 178

The Blues: An Oral Culture

UC San Diego

Thursday 6:30-9:20 CENTR 216

Professor: David Borgo (dborgo@ucsd.edu)

Office: Conrad Prebys Music Center (CPMC) Room 234, 858-822-4957, Tuesdays 11a-noon or by appointment

Readers: Tobin Chodos (achodos@ucsd.edu) and Chris Golinski (kgolinsk@ucsd.edu)

Course Website: <http://tritoned.ucsd.edu>

Couse 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. cultural 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 resilience of African Americans and the music's 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" in the 1930s and 40s as part of a trend in liberal politics, in the 1950s as the foundation for rock-and-roll, and again during the socially conscious counterculture of the 1960s. Since that time the blues has continued to 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 African antecedents and its roots in African American spirituals, work songs and hollers, through its initial flowering in the Mississippi Delta and 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, 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.

Course Requirements

The course is divided into two non-cumulative units of equal weighting. For each unit, students must complete bi-weekly assignments, a concert/media report, and take an in-class exam (covering lecture materials, reading, and listening assignments). Assignment details are provided in separate prompts at TritonEd. All work must have the *word count visible* at the top, be *submitted to TritonED on time*, and will be *screened for potential plagiarism issues by Turn-It-In*. In-class writing (or pop quizzes) will also be a component of the student's final grade. Students are expected to be at every class session. Video, audio, lecture, and discussion materials vital to one's success in this course will only be presented during class times. *There are no make-ups for missed exams or for missed In-class assessments* except under the most unusual circumstances and with proper documentation. It is completely at the discretion of the instructor to grant or not grant a make-up. *Personal conflicts or scheduling difficulties will not be considered legitimate excuses. No late work will be accepted.*

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Classroom Etiquette and Expectations:

While you are in college, your coursework is your job. You should behave as you would in a professional work environment. When in doubt about how you should speak, write, or act, always err on the side of formality. You will never offend or annoy someone by being overly formal and polite. Class discussions should be both informed and respectful. All students are encouraged to raise questions, explore ideas, and express misgivings. We will aim to make certain that everyone's voice is heard and that all viewpoints are given equal consideration. See UCSD's [principles of community](#).

We will also aim to **excel with integrity**, using only honest, respectful, responsible, fair, and trustworthy methods. UCSD has a university-wide Policy on Integrity of Scholarship, published annually in the General Catalog, and online at <http://students.ucsd.edu/academics/academic-integrity/policy.html>. All students must read and be familiar with this Policy. All suspected violations of academic integrity will be reported to UCSD's Academic Integrity Coordinator. Students found to have violated UCSD's standards for academic integrity may receive both administrative and academic sanctions. Administrative sanctions may extend up to and include suspension or dismissal, and academic sanctions may include failure of the assignment or failure of the course. Receipt of this syllabus constitutes an acknowledgment that you have understood and are responsible for understanding and acting in accordance with the above policies and with UCSD guidelines, including the UCSD principles of community and guidelines on academic integrity.

The use of personal technology (laptops, mobile phones, etc.) is not permitted during lecture. You should plan to buy a physical notebook for the class and you will need loose paper to complete in-class assessments and writing. You may be asked to leave the classroom if you have your phone or computer out and will receive no credit for any in-class work that day.

- see <https://goo.gl/Dv1qLH>, <https://goo.gl/7mYnVi>, <https://goo.gl/oKoXdz>

You should always come to class prepared (having completed assigned reading and listening) **and ready to participate in class activities.**

Grade Breakdown

	Unit I	Unit II	Total
Exams	25	25	50%
Concert/Media Reports	10	10	20%
Bi-weekly Assignments (2 per unit, 5pts. ea.)	10	10	20%
In-Class Assessments	5	5	10%

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COURSE SCHEDULE

Date	Topic	Assignments Due (via TritonED before the start of class)	Reading and Media Assignments (complete before class)
9/27	Introduction and Overview Roots of the Blues		Dixon, <u>Wald</u> Intro; Jones
10/4	Classic Blues: Rural and Urban The Poetry of the Blues	minstrelsy reflection (250-500 words)	<u>Wald</u> Chps. 1, 2, and 6 Davis (Angela)
10/11	Blind Lemon Jefferson, Charlie Patton, Robert Johnson, Leadbelly, the Lomaxes		Govenar, Gioia, Lipsitz, Filene
10/18	Country and Jazz meet at The Blues	blues and poetry (250-500 words)	<u>Wald</u> Chps. 4 and 5 Recommended: Wolfe
10/25	Review and Guest Presentation with Nathan James and Ben Hernandez		
11/1	EXAM I	concert/media report 1 (300-600 words)	
11/8	Modern Blues: Chicago Blues, Rhythm-and-Blues, Rock-and-Roll, Blues Rock		<u>Wald</u> Chp. 3, Walker Recommended: George
11/15	British Blues, Dylan, Janis, and Jimi		Hellman, Albin, Whiteley, Waksman
11/22	Rap and the Blues Impulse	blues and rap (250-500 words)	Titon, Narváez
11/29	HOLIDAY		
12/6	The State of the Blues Today and Guest Presentation with Missy Andersen and Heine Andersen	blues today (250-500 words)	Rose, Davis (Francis), Lieberfeld
TUESDAY 12/11 (7pm)	EXAM II	concert/media report 2 (300-600 words)	

Grading and scheduling details are subject to change at the discretion of the instructor.

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READINGS (available on TritonED)

- Albin, J. Zak. "Bob Dylan and Jimi Hendrix: Juxtaposition and Transformation "All along the Watchtower." *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, Vol. 57, No. 3 (Autumn, 2004), pp. 599-644.
- Davis, Angela. "Blame It On The Blues: Bessie Smith, Gertrude 'Ma' Rainey, and the Politics of Blues Protest." *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*. Random House, 1998.
- Davis, Francis. "The Blues is Dead; The Blues Will Never Die." *The History of the Blues*. New York: Hyperion, 1995.
- Davis, Francis. [2] *The History of the Blues*. New York: Hyperion, 1995.
- Filene, Benjamin. "'Our Singing Country': John and Alan Lomax, Leadbelly and the Construction of an American Past." *American Quarterly*. 43.4 (December 1991).
- George, Nelson. "The New Negro (1950-65)" [Excerpt]. *The Death of Rhythm & Blues*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1988, pp.59-70.
- Gioia, Ted. "Dockery's Plantation" and "Hellhound on My Trail." *Delta Blues*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2008.
- Govenar, Alan. "That Black Snake Moan: The Music and Mystery of Blind Lemon Jefferson." In *Bluesland: Portraits of Twelve Major American Blues Artists*, edited by Pete Welding and Toby Byron. New York: Dutton Books, 1991, pp.16-37.
- Harrison, Daphne Duvall. "'Wild Women Don't Have the Blues': Blues from the Black Woman's Perspective." *Black Pearls: Blues Queens of the 1920s*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1993(1988).
- Hellmann, John M. Jr. "'I'm a Monkey': The Influence of the Black American Blues Argot on the Rolling Stones." *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 86, No. 342 (Oct. - Dec., 1973), pp. 367-373
- Jones, LeRoi (Amiri Baraka). Selections from *Blues People: Negro Music in White America*. New York: William Morrow, 1963. ("The Negro as Non-American: Some Background" and "The Negro as Property" and "Slave and Post Slave")
- Kunzru, Hari. *White Tears*. Alfred A. Knopf. 2017.
- Lieberfeld, Daniel. "Million-Dollar Juke-Joint: Commodifying Blues Culture." *African American Review*. 29.2 (Summer 1995).
- Lipsitz, George. "White Desire: Remembering Robert Johnson." *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit From Identity Politics*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998. 118-138.
- Narváez, Peter. "Living Blues Journal: The Paradoxical Aesthetics of the Blues Revival." *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined*. Ed. Neil V Rosenberg. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993.
- Rose, Tricia. "Soul Sonic Forces: Technology, Orality, and Black Cultural Practice in Rap Music." In *Sounding Off!: Music as Subversion/Resistance/Revolution*, ed. Ron Sakolsky and Fred Wei-Han Ho. New York: Autonomedia, 1995.
- Titon, Jeff Todd. "Reconstructing the Blues: Reflections on the 1960s Blues Revival." *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined*. Ed. Neil V Rosenberg. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993.
- Wald, Elijah. *Blues: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press. 2010.
- Walker, Alice. "1955." *You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down*. New York: Harcourt Press, 1981.
- Whiteley, Sheila. "Try, Just a Little Bit Harder: Janis Joplin and the Search for Personal Identity." *Women and Popular Music: Sexuality, Identity, and Subjectivity*. New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Wolfe, Charles. "A Lighter Shade of Blue: White Country Blues." *Nothing But the Blues*. New York: Abbeville Press, 1993.