Authenticity has loomed large in American popular music since the 19th century. And in the last half-century, listeners have grown ever more invested in the “realness” of their favorite musicians. In rap and punk, and even in sleek pop (e.g. the controversy about Britney Spears’s lip-synching), no sin is greater or more career-deflating than faking it, or being perceived as faking it. There is no single standard for authenticity, but variables include socio-economic background, anti-commercial posture, street credibility, proximity to audience, political affiliation, purity of sound, sincerity of emotion, and originality.

This class investigates our culture’s investment in the notion of musical authenticity. It explores the ways that musicians, who, after all, are performers, have negotiated the demands of “realness,” and how their negotiations have varied according to genre, gender, race, and historical period. To that end, we will focus on fourteen artists--Robert Johnson, Bob Dylan, Diana Ross, the Beatles, Billie Holiday, Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, James Brown, Bruce Springsteen, Kanye West, Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Kurt Cobain, Donna Summer, the Sex Pistols, and Lady Gaga--whose careers can enrich our understanding of the ways in which authenticity operates.

**Learning Goals:** American Studies 301 familiarizes students with the ever-growing scholarship about popular music in American Studies, Cultural Studies, History, Anthropology, Musicology, and Gender Studies. This course is meant to sharpen students’ critical ability through the practice of close reading of musical texts, biography and autobiography, critical reviews, cultural histories, as well as films and videos. Students can expect to develop practical skills, including the ability to read and analyze both primary sources and secondary sources, to analyze information effectively, and to write more persuasively.

**Class requirements:** Please note that this class consists of lectures, film clips, and as much discussion as is possible in a class this size. Course requirements include regular attendance, an in-class midterm exam, in-class quizzes, Sakai assignments, and one paper, between 6-8 pages and based upon course readings. Class participation (including quizzes, attendance, and Sakai assignments) will count for 20% of your grade, the midterm for 40%, and the final paper for 40%.

**Attendance:** you are permitted up to three absences. After that, your grade will start to drop by a letter grade per absence, unless you have written medical evidence. No one is permitted more than eight absences, for whatever reason, documented or undocumented. I expect you to be punctual – repeated late arrival for class will adversely affect your grade. Please note that there should be no live cell phones in class – not even on vibrate…and no TM-ing, and no computers, unless you have documentation from the Office of Disability Services or have cleared it with me.

**Plagiarism:** For the University’s policy on this, please consult: [http://history.rutgers.edu/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=109&Itemid=147](http://history.rutgers.edu/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=109&Itemid=147) and Academic Integrity at Rutgers: [http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/](http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/).

**Office hours:** 3:45-4:45 on M, W at 205E Ruth Adams. I am also available at other times, and I respond to emails at aechols@rci.rutgers.edu
Books: The following books can be purchased at the RU Bookstore:


Course Outline

1-20---Introductory Lecture

1-25 –The Blues and Its Gatekeepers

1-27---Robert Johnson: Iconic Bluesman
    Film Clip: *The Search for Robert Johnson*

2-1---Billie Holiday: Lady of Hipness Pt. 1
    Billie Holiday, w/William Dufty, *Lady Sings the Blues*, pp. ix-56
    Film clips: *Lady Day: The Many Faces of Billie Holiday*

2-3--- Billie Holiday: Lady of Hipness Pt. 2
    Film Clip: *Lady Sings the Blues* (1972) starring Diana Ross
    Billie Holiday, w/William Dufty, *Lady Sings the Blues*, pp. 57-end

2-8--- Folk Music and “The People”: Leadbelly, the Almanac Singers, Woody Guthrie
    Video Clip: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NCifK-vIG2k

2-10--The Folk Revival of the 1960s
    Hajdu, *Positively 4th Street*, pp. TBA
    Film Clip: *Festival* (1967)

2-15-- Bob Dylan’s “Curve-Ball Persona” Pt. 1
    Hajdu, *Positively 4th Street*, pp. TBA
    Film Clip: *No Direction Home* (2005)

2-17— Bob Dylan’s “Curve-Ball Persona” Pt. 2
    Hajdu, *Positively 4th Street*, pp. TBA
    Film: *No Direction Home* (2005)

2-22---Motown & Diana Ross: Plastic Soul?
    Gerald Early, *One Nation Under a Groove*, 1-65
    Film Clips: *Ed Sullivan Show* and *Standing in the Shadows of Motown*

2-24—Sister Rosetta Tharpe: The Genuine Article?

3-1--- James Brown: “Black and Proud”
    Early, *One Nation Under a Groove*, 67-135
    Film Clip: *Ed Sullivan Show*
3-3—The Beatles: Rock Auteurs
   Film Clip: *A Hard Day’s Night*

3-8—In-class Midterm Exam

3-10—Janis Joplin: “Queen of the Real” & Jim Hendrix: “Soul on Ice”
   Film Clips: *Monterey Pop*

Spring Break

3-22—Bruce Springsteen and the Authenticity of Feeling

3-24— New York Punk: New York Dolls Ramones, Patti Smith
   John Lydon, *Rotten*, xi-128

3-29-- British Punk: The Sex Pistols, Pt 1
   Lydon, *Rotten*, 129-189

3-31--The 70’s Other Outsider Music: Disco--Donna Summer

4-5-- British Punk: The Sex Pistols, Pt 2
   Lydon, *Rotten*, 190-332

4-7—Film: *The Filth and the Fury: A Sex Pistols’ Film* (2000)

4-12--The Origins of Hip-Hop
   Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*, xi-61
   Film Clip: *Scratch* (2001)

4-14---Prophets of Rage
   Rose, *Black Noise*, 99-145
   Film Clips: *Eight Mile* and *Hustle and Flow*

4-19—Kanye West and Missy Elliott
   Rose, *Black Noise*, 146-86
   Video Clips

4-21—Grunge’s Kurt Cobain, Pt 1
   Charles Cross, *Heavier than Heaven*, ix-56
   Film Clip: *MTV Unplugged: Nirvana*

4-26---Cobain, Pt 2
   Cross, *Heavier than Heaven*, 57-213

4-28---Lady Gaga: Poker Face Performance Artist

5-3——Cobain Pt 3
   Cross, *Heavier than Heaven*, 213-366