Honors 240
The Roots of American Popular Music
Fall 2017

Professor: Dr. Suzanne Smith
Office: Robinson B371C
E-mail: smisuze@gmu.edu
Phone: (703) 993-2147

Course Time and Place:
TR, 1:30-2:45 am, Buchanan Hall (formerly Mason Hall) D005

Office Hours:
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 3:00-4:00 pm, and by appointment.

Course Description:
This course explores the roots of American popular music. American roots music encompasses a wide array of music styles including: the blues, gospel, early jazz, country, bluegrass, Western swing, as well as immigrant music such as polka and zydeco. Throughout the semester, we will study how these different styles evolved, influenced each other, and laid the foundation of rock and roll. Another important dimension of the course will be learning how the history of race relations, gender relations, and class in America play a key role in understanding why certain musical styles develop and become popular. Since music is the focal point of the course, weekly assignments include readings, listening to music, and screenings of films about American roots music.

Grading and Assignments:
In this course, you will be graded in three major areas:

1) Class participation: (20%)  
2) Written assignments:  
    Discussion Board Posts/Responses (20%)  
    Two Reaction Papers (20%)  
3) Exams:  
    Midterm exam (20%)  
    Final exam (20%)
Work Groups:
To make the workload for this class more manageable, I have assigned students to small “work groups” (e.g. Group 1, Group 2, etc.). Each week, your work group will have one of three assignments to complete:

- Reaction Paper
- Discussion Board Post
- Response to Discussion Board Post

Our Blackboard webpage will direct you to the assignment you are responsible to complete each week.

Grade Assessment:
• Class participation: Class participation is crucial to one's overall grade and will be assessed by attendance and active participation in class discussions. Regular attendance, evidence of preparation (i.e. having completed and thought about the assigned readings), offering relevant commentary, respectful engagement with other students’ ideas, completion of in-class assignments, and appropriate class behavior all factor into the class participation grade. If you are unable to attend class for any reason, it is helpful to notify me via e-mail.

• Written Assignments:
  o Discussion board postings: When your group is assigned a discussion board post, each member of your group should write an individual discussion board post and upload it to Blackboard by 10:00 am on Thursdays. Discussion posts should be concise (250-400 words) and should focus on what you found most provocative about the reading assignment. Please do not summarize the readings in these posts, but discuss what surprised you or deepened your understanding of the course topics for the week. For more details about how to write a successful discussion board post, please review the Discussion Board Post Rubric on our Blackboard.

  o Response to Discussion Board Posts: When your group is assigned to respond to discussion board posts, each member of your group should write a response to two of the posts submitted by other students participating in the discussion board for that week. Please post your response to the discussion board no later than 11:59 pm on Thursdays. Responses to posts should be approximately 50-100 words; show respect to the person who wrote the post, and should offer meaningful feedback (e.g. Simply writing, “Good job!,” is insufficient.) For complete details, see Discussion Board instructions on Blackboard.
- **Reaction Papers:** These papers are individual assignments. The first paper will be 3-4 pages in length; the second paper will be 4-6 pages in length. For more details about how to write a successful response paper, please review the Reaction Paper Rubric on Blackboard.

- **Leading Class Discussion:** On the week that your work group’s second Reaction Paper is due, your work group will be responsible for leading class discussion. Your group will work together to brainstorm discussion ideas and compile any other additional materials (e.g. PowerPoint slideshow or songs) that might spark discussion for the class. Additional details for this assignment are available on Blackboard.

- **Exams:**
  - You will have a take-home midterm and final exam. In the exams, you will be responsible for all material covered in course readings, lectures, and any additional materials--films, music, etc.

**Required Books:**
Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and American Roots Music*
Robert Palmer, *Deep Blues*
Bill Malone, *Don’t Get Above Your Raisin’: Country Music and the Southern Working Class*
Burton Peretti, *The Creation of Jazz*
Additional articles available on Blackboard under “Course Content.”

**Class Policies:**
1) **Punctuality:** Please make every effort to arrive in class on time; arriving late to class is disruptive.

2) **Cell phones:** Turn off or silence cell phones before class begins and refrain from any texting.

3) **Laptop Free Zone**: Laptops and other electronic devices may not be used except by special arrangement. For my reasons, see Jennifer Senior, “The Case Against Laptops in the Classroom,” *Science of Us*, July 9, 2015. Please bring a notebook and pen or pencil with which to take notes.

4) **Honor Code:** *All of George Mason University's academic policies and honor code apply to this course.* Plagiarism means using the exact words, opinions, or information from another person without giving proper credit. Self-plagiarism involves recycling papers from previous coursework. If you have any doubts about what constitutes plagiarism, please see me. Violators will be brought before the University's Honor Committee for disciplinary action. For details, see the Undergraduate Catalog.
5) **Disability Accommodations:** If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Resources at 703-993-2474. All academic accommodations are arranged through that office.

6) **Add and Drop Deadlines:**
   - Last Day to Add: **September 5, 2017**
   - Last Day to Drop: **September 29, 2017 (67% Tuition penalty)**

**Class Schedule:**

**Week 1 (Aug. 28-Sept. 1):**

**Course Introduction: The Music District**

**Readings:**

**Screening:**
The *Music District* film, available under “Course Content” on Blackboard

**Assignments:**
ALL Groups: Discussion Board post due by 10:00 am on Thursday, Aug. 31 (Names A-M) and write two responses to peers by 11:59 pm on Thursday, Aug. 31 (Names N-Z).

**Week 2 (Sept. 4-8):**

**What is American Roots Music?**

**Readings:**
- Filene, *Romancing the Folk*, Introduction and Chapter 1, pp. 1-46

**Assignments:**
ALL Groups: Discussion Board post due by 10:00 am on Thursday, Sept. 7 (Names N-Z) and write two responses to peers by 11:59 pm on Thursday, Sept. 7.

**Week 3 (Sept. 11-15):**

**Deep Blues in the Rural South**

**Readings:**
- Filene, *Romancing the Folk*, Chapter 2, pp. 47-75
- Palmer, *Deep Blues*, pp. 1-92
Assignments:
Group 1: Reaction Paper #1
Groups 2&3: Discussion Board Post due by 10:00 am on Thursday.
Groups 4&5: Response to Discussion Board Posts due by 11:59 pm Thursday.

Week 4 (Sept. 18-22):

Muddy Waters and the Cult of Authenticity
Readings:
- Filene, Romancing the Folk, Chapter 3, pp. 76-132
- Palmer, Deep Blues, pp. 95-169

Assignments:
Group 2: Reaction Paper #1
Groups 4&5: Discussion Board Post due by 10:00 am on Thursday.
Groups 1&3: Response to Discussion Board Posts due by 11:59 pm Thursday.

Week 5 (Sept. 25-29):

Wild Women Don’t Have the Blues
Readings:

Assignments:
Group 3: Reaction Paper #1
Groups 1&5: Discussion Board Post due by 10:00 am on Thursday.
Groups 2&4: Response to Discussion Board Posts due by 11:59 pm Thursday.

Week 6 (Oct. 2-6):

Performing and Romancing the Folk
Readings:
- Filene, Romancing the Folk, Chps. 4-5, pp. 133-236

Assignments:
Group 4: Reaction Paper #1
Groups 1&2: Discussion Board Post due by 10:00 am on Thursday.
Groups 3&5: Response to Discussion Board Posts due by 11:59 pm Thursday.
Week 7 (Oct. 9-13):  

**Country Music: That High Lonesome Sound**  
**Readings:**  
- Malone, *Don’t Get Above Your Raisin’,* Introduction-Chp. 3, pp. 1-88  

**Assignments:**  
- **Group 5:** Reaction Paper #1  
- **Groups 3&4:** Discussion Board Post due by 10:00 am on Thursday.  
- **Groups 1&2:** Response to Discussion Board Posts due by 11:59 pm Thursday.  

**Note:** No class on Tuesday because of the Columbus Day holiday.

Week 8 (Oct. 16-20):  

**That High Lonesome Sound**  
**Readings:**  
- No readings; work on take-home midterm.  

**Midterm Exam Due by 3:00 pm on Thursday, October 19.**  
**NOTE:** No class that day!

Week 9 (Oct. 23-27):  

**From the Old Country Church to the Barn Dance**  
**Readings:**  
- Malone, *Don’t Get Above Your Raisin’,* Chps. 4-6, pp. 89-170  

**Assignments:**  
- **Group 1:** Reaction Paper #1 and Lead Discussion  
- **Groups 2&3:** Discussion Board Post due by 10:00 am on Thursday.  
- **Groups 4&5:** Response to Discussion Board Posts due by 11:59 pm Thursday.

Week 10 (Oct. 30-Nov. 3):  

**Country Music and Politics**  
**Readings:**  
- Malone, *Don’t Get Above Your Raisin’,* Chps. 7-Conclusion, pp. 171-261  

**Assignments:**  
- **Group 2:** Reaction Paper #1 and Lead Discussion  
- **Groups 4&5:** Discussion Board Post due by 10:00 am on Thursday.  
- **Groups 1&3:** Response to Discussion Board Posts due by 11:59 pm Thursday.
Week 11 (Nov. 6-10): Origins of Jazz
Readings:
• Peretti, *The Creation of Jazz*, pp. 1-99

Assignments:
Group 3: Reaction Paper #1 and Lead Discussion
Groups 1&5: Discussion Board Post due by 10:00 am on Thursday.
Groups 2&4: Response to Discussion Board Posts due by 11:59 pm Thursday.

Week 12 (Nov. 13-17): Jazz During the War Years
Readings:
• Peretti, *Creation of Jazz*, pp. 100-217

Assignments:
Group 4: Reaction Paper #1 and Lead Discussion
Groups 1&2: Discussion Board Post due by 10:00 am on Thursday.
Groups 3&5: Response to Discussion Board Posts due by 11:59 pm Thursday.

Week 13 (Nov. 20-24): Sister Rosetta Tharpe and the Roots of Rock and Roll
Readings:

Assignments: Complete reading for discussion on Tuesday.

Note: No class on Thursday. Enjoy Thanksgiving Break!

Readings:
• Robert M. Marovich, *A City Called Heaven: Chicago and the Birth of Gospel Music*, Introduction and Chapters 5 – 6, available under “Course Content” on Blackboard

Assignments:
Group 5: Reaction Paper #1 and Lead Discussion
Groups 3&4: Discussion Board Post due by 10:00 am on Thursday.
Groups 1&2: Response to Discussion Board Posts due by 11:59 pm Thursday.

Week 15 (Dec. 4-8): The Spirit Travels: Immigrant Music in America

Readings:
- Gage Averill, “‘Pan Is We Ting’: West Indian Steelbands in Brooklyn” from The Musics of Multicultural America
- Daniel Sheehy, “Mexican Mariachi Music: Made in the U.S.A.” from The Musics of Multicultural America
- Susan M. Asai, “Sansei Voices in the Community: Japanese American Musicians in California” from The Musics of Multicultural America

Assignments:
ALL Groups: Discussion Board post due by 10:00 am on Thursday and write one response to a peer by 11:59 pm.

Take Home Final Exam: Due Tuesday, Dec. 19, by 5:00 pm.

**PLEASE NOTE: No late exams accepted under ANY circumstances.**