

A History of American Popular Culture through Music

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American Studies 050: 259: 01

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This course examines American popular culture by exploring some of the musical forms that have most shaped its history. It assumes that a close examination of important musical forms over time and in particular spaces will illuminate some of the key issues in American culture and history. It begins in the 1830s with minstrelsy, the first distinctly American form of popular culture, and ends in the 1960s with Rock 'N' Roll. Throughout the course we will ground these musical forms within their political and social contexts, attending to what both their critics and fans had to say. Our task then is to explore how these musical forms connected to the desires of different audiences and to individual's self-fashioning, as well as to what debates about music reveal about changing projections of America over time.

The following books are **required** and on sale at the Douglass bookstore:

Glen Altschuler, *All Shook Up* (2003)

Wesley Brown, *Darktown Strutters* (1994)

Melvyn Ely, *The Adventures of Amos 'N' Andy* (1991)

Lewis Erenberg, *Swingin' the Dream* (1998)

Other readings marked with a **single *** are accessible through the IRIS database, *America: History and Life*. You are responsible for downloading them. (*I will provide more details on how to do this in class.*) Those marked with a **double **** are on electronic reserve.

Assignments:

Quizzes: will be short answer and take place only during the first 15 minutes of class. Makeup quizzes are only given in the event of an excused absence.

Attendance and Participation: Consistent attendance and participation are important. Come prepared to discuss the material assigned that day. I take attendance. You are allowed three unexcused absences after which your grade will drop ½ of a letter step for each absence. An excused absence must come from the Dean's office.

Midterms and Finals are cumulative and each will cover one-half of the class.

Paper: 4-5 pages, typed, double-spaced.

This paper will require some outside research.

Please note: Plagiarism: This is a serious academic offense. You must cite any material or ideas—however brief—that you obtain from an outside source, including the internet. As per university of policy, all cases of plagiarism will be reported directly to the Dean's office.

Lateness on assignments: Failure to complete your work in a *timely fashion* will result in *failing the class*. Your grade will drop **one step for each day that an assignment is late**. Extensions will be granted only in the event of an emergency. Like excused absences, you will be granted an extension only if I receive a note from the dean. **If you have a serious problem please contact me, by phone or email, ASAP so that I can ensure that you get the assistance you need.**

Your grade will be calculated as follows:

Midterm:	25%
Final:	25%
Short Answer QUIZZES (6):	25%
Paper:	25%

I. Coming to Terms

1. TU. September 5: **Introduction: Keyword**
Handout: Raymond Williams, "Culture"
2. F. September 8: **Key Concepts**
READ: ***"Defining Popular Culture," in Henry Jenkins, *Hop on Pop*, 26-42.
3. TU. September 12: **Saying it With Music**
READ: **Simon Firth, "Towards an aesthetic of popular music," In, *Music and Society*, 133-149.
GET STARTED on Wesley Brown, *Darktown Strutters*
Music: Thomas Hampson, "Jennie with the Light Brown Hair" (Stephen Foster)

II. Making America at the Minstrel Show

4. F. September 15 **QUIZ 1**
READ & discuss: **Robert Toll, *Blacking Up*, chs 1 & 2
Continue reading Brown, *Darktown Strutters*.
5. TU. September 19
READ: Continue reading Brown, *discuss Part I*
Clip: THE BIRTH OF A NATION (Biograph, 1915, re-released 1921)
6. F. September 22
READ: Finish Brown, *discuss Part II*
Clip: WITHIN OUR GATES(Oscar Michaeaux, 1920)

III. Early Twentieth Century Transformations

7. TU. September 26: **"I Got Rhythm" Tin Pan Alley** **QUIZ 2**
READ: **Michael Alexander, "'Mammy, Don't You Know Me?': Al Jolson and the Jews," from *Jazz Age Jews* (2001)
Music: Al Jolson, "April Showers" (1921)
Al Jolson, "April Showers" (1932)
8. F. September 29: **Race Records**
READ: *Adam Gussow, "Racial Violence, 'Primitive Music, and the Blues Entrepreneur," *Southern Culture* vol. 8 no. 3 (Fall 2002)
Music: Louis Armstrong & Sidney Bechet, "St. Louis Blues" (both 1932)
9. TU: October 3: **Blues Women**
READ: ½ the class **Hazel Carby, "It Just Be's Dat Way Sometime" in *Unequal Sisters*, 238-49. ½ the class, *Nghana Tamu Lewis, "In a Different Chord: Interpreting the Relations Among Black Female Sexuality, Agency, and the Blues," *African American Review* vol. 7 no. 4 (2003)
Music: Gertrude 'Ma' Rainey, "Don't Fish in My Sea" (1925)
Bessie Smith, "Kitchen Man" (nd)
10. F. October 6: **JAZZ I**
READ: ***"Selection from the *New Negro*" (1925), including JA Rodgers, "Jazz at Home," (poems) Langston Hughes, "Jazzonia" & "Minstrel Man,"
Screening: THE JAZZ SINGER (Warner Brothers, 1927, 88m)
11. TU. October 10: **JAZZ II**
READ: **Kathy Ogren, "Prudes and Primitives; White Americans Debate Jazz," in *The Jazz Revolution*, 139-161
Clip: THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE (Kultur 2005)
12. F. October 13: **QUIZ 3**
MIDTERM REVIEW
13. TU. October 17: **MIDTERM**

IV. Mass Publics and Racial Masquerade in the “Ether”

14. F. October 20:

READ: Melvyn Ely, *The Adventures of Amos ‘N’ Andy*, Chs. 1-3

Clip: *Amos N’ Andy* (1930)

15. TU. October 24:

READ: Ely, Chs, 4 & 5

Clip: Louis Armstrong in “A Rhapsody in Black and Blue” (Paramount 1932)

16. F. October 27:

READ: Ely, Chs, 6&7

Clip: George Dewey Washington, “Ol’ King Cotton” (Paramount 1930)

17. TU. October 31:

READ: Ely, Chs, 8, 9, & Epilogue

18. F. November 3:

PAPER WORKSHOP

QUIZ 4

V. Swinging from the Margins to Center Stage in the Postwar Era

19. TU. November 7:

READ: Lewis Erenberg, *Swingin’ the Dream*, Chapters, 1-3

Music: Glenn Miller, “In the Mood” (1939)

Clip: “Artie Shaw’s Class in Swing” (Paramount 1939)

20. F. November 10:

READ: Erenberg, Chs., 4&5

Music: Louis Jourdan, “Choo-Choo Ch’ Boogie” (1946)

Clip: Duke Ellington & Billie Holiday, “Rhapsody in Black and Blue” (Paramount 1932)

21. TU. November 14:

PAPERS DUE

READ: Erenberg, Chs., 6&7

Screening: DANCING COED (1939, 84m.)

22. F. November 17:

QUIZ 5

READ: Erenberg, Chs., 8 & 9

Music: Duke Ellington & Ella Fitzgerald, “A Train” (1949)

TU. November 21: NO CLASS—FOLLOW THURS SCHEDULE

23. WED. November 22: **CLASS—FOLLOWS FRIDAY SCHEDULE**

VI. Rocking the American Scene

24. TU. November 28:

READ: Glenn Altshuler, *All Shook Up*, ch 1 & 2

Music: Bill Haley and His Comets, “Shake, Rattle and Roll” (1954)

25. F. December 1 R

READ: Altshuler, *All Shook Up*, ch 3 & 4

Music: Chuck Berry, “Maybellene” (1955)

26. TU. December 5

READ: **Susan Douglas, “Why the Shirelles Mattered,” in *Where the Girls Are*.

Music: The Shirelles, “Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow,” (1960)

27. F. December 8

QUIZ 6

READ: Altshuler, *All Shook Up*, ch 5&4

Music: Elvis, “Hound Dog” (1956)

28. TU. December 12: **LAST CLASS**

FINAL REVIEW