

The Blues: An Oral Tradition

Professor: David Borgo (dborgo@ucsd.edu)

Instructional Assistants: see Canvas website

Class Discussions: The Professor will be available via Zoom on Thursdays at 6:30P.M. (Pacific Time). This time slot may be used to explore topics presented in the lectures in greater depth or other topics of interest, and to answer student questions. These discussions are optional but students are strongly encouraged to take advantage of the opportunity. The professor will remain online only as long as there are students present, so please arrive on time.

Office Hours: The professor is available for individual Zoom meetings by appointment. Instructional Assistants will post their weekly office hours on Canvas.

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

Couse Objectives

This course investigates the development of the blues from its beginnings to the present day. 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. 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.

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, gender, and other markers of difference, and of the institutional arrangements that have shaped and continue to shape contemporary music making.

Grade Breakdown

<u>Assignment Type</u>	<u># of assignments</u>	<u>% points for ea.</u>	<u>% of Final Grade</u>
Lecture Quizzes	33	30 lectures @1pt ea. 3 performance videos @2pts ea.	36%
Writing Assignments	5	8	40%
Unit Assessments	2	12	24%

Grading Scale

A >93%	A- 90-93%	B+ 87-90%	B 80-87%	C+ 77-80%	C 70-77%	D/NP) 60-70%	F <60%
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Course Policy and Expectations (Please Read Carefully)

- The course is divided into 30 lectures with embedded quizzes (usually 3-5 questions) and 5 independent writing assignments (2 of which involve watching assigned videos; and at least one with a creative component)
- Lectures must be viewed in one sitting and quizzes must be submitted at the end; Seeking forward in the videos is disabled.
- Most lectures are around 20-30 minutes in length (with a few outliers). Please plan to watch each lecture when you have ample time, ample focus, and a reliable internet connection.
- A second attempt is allowed (e.g., if you got a question incorrect, or you encountered technical difficulties), but this requires viewing the complete lecture again (and no attempts beyond this will be allowed).
- PDFs of the lectures slides are available, and the lectures without embedded quizzes can be viewed in the “Media Gallery” for review and citation purposes, but viewing them this way does not provide credit to students for the assignment.
- Writing assignment prompts can be found on Canvas under “Assignments,” with specific word count expectations. Submitted work must have the word count visible at the top of the first page.
- All writing assignments must be uploaded as pdf or Word files to the appropriate link and will be screened for potential plagiarism issues by Turn-It-In.
- Assignment due dates are provided on the “course schedule” (below) and on Canvas; Assignments must be submitted before midnight (Pacific Time) on the scheduled date.
- All lectures & quizzes—and all assigned reading and listening—must be completed before midnight on Thursday of the week in which they are assigned.
- Writing assignments are due before midnight on the Sunday following the class in the week in which they are assigned (unless otherwise noted in the Course Schedule or on Canvas)
- **Late assignments will receive an automatic 10% deduction per day; there are no exceptions to this policy**
- The Unit Exams are each divided into two parts. One part is an online listening ‘quiz’ that presents 20 audio examples drawn from the respective Unit listening list on Spotify. Students must match what they are hearing to the track title and the name of the artist(s) using pull-down menus. Students will be given at least 24 hours to complete the listening portion. The second part of the exam involves take-home writing based on prompts that will be provided approximately one week prior to their due date. **Unit Exams may not be submitted late or made up if missed. Students failing to submit prior to the deadline will receive a zero.**

COURSE SCHEDULE - The below provides a general snapshot of assignments and their due dates, but the “Pages” tab on Canvas should be consulted for a more accurate and up-to-date listing of the required lectures, assignments, and resources. In the case of discrepancy, the Canvas website will be considered correct.

WEEK	LECTURE/QUIZZES	ASSIGNMENTS (due by Sunday unless noted)
0	INTRO on ZOOM	
1	1-3	
2	4-6	Minstrelsy Reflection and Discussion
3	7-9	Performance Reflection: Palmer & Ajuzie
4	10-13	Blues Lyrics/Themes Performance Reflection: Robin Henkel
5	14-15	Unit I EXAM (listening portion must be completed before the start of class , and the take-home writing is due on Sunday.)
6	16-20	Video Report 1
7	21-24	Performance Reflection: Nathan James
8	HOLIDAY	
9	25-27	Blues and Rap
10	28-30	Video Report 2
FINAL EXAM TIME (Dec 7 @7pm)		Unit II Exam (the listening portion and the take-home writing portion must be completed before the start of the exam time). Video Report 3 (optional/extra credit) due

UNIT I

0. Course Introduction
1. Defining the Blues
2. Culture and Orality
3. Studying the Blues
4. Africa and the Blues
5. Precursors of the Blues
6. Blackface Minstrelsy
7. The Blues Queens
8. Race Records
9. Blues Themes and Lyrics
10. Delta Blues and Beyond
11. Charlie Patton
12. Robert Johnson
13. Leadbelly and the Lomaxes
14. The Blues in Jazz
15. The Blues in Country Music

UNIT II

1. The Great Migration
2. Chicago Blues
3. Muddy Waters
4. Chess Records
5. Rock-and-Roll
6. British Blues
7. The Folk Blues Revival
8. Jimi Hendrix / Psychedelic Blues
9. Janis Joplin / Counterculture Blues
10. The Roots of Rap
11. Hip Hop and the Blues
12. The Commodification of the Blues
13. The State of the Blues Today
14. The Gift
15. Final Remarks

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.

Specific examples of prohibited violations of academic integrity include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Academic stealing refers to the theft of exams or exam answers, of papers or take-home exams composed by others, and of research notes, computer files, or data collected by others.
- Academic cheating, collusion, and fraud refer to having others do your schoolwork or allowing them to present your work as their own; using unauthorized materials during exams; inventing data or bibliography to support a paper, project, or exam; purchasing tests, answers, or papers from any source whatsoever; submitting (nearly) identical papers to two classes.
- Misrepresenting personal or family emergencies or health problems in order to extend deadlines and alter due dates or requirements is another form of academic fraud. Claiming you have been ill when you were not, claiming that a family member has been ill or has died when that is untrue are some examples of unacceptable ways of trying to gain more time than your fellow students have been allowed in which to complete assigned work.

Copyright Statement: "My lectures and course materials, including PowerPoint presentations, videos, tests, outlines, and similar materials, are protected by U.S. copyright law and by University policy. I am the exclusive owner of the copyright in those materials I create. You may take notes and make copies of course materials for your own use. You may also share those materials with another student who is enrolled in or auditing this course. You may not reproduce, distribute or display (post/upload) lecture notes or recordings or course materials in any other way — whether or not a fee is charged — without my express prior written consent. You also may not allow others to do so. If you do so, you may be subject to student conduct proceedings under the UC San Diego Student Code of Conduct. Similarly, you own the copyright in your original papers and exam essays. If I am interested in posting your answers or papers on the course web site, I will ask for your written permission."

COVID-19 Statement: These are unprecedented times and there is much uncertainty at the moment. The Department of Music remains committed to the well being of its students. If you are experiencing any significant disturbances to your ability to excel with your coursework, be they technological, psychological, physical, social, or otherwise, we encourage you to contact your instructor or Katara Conroy (kaconroy@ucsd.edu), the undergraduate advisor in the Department of Music, or to seek out other appropriate help on campus.

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.

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

READINGS (linked on Canvas under the related assignment)

- Brooks, Daphne A. "100 Years Ago, 'Crazy Blues' Sparked a Revolution for Black Women Fans." *New York Times*, Aug. 10, 2020.
- Danaher, William F. and Stephen P. Blackwelder. "The emergence of blues and rap: A comparison and assessment of the context, meaning, and message, *Popular Music & Society*, 17:4, 1993, pp.1-12.
- Davis, Angela. "Blame it on the Blues." *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*. Vintage Books, 1998, pp.91-119.
- Davis, Francis. "The Blues is Dead; The Blues Will Never Die." *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).
- 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.
- 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," "The Negro as Property," and "Slave and Post Slave")
- Lhamon, Jr., W.T. "Every Time I Wheel About I Jump Jim Crow: Cycles of Minstrel Transgression from Cool White to Vanilla Ice." *Inside the Minstrel Mask*. Wesleyan University Press, 1996, pp. 275-284.
- 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.
- Lott, Eric. "Love and Theft: The Racial Unconscious of Blackface Minstrelsy." *Representations*, no. 39 (Summer 1992), pp. 23-50.
- Waksman, Steve. "Black Sound, Black Body: Jimi Hendrix, the Electric Guitar, and the Meanings of Blackness." *Instruments of Desire*. Harvard University Press, 1999, pp. 167-206.
- 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.