

# Music as Social Action

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



MSTU 4863 (Advanced Research) • Fall 2023  
Tuesdays & Thursdays • 9:30-10:45 a.m. • Oliphant 141

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*Office hours:*

*In person:* 11 a.m.-noon Tuesdays @ Oliphant 113  
*Online:* 11 a.m.-noon Thursdays @ (see link on Harvey)

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.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After successfully completing this course, students will be able to:

- Evaluate and critique the representation, production, and consumption of media and popular music, including ethical implications and issues of identity, equity, and justice (ILO 2 and 4).
- Communicate clearly and persuasively in analytical writing assignments and oral presentations (ILO 3).
- Propose and execute an interdisciplinary research and/or artistic project (ILO 1 and ILO 3).
- Practice and defend the critical consumption of media and popular music in everyday civic life (ILO 5).

As such, our learning objectives fulfill the Department of Media Studies’ Program Objectives, which articulate that students will:

1. Evaluate and critique abstract categories, and to use these categories in the analysis of empirical data.
2. Apply concepts of social science methodology to rigorously critique and compare empirical studies, or to construct their own empirical study.
3. Effectively use writing to accurately convey their ideas, and to demonstrate the basic ability to think logically and critically, through their writing.
4. Demonstrate a basic competence in communicating ideas through oral presentations before a group of people.
5. Critique visual images with the use of fundamental theoretical concepts.
6. Be able to understand their lives within a wider social and environmental context, to thoughtfully consider their responsibilities towards other people and the natural world, and to take appropriate and ethical actions based upon those considerations.

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

*This syllabus is the menu for your intellectual nourishment this term, and it constitutes a contract between you and me. After the first days of the semester, however, **Harvey will serve as the repository of all active information about the course** — readings, videos, assignments, and communication. This PDF will not be updated with any scheduling changes, but the schedule page on Harvey will be. If you have a question about the course, always check the syllabus and Harvey first. If they don't contain the answer, then you may contact me for help.*

## LOGISTICS & AGREEMENTS

**Grading:** You can expect clear instructions and explanations on all course assignments, followed by consistent procedural support and detailed written feedback on your performance (via Harvey). I make every effort to return assignments with feedback and grades **within two weeks after submission**. I am happy to discuss feedback, but I do not entertain regrade requests.

- In this class, a **B grade** (80-89%) means that the work successfully satisfied all instructions and goals for the assignment; an **A grade** (90% and above) exceeds those expectations. A **C grade** (70-79%) is applied to work that is only satisfactory or falls below expectations; a **D grade** (60-69%) applies to unsatisfactory efforts; and a **failing grade** (below 60%) is for unacceptable work.

**Course communications:** Check your messages and email regularly! Urgent announcements or schedule/location changes will be communicated to you via email. Please contact me via the messaging available in Harvey. When writing to me, please remember that you are writing in a professional context. I will make every attempt to answer messages quickly, at least within 24 hours, except on Saturdays. You may address me as Professor Conner or Dr. Conner, and my preferred pronouns are he/him/his.

**Diversity, equity, inclusion & belonging:** We pursue this coursework together in order to learn more about our shared world — and our individual worlds. In doing so, we seek to acknowledge, respect, and encourage each of our diverse perspectives, as every one of these adds vital dimension to our understanding of the world. As a community, we (*students, instructors, guests*) will behave courteously and respectfully to everyone within our shared space, **respecting differing ideas as well as different levels of comprehension** and building awareness of our own positionalities, perspectives, and backgrounds, including

categories of identity like race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, nationality, and religion — overall, respecting the magnificent diversity of experience that a university education affords us.

**Academic integrity:** The university has strict rules and severe punishments for cheating, plagiarism, and other violations of academic integrity. These will not be waived under any circumstances. Read the Academic Misconduct Policy (<https://artsandsciences.utulsa.edu/advising/academic-misconduct-policy/>), and if you have the *slightest* question about *any* of these parameters, ask me. (You don't get in trouble for *asking*!) If you weren't capable of doing the work, you wouldn't be here. Don't blow it.

**Technology:** Please **silence cell phones** and any alerts on your various devices. Also, 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!*

**Student Access and Success:** Students who have or believe they may have a disability and would like to set up accommodations should contact **Student Access** within Student Success to self-identify their needs and facilitate their rights under the Americans with Disabilities Act and related laws. Student Access provides private consultations to any student. Contact Student Access staff at [studentaccess@utulsa.edu](mailto:studentaccess@utulsa.edu) or by phone at (918) 631-2315. The application for accommodations may be obtained online at <https://sierra.accessiblelearning.com/s-UTulsa/ApplicationStudent.aspx>. Student Access staff will assist students in the implementation of approved accommodations, and students should submit requests as early as possible for full assistance. Students who qualify for accommodations should meet with the instructor privately (during office hours or by appointment) *as soon as possible* to arrange for their needs and obtain support for the class. Instructors are entitled to notice of 5 business days before the implementation of any required accommodations and all accommodations should be requested by the 12th week of classes for use in that semester, absent an extraordinary and unforeseeable circumstance. TU maintains a list of accessible features for all buildings (e.g., entrances, parking) at [maps.utulsa.edu](http://maps.utulsa.edu).

**Know Your Title IX:** Sexual misconduct is prohibited by Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 ("Title IX") and will not be tolerated within the TU community. Sexual misconduct encompasses all forms of sex and

gender-based discrimination, harassment, violence, and assault, as well as dating violence, domestic violence, interpersonal violence, stalking and sexual exploitation. For more information about your rights under Title IX, visit <https://utulsa.edu/sexual-violence-prevention-education/policies-laws/>. If you or someone you know has been harassed, assaulted, or stalked, or if you have questions about violence prevention resources available to you, please contact any of the following campus and community resources:

Title IX Coordinator 918-631-4602

Office of Violence Prevention 918-631-2324

TU Counseling and Psychological Services 918- 631-2241

Campus Security 918-631-5555

Domestic Violence Intervention Services 918-585-3163 or 918-743-5763

Tulsa Police Department 918-596-9222 or 911 (emergency situations)

## ASSESSMENT

*To achieve our objectives, we will meet regularly to discuss course concepts and texts, and students will complete the following assignments:*

### **Blog post — 15%**

Students will write blog posts (and respond to others') about our initial definitions of propaganda music based on our burgeoning criteria.

— *Due Sept. 7*

### **Annotated playlist — 25%**

Students will compile a playlist of at least 10 songs by a single artist or small group of related artists. Applying our evolving, working definition of what constitutes communication via this mode, the playlist will be annotated with analytical commentary about how each song contributes to protest music generally and social issues specifically.

— *10 songs, each supported by one analytical paragraph*

— *Due Oct. 12*

### **Play & Tell (the past) — 5%**

Students will take turns submitting songs for consideration during weekly seminars: presenting them in class and leading a brief discussion of them.

— *Due on a rolling sign-up schedule*

### **Play & Tell (the future) — 5%**

During Week 13, students will submit songs specifically chosen from their own current interests, each making a case for which artist is a future icon of socially conscious pop music.

— Due Nov. 9

### **WOW! Tickets — 5%**

In occasional surveys and/or discussion boards, students will respond directly to the interesting, fascinating, and valuable ideas raised by other students during our discussions and course procedure. Just a means of recording your participation and engagement.

### **Final project — 45%**

Students will select from three options for the final assignment: writing a critical analysis of a specific music genre and its participation in propaganda music; interviewing an artist about their contributions to musical protest; or writing and recording your own protest song, with a supplemental written explanation of its relationships to course themes.

— Due Dec. 4

*See Harvey for detailed assignment descriptions, instructions, and rubrics.*

**A word about “participation”:** Especially because this is an advanced seminar, every student is expected to have read or listened to all assigned texts prior to class, and they are expected to be able to respond to basic questions from the instructor and fellow students about those texts and their ideas — to **arrive to each session with something relevant and productive to contribute or ask about**. To facilitate and encourage deep, active engagement, you will complete the occasional WOW! tickets — just quick surveys or discussion threads on Harvey where you can double down on each other’s input (e.g., “Holy cow, Jessica’s POV on *Stranger Things* made me see it in this whole other way!,” “Wow, we need to make our own Top 10 list of Vocaloid songs. I’ll start ...” etc.). In addition, **your engagement with the course (inside or outside of our classroom) should be readily apparent in each assignment** — in how properly and deeply you demonstrate a mastery of course concepts and objectives, in the originality of your thinking, and in the vibrancy of connections you make not only between texts but to the wider world. I will maintain a record of your attendance and engagement levels throughout the term; I may speak to you about these as we proceed, and you may speak to me about this at any time. Encouraging student



engagement not only addresses your success in this advanced course but your ultimate performance as a scholar from a university of this caliber.

**Illness, emergencies, OMGs:** If you fall ill or have other difficulties this semester, your health and wellbeing are your top priority. Deadline extensions are available for most assignments, if needed. Make sure you contact me as soon as you're able so we can devise a plan together. Know *I am here to support you* in this class. If you're having any trouble — from illness and family emergencies to caregiving responsibilities and the struggle for basic needs — please reach out so that I might connect you with the multitude of assistive resources available on campus. *Life happens*: we will work through it together.

## SCHEDULE OF WORK

*The following schedule is subject to slight or radical changes throughout the term. Pay attention to all course announcements as we go.*

No textbook is required for the course.

Readings and other media will be delivered via Harvey.

### Week 1

T :: Aug 22 :: Course & syllabus

- **Syllabus & site**
- **Williams, Paul.** (1966). “How Rock Communicates.”

*Listen:* See playlist link on Harvey.

Th :: Aug 24 :: Foundational perspectives I: Comm as culture

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

### Week 2

T :: Aug 29 :: 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.”

*Listen:* See playlist link on Harvey.

Th :: Aug 21 :: 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.’”

### **Week 3**

T :: Sep 5 :: Defining musical protest (Eyerman, Hardwood)

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

*Listen:* See playlist link on Harvey.

Th :: Sep 7 :: 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.’”

**DUE: Assignment #1 — Blog post**

### **Week 4**

T :: Sep 12 :: The 1950s, Elvis, and teen panic

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

*Listen:* See playlist link on Harvey.

Th :: Sep 14 :: Culture wars and censorship

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

### **Week 5**

T :: Sep 19 :: 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 Harvey.

Th :: Sep 21 :: The 1960s: From rock 'n' roll to rock

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

## **Week 6**

T :: Sep 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.”

*Listen:* See playlist link on Harvey.

Th :: Sep 28 :: The 1960s: Civil Rights

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

## **Week 7**

T :: Oct 3 :: 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.”

*Listen:* See playlist link on Harvey.

Th :: Oct 5 :: The 1960s: R&B

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

## **Week 8**

T :: Oct 10 :: ‘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 Harvey.

Th :: Oct 12 :: What’s protest about disco?

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

## **DUE: Assignment #2 — Annotated playlist**

### **Week 9**

T :: Oct 17 :: 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’”

*Listen:* See playlist link on Harvey.

Th :: Oct 19 :: Punk

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

### **Week 10**

T :: Oct 24 :: Hip-hop I

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

*Listen:* See playlist link on Harvey.

Th :: Oct 26 :: 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 11**

T :: Oct 31 :: The 1980s

- **Williams, Paul.** (1992). “What the 60s Had the 80s Don’t Have.”
- **Garofalo, Reebee.** (1993). “Understanding Mega-Events.”
- **Street, John, Seth Hague and Heather Savigny.** (2007). “Playing to the Crowd: The Role of Music and Musicians in Political Participation.”

*Listen:* See playlist link on Harvey.

Th :: Nov 2 :: 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*.

TBA :: Live Aid viewing party

As an optional extra event supporting our understanding of 1980s mega-events, we’ll schedule an optional viewing of selections from this day-long world concert event.

## **Week 12**

T :: Nov 7 :: Nationalism & patriotism

- **Bohlman, Philip V.** (2004). Selection from “Music and Nationalism: Why Do We Love to Hate Them?”
- **Erenberg, Lewis A.** (1996). “Swing goes to war: Glenn Miller and the popular music of World War II.”
- **Olaniyan, Tejumola.** (2004). “Introduction: ‘Living in the Interregnum’: Fela Anikulapo-Kuti and the Postcolonial Incredible” and “Dissident Tunes: The Political Afrobeat.”

*Listen:* See playlist link on Harvey.

Th :: Nov 9 :: **NO CLASS TODAY!**

**DUE: Play & Tell (the future)**

## **Week 13**

T :: Nov 14 :: 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 Harvey.

Th :: Nov 16 :: Student choice

- TBA

**Week 14 — NO CLASS :: THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY!**

## **Week 15**

T :: Nov 28 :: Conferences

**NO CLASS**— Individual meetings to be scheduled for discussing final projects.

Th :: Nov 30 :: Looking ahead

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

## **Week 16**

M :: Dec 4 :: **DUE: Assignment #3 — Final project**

## **Finals week**

Fr :: Dec 8, 9-11:25 a.m. :: Final presentations & performances

*Per the final project assignment listed above, students will present a brief presentation about their final project selection, and those who select the songwriting option are welcome to perform them!*

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

— Oscar Wilde

