

# **Music as Social Action**

**COMM 113T** (Intermediate Topics in Communication)

*Spring 2019*

*Things are wrong,  
Things are going wrong.  
Can you tell that in a song?  
— Echo & the Bunnymen, "Rescue"*

This course surveys American popular music as a medium for ideological and political communication. Students will learn to recognize "socially conscious" music across genres and evaluate its effects as both transmission of information and meaning-making ritual. We will listen to and examine a variety of protest music genres — folk, rock and roll, blues, soul, hip-hop, glam, disco, punk, and more — in order to explore the contested relationships with changing social and political contexts during the post-WWII era of recorded popular music, namely political identity, race relations, gender and sexuality, and neoliberal commoditization. Understanding these developments will fortify students' abilities to comprehend cultural-political messaging and hone their own musically mediated communications.

Section 01 / ID #968675

**M/W/F @ noon @ TM 102**

**Instructor: Thomas Conner**

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*(Subject line MUST include "COMM 113T")*

**Office: SSR 306**

*(Note: This is the Social Sciences Research Building, directly south of the Comm bldg patio;  
it is not the Social Sciences Building north of the tennis courts)*

**Office hour: 10:30-11:30 a.m. Fridays** or by appointment

*I thought that if you had an acoustic guitar  
It meant that you were a protest singer!  
— The Smiths, "Shakespeare's Sister"*

# LOGISTICS

## **What are we doing here?**

*The chief objectives of this course are as follows:*

- To survey a broad history of what has been labeled “protest,” “political,” and “socially conscious” music, and to evaluate this particular form of communication as messaging that produces something other than “mere” entertainment.
- To evaluate music as presented via numerous communication media in terms of the definitions of protest and propaganda previously established within scholarship — with an eye toward contributing new perspectives on those definitions, if not new definitions altogether — in order to further that scholarship and apply these perspectives to current and future social realities.
- To equip students with critical tools with which to evaluate calls to social action within artistic and cultural contexts, and possibly to further their own efforts at such communication.

## **OK, but what are we doing *in here*?**

During each class meeting, we will be discussing the readings and listening assignments for the week, per the schedule below.

In the first few weeks of the course, I’ll introduce various nodes of scholarship that investigates or tries to define protest/propaganda music. Then we’ll begin moving through the decades and pop genres, applying that scholarship, critiquing it, and amending it. Through this bulk of the course, I should be talking less, you more — reacting to the reading, questioning it, questioning each other, raising new ideas, introducing relevant current contexts, and voicing your critical analysis of the material and its relationships.

Once a week, for the Play & Tell assignment, individual students will present songs to the class that reflect the current reading. We’ll listen to the songs and discuss any and all connections to the current readings.

## **What’s expected of you?**

You’ll be prepared for each class. That means reading the assigned texts. That means reading the assigned texts. That means reading the assigned texts. (Notice, repetition implies importance.)

That also means arriving to class with something to say about those texts. You are required to participate in class discussions — so chime in, speak out, pipe up. In so doing, you will be courteous to others, respecting the magnificent diversity of experience a university education affords us. That means respecting differing ideas as well as different levels of comprehension.

You’ll not only be in class each week, you’ll be on time. You’ll silence your cell phones and any alerts on your various devices. And, give yourself a break — avoid the social media and other distractions while in class. You’re here, and you or some very nice person is paying for this experience: so focus!

## **How do I prepare for class?**

Perhaps you’ve seen this before: *read the assigned texts*. However, there’s more to this process than sweeping your eyes across the printed pages. Engage with the texts. No text is a given, an oracle, an isolated entity. You’re here to extract material from the texts, material with which you will then consider, argue, discuss, debate, question, and apply. So take notes and write down questions — which you then bring with you to class.

### **How's everything graded?**

*Participation* — 5%

*Play & Tell* — 5%

*Assignment 1* — Blog post: 15%

*Assignment 2* — Annotated playlist: 25%

*Assignment 3* — Final: 50%

Late assignments will be graded down one letter grade for every 24 hours they are late.

### **What three websites should I bookmark *immediately*?**

The offsite work of this course will be conducted via two internet portals, which you must bookmark now and check regularly, plus one online music service. We also will view video content in class and as assignments via YouTube.

#### **The assigned course page on TritonEd**

Per your previous courses at UCSD, this course has an assigned channel in the TritonEd system. Through TritonEd you will (1) receive most of the assigned readings for the course and (2) deliver the written text for all assignments.

#### **[thomasconner.info/comm113Tsp19](http://thomasconner.info/comm113Tsp19)**

This site contains the entirety of this syllabus, the reading and assignment schedule (and this is where changes and updates will be posted), plus a blog that will run throughout the term. The blog is a feed through which extra class discussions may take place (which may count toward your participation grade; see below), related text and multimedia content may be posted, and student contributions may be shared.

#### **Spotify**

Weekly listening assignments will be compiled as Spotify playlists, the links to which will be posted on the assignment schedule on the above class website. Assignment #2 also involves you creating your own Spotify playlist for critical annotation. If you do not already have a Spotify account, sign up at [open.spotify.com](http://open.spotify.com); you'll need only the basic, free level of access (though there is a discounted premium rate for students).

### **How are assignments delivered?**

You'll deliver all written assignments via the course's TritonEd page; delivery of multimedia components for certain assignments may vary. Follow the instructions given with each assignment, as well as any additions or amendments announced in class, to deliver your work for discussion and grading.

### **What exactly is participation?**

Participation means on-time attendance in class, asking questions during class, keeping up with the readings (and scoring well on occasional quizzes) and generally contributing to the scholarship generated by the course. It means generally being *present* — in both the colloquial and communication-theory sense of that term.

Commenting on the class blog is not required, but doing so may count toward your participation grade. Most posts there will contain a paragraph at the end marked "***Participation!***" containing questions or discussion prompts. A thoughtfully considered and well-written post in response is as good as raising your hand in class! (Note: I only consider blog comments toward participation when they are posted *within a week* of the blog post date — i.e., no cramming by filling up the comments during week 10.)

**Play & Tell sounds goofy. What's that?**

Throughout the bulk of the course, each student will have an opportunity to suggest extra songs to be considered among the discussion of readings and course concepts. Per the assigned schedule (during Week 2, each student will be assigned one week to deliver the assignment), students will select a song that is evocative of that week's readings and themes, then discuss its relevance and components on the Play & Tell form, due before the Wednesday class that week. Details on the class website.

**Should I check my email every day?**

Yes! Changes in assignments or the class schedule will be announced in class when possible but always delivered via email to your ucsd.edu address. *If contacting me by email*, use appropriate email etiquette and a professional tone. Contact me by email for quick questions and scheduling only; for in-depth discussions or revision work, come to office hours. I respond to emails within 24 hours, except on Saturdays. I only respond to emails sent from your ucsd.edu account. By university policy, I am not allowed to discuss grades via email.

**May I speak with you during office hours?**

That's why they exist! Drop-in office hours are a time when you can come to my office to seek individual or group help with course material (readings, concepts, etc.) and assignments. You are encouraged to come by. However, office-hour meetings generally only last about 10 minutes, so make sure you have *specific questions* that you would like help with. *What "by appointment" means*: I expect you to plan your time so that you can come to my regular office hours. However, if you have a legitimate, unavoidable conflict (i.e., class or work) that coincides with my office hours, you may contact me to make an alternate time to meet. When writing to request an appointment, email me at least two days in advance and provide me with all your available times.

**How bad will it suck if I turn in work that's not my own?**

Mightily. Plagiarism means taking material from another source (published or unpublished) and presenting it as your own without proper citation. This is a serious academic offense. That means outright copying and/or rewriting of material, but it also means using someone else's ideas or even turning in a paper you used in another class. The University has strict rules and severe punishments for plagiarism and cheating. These will not be waived under any circumstances. If you have the slightest question about these parameters, ask me or contact the Office of Academic Integrity. If you weren't capable of doing the work, you wouldn't be here. Don't blow it.

**Got special needs?**

If you require accommodations for a physical or learning disability or medical condition, please contact me early in the quarter so we can arrange ahead of time to accommodate your classroom or assignment needs. You must also register with the Office of Students with Disabilities (OSD) and obtain a current Authorization for Accommodation (AFA) letter. This letter is required for me to approve your accommodation requests, and I must receive it in advance of when the accommodations are needed. For more information about OSD, visit: <http://disabilities.ucsd.edu/>

***What Art gains from contemporary events is always a  
fascinating problem and a problem that is not easy to solve.***

— Oscar Wilde

# SCHEDULE

*The following schedule of assignments is subject to slight and radical changes throughout the term.  
The current schedule is always the website version.*

## Week 1

**M :: April 1** :: Course & syllabus

- **Syllabus & site** (<https://www.thomasconner.info/comm113tsp19.html>)
- **Williams, Paul.** (1966). “How Rock Communicates.”

*Listen:* See playlist link on class website.

**W :: April 3** :: Foundational perspectives I: Comm as culture

- Selections from **John Dewey**, *The Public and Its Problems*; **Maxine Greene**, interview; **Stuart Hall**, “The Work of Representation”

**F :: April 5** :: Foundational perspectives II: The culture industries

- **Adorno, Theodor.** (1941). “On Popular Music.”
- **Shuker, Roy.** (2017). *Key Words*: “Commercialism; Commodification,” “Communication,” “Cultural Industries,” “Cultural Intermediaries,” “Hegemony,” “Ideology,” “Mass Culture: Frankfurt School,” “Marxism,” “Popular Music.”
- **Carey, James.** (1989). “A Cultural Approach to Communication.”

## Week 2

**M :: April 8** :: The first wave of folk

- **Lynskey, Dorian.** (2011). “Billie Holiday, ‘Strange Fruit,’” “Woody Guthrie, ‘This Land Is Your Land,’” “Pete Seeger et al., ‘We Shall Overcome.’”

*Listen:* See playlist link on class website.

**W :: April 10** :: Defining musical protest (Denisoff)

- **Denisoff, R. Serge.** (1966). “Songs of Persuasion: A Sociological Analysis of Urban Propaganda Songs.”
- **Denisoff, R. Serge & Mark H. Levine.** (1971). “The Popular Protest Song: The Case of ‘Eve of Destruction.’”

**F :: April 12** :: Defining musical protest (Eyerman)

- **Eyerman, Ron & Scott Barretta.** (1996). “From the ’30s to the ’60s: The Folk Music Revival in the United States.”
- **Eyerman, Ron & Andrew Jamison.** (1995). “Social Movements and Cultural Transformation: Popular Music in the 1960s.”

### Week 3

**M :: April 15** :: Defining musical protest (Hardwood)

- **Harwood, Jake.** (2017). “Music and Intergroup Relations: Exacerbating Conflict and Building Harmony through Music.”

*Listen:* See playlist link on class website.

**W :: April 17** :: The 1950s, Elvis, and teen panic

- **Wise, Sue.** (1984). “Sexing Elvis.”

**F :: April 19** :: Culture wars and censorship

- **Gilbert, James.** (1986). “Introduction: The Social History of an Idea” and “The Intellectuals and Mass Culture.”

### **DUE (F-April 19): Assignment #1 — Blog post**

Write a blog post encapsulating your understanding thus far of what elements comprise the kind of songs we’re examining in this course. Focus your analysis through one song — pick a popular song and answer *at least* these questions: What makes this a protest song? How does it fit within (or defy) the definitions we’ve encountered thus far? What message is being communicated? For whom? By whom? (Who’s being excluded?) Why is this medium effective for communicating this message? You must apply theory from the readings thus far to support your claims.

— **Length:** 500 words

— **Submit:** before class on Friday via Assignment #1 link on TritonEd

### Week 4

**M :: April 22** :: The second wave of folk

- **Frith, Simon.** (1981). “The Magic That Can Set You Free: The Ideology of Folk and the Myth of Rock Community.”

*Listen:* See playlist link on class website.

**W :: April 24** :: The 1960s: From rock ‘n’ roll to rock

- **Rosenstone, Robert A.** (1969). ““The Times They Are A-Changin’”: The Music of Protest”

**F :: April 26** :: The 1960s: From the streets to the seats

- **Denisoff, R. Serge.** (1970). “Protest Songs: Those on the Top Forty and Those of the Streets.”

## **Week 5**

**M :: April 29** :: The 1960s: Civil Rights

- **Lynskey, Dorian.** (2011). “Nina Simone, ‘Mississippi Goddam,’” “James Brown, ‘Say It Loud–I’m Black and I’m Proud’”

*Listen:* See playlist link on class website.

**W :: May 1** :: The 1960s: Motown

- **Smith, Suzanne E.** “‘Afro-American Music Without Apology’: The Motown Sound and the Politics of Black Culture” and “‘Come See About Me’: Black Cultural Production in Detroit.”

**F :: May 3** :: The 1960s: R&B

- **Danielsen, Anne.** (2006). “Whose Funk?”
- **Locke, Alain.** (1934). “Toward a Critique of Negro Music”

## **Week 6**

**M :: May 6** :: ‘Women’s music’

- **Rodnitzky, Jerome L.** (1975). “Songs of sisterhood: The music of women’s liberation.”
- **Rosenberg, Jessica & Gitana Garofalo.** (1998). “Riot Grrrl: Revolutions from within.”

*Listen:* See playlist link on class website.

**W :: May 8** :: What’s protest about disco?

- **Dyer, Richard.** (1979). “In Defense of Disco.”

**F :: May 10** :: Sexual orientation

- **Jang, S. Mo & Hoon Lee.** “When Pop Music Meets a Political Issue: Examining How ‘Born This Way’ Influences Attitudes Toward Gays and Gay Rights Policies.”
- **Lynskey, Dorian.** (2011). “Carl Bean, ‘I Was Born This Way’”

### **DUE (F-May 10): Assignment #2 — Annotated playlist**

You are a talent scout, and you have been asked by a record company to suggest a “socially conscious” artist to add to their roster. The company is seeking to sell the music of someone who’s “in touch with the issues of today and uses their music as a bullhorn for society.” Compile a playlist of 10 songs by a single artist. Applying your evolving, working definition of what constitutes communication via this mode, discuss each song, explaining how it measures up to our topical standards thus far as well as similar artists and music. The record company insists that you offer

compelling and precise *evidence-based* arguments for why the artist is endemic of protest music, as well as what makes them popular (commercial), how the 10 songs communicate both individually and as a body of work, and why it's in the best interests of the company to back and sell this messaging. How does your artist not only "reflect" the larger history of protest music but also embody, raise the stakes of, and even drive the progression of that larger story?

- **Length:** 10 songs, each supported by one analytical paragraph, plus an introduction and conclusion (5-7 pages?)
- **Submit:** before class on Friday via Assignment #2 link on TritonEd, plus instructions to come

## **Week 7**

**M :: May 13 :: Punk**

- **Marcus, Greil.** (1979). "Punk."
- **Marcus, Greil.** (1993). "The Clash" and "Gang of Four."

*Listen:* See playlist link on class website.

**W :: May 15 :: Hip-hop I**

- **Stapleton, Katina R.** (1998). "From the margins to mainstream: The political power of hip-hop."

**F :: May 17 :: Hip-hop II**

- **Garofalo, Reebee.** (1993). "Black Popular Music: Crossing Over or Going Under?"
- **Shank, Barry.** (1996). "Fears of the White Unconscious: Music, Race, and Identification in the Censorship Of 'Cop Killer.'"

## **Week 8**

**M :: May 20 :: The 1980s**

- **Williams, Paul.** (1992). "What the 60s Had the 80s Don't Have."
- **Garofalo, Reebee.** (1993). "Understanding Mega-Events."

*Listen:* See playlist link on class website.

**W :: May 22 :: Mega-events**

- **Marcus, Greil.** (1993). "Yes Nukes."
- **Ullestad, Neal.** (1987). "Rock and rebellion: Subversive effects of Live Aid and 'Sun City.'"
- **Goodyer, Ian.** (2009). "Introduction" to *Crisis Music: The Cultural Politics of Rock Against Racism*.

**F :: May 24 :: Live Aid**

- **Street, John, Seth Hague and Heather Savigny.** (2007). “Playing to the Crowd: The Role of Music and Musicians in Political Participation.”

## **Week 9**

**M :: May 27 :: Nationalism**

- **Bohlman, Philip V.** (2004). Selection from “Music and Nationalism: Why Do We Love to Hate Them?”

*Listen:* See playlist link on class website.

**W :: May 29 :: Patriotism**

- **Erenberg, Lewis A.** (1996). “Swing goes to war: Glenn Miller and the popular music of World War II.”

**F :: May 31 :: Internationalism**

- **Olaniyan, Tejumola.** (2004). “Introduction: ‘Living in the Interregnum’: Fela Anikulapo-Kuti and the Postcolonial Incredible” and “Dissident Tunes: The Political Afrobeat.”

## **Week 10**

**M :: June 3 :: The 1990s to Occupy Wall Street**

- **Pekacz, Jolanta.** (1994). “Did rock smash the wall? The role of rock in political transition.”

*Listen:* See playlist link on class website.

**W :: June 5 :: Final thoughts**

- **Small, Christopher.** (1998). *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*

**F :: June 7 :: Conferences**

NO CLASS. Meetings to be scheduled for discussing final projects.

## **Finals week**

### **DUE (W-June 12): Assignment #3 — Final project**

Choose one of the following options:

**Write:** This course has surveyed several time periods and broad music genres, but countless subgenres and street-level movements remain to be examined within the basic framework of defining and critiquing social messaging via popular music. Select a subgenre not covered in-depth in class (EDM? death metal? MTV? — and, get specific as possible: *Brazilian* EDM? *Swedish* death metal? the subtle politics of MTV’s “120 Minutes”?). Write a thorough critical history of its existence, its chief artists, and its overall messaging. You must apply significant theory from the readings to support your claims.

— **Length:** 10 pages (2,500 words)

— **Submit:** before 2:30 p.m. Wednesday, June 12, via link on TritonEd

**Report:** Identify an artist or a related group of artists (no more than three) significant to the themes of this course. Conduct an in-depth interview with the artist(s) in which you discuss their history, their artistic process, and the multiple methods and multiple contexts through which they have communicated topical messages, as well as to what degrees of (commercial and artistic) success they think they’ve achieved doing so. Engage with the artist(s) in conversation about specific theories from the course (even, and maybe especially, if they think they’re academic hogwash!). Write your interview(s) as a single piece of critical arts journalism, as if this were to be published by a major national music outlet. You must apply significant theory from the readings to support your claims.

— **Pre-approval:** *You must gain my approval of the artist you intend to interview before May 24, verbally or via email.*

— **Length:** 10 pages (2,500 words)

— **Submit:** before 2:30 p.m. Wednesday, June 12, via link on TritonEd

**Create:** Write and record a song that protests against, advocates for, or raises awareness of a social issue. This must be a new, original composition of sole individual authorship, in any style, with music played and/or programmed by you and a complete lyric (at least five verses, plus a chorus and/or refrain). Create the song with specific course themes in mind. Record your performance on audio (to submit an .mp3 file) or video (to link to). Then write a short paper explaining *in exquisite detail* the specific course themes that apply to the construction and potential reception of this piece of music. Into what genre and historical era might this song fit (or defy)? Into what performance context(s) might this song best be presented? What other messaging about this issue exists in the culture, and exactly what makes your song an effective contribution to that effort? You must apply significant theory from the readings to support your claims.

— **Length:** 1 song (details above), plus a paper of 5-6 pages (1,250-1,500 words)

— **Submit:** before 2:30 p.m. Wednesday, June 12 — email a link to your song, and submit your text via link on TritonEd