

# ROCK 'N' ROLL: THE MUSIC OF A GENERATION

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OFFICE HOURS: BY APPOINTMENT ONLY

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

*The history of popular music is often presented as a sequence of innovations and events. The aim of this course, in contrast, is to study popular music in the United States in order to understand significant social, economic, and cultural transformations during the past century. We will trace important developments in technology, business, social life, and popular culture through American popular music. Simultaneously, we will discuss how popular music has reflected shifting attitudes about race, region, gender, and class. Particular attention will be devoted to the role that popular music played in the forging of a mass culture that Americans, regardless of class, region, race, and gender, participated in.*

## COURSE MATERIALS

Altschuler, Glen. *All Shook Up: How Rock 'n' Roll Changed America*. Oxford University Press, 2004. (Provided)

Salinger, J. D. *The Catcher in the Rye*. Little, Brown and Company, 1991. (ISBN-13: 978-0316769488)

Vance Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders*. Ig Publishing; Reissue Ed edition, 2007. (ISBN-13: 978-0978843106)

## MOVIE RENTALS (Available on iTunes and Amazon)

*Blackboard Jungle*. MGM, 1955.

*Rebel Without a Cause*. Warner Brothers, 1955.

*Great Balls of Fire!*. Orion, 1989

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- A. Students will be tested on assigned readings through weekly online quizzes.
- B. Students will participate in blog-based group discussions and projects
- C. Students will participate in written assignments from the required listening and movie viewing.
- D. Students will have a written final consisting of no more than 750 words on a topic provided by the instructor. All documents will be submitted via Canvas.

## **COURSE PURPOSE & LEARNING GOALS**

*This course addresses the need for students to learn contemporary musical history, and to be able to place the music of our times in cultural/historical context. Conversely, students encounter rock 'n' roll/popular music every day of their lives in a multitude of venues, but are rarely if ever encouraged to listen critically to it or to consider it in a larger context.*

***Inquiry:*** By learning to ask how and why (as well as who, what, where, and when) we will develop our abilities to think 'historically.' Our goal is not mere command of 'facts,' but rather the capacity to use history to understand how American society has developed during the past century. Examples of the sorts of historical questions that will arise in this course include: how did the 'Great Migration' of African Americans during and after World War One influence popular music? Why have some genres of music been vehicles for women artists while other genres have not? How did changing ideas about masculinity and femininity in the 1950s affect popular music? Arguably the most important question we will address is how music became a central component of American mass culture.

***Critical Thinking:*** In order to think critically about the past, we will develop analytical models that we will use to make sense of technological developments, the music business, musical genres, and the public's reaction to technological and stylistic changes. Each on-line forum and posted audio/video files will provide us with opportunities to apply these analytical models to specific topics and problems.

***Historical Context:*** Our analytical models will be applied to sound clips, sheet music, liner notes, lyrics, advertisements, and contemporary music criticism. Our goal, again, is not to compile arcane knowledge about genres, artists, or events in the history of American popular music, but rather to make sense of political, social, cultural, and economic change in twentieth century America.

***Written Language Skills:*** Written assignments in this course will provide you with an opportunity to hone your skills in critical historical analysis

**Goals:** The students will develop a critical aesthetic appreciation, with a historical perspective of rock 'n' roll/popular music and its cultural influences and effects.

### ***Learning Outcomes:***

- A. *The student will be able to listen critically to popular music and express in writing his or her critical knowledge and opinions.*
- B. *The student will be able to distinguish music from different stylistic periods.*
- C. *An understanding of how popular music was a tool of political, social, cultural, and economic change in twentieth-century America.*

## **COURSE SCHEDULE (EACH MODULE WILL BE OPEN FOR TWO WEEKS AT A TIME)**

### **Module 1** (*Popular Music and American Culture*)

*This chapter deals with the rapidly changing cultural landscape of the United States from 1945 – 1955. Ultimately, this chapter will help give you some context for what will unfold in the next few chapters.*

#### Reading

Glen Altschuler, *All Shook Up: How Rock 'n' Roll Changed America* (Chapter No. 1, 32 pages)

#### Additional Reading

*Berlin Airlift and the Korean War* (10 pages)

*Brown vs. Board of Education – Summary* (3 pages)

*Plessy vs. Ferguson – Summary* (3 pages)

*The rise of the electric guitar.* (8 pages)

#### Evaluation

*Written Assignment #1 (15 points)*

*Test on Chapter No. 1 (100 points) this test will include multiple choice, matching and true/false questions.*

### **Module 2** (*Rock 'N' Roll and Race*)

*Enmeshed in the racial politics of the 1950s, rock 'n' roll was credited with and criticized for promoting integration and economic opportunity for blacks while bringing to 'mainstream' culture black styles and values.*

#### Reading

Glen Altschuler, *All Shook Up: How Rock 'n' Roll Changed America* (Chapter No. 2, 32 pages)

#### Additional Reading

*Rosa Parks and Dr. Martin Luther King - Biographical information* (4 pages)

*The Jim Crow era: Integration of Little Rock Central High School and the "Southern Manifesto".* (4 pages)

#### Video/audio

*Alan Freed's Rock 'n' Roll Dance Party*

#### Evaluation

*Written Assignment #2 (15 points)*

*Test on Chapter No. 2 (100 points) this test will include multiple choice, matching and true/false questions.*

### **Module 3** (*Rock 'n' Roll and Sexuality*)

*In the '50s, rock 'n' roll became the focal point for anxiety that cultural life in the United States had become sexualized and teenagers addicted to the pleasures of the body. At the same time, rock 'n' roll was demonstrating the power of the libido, as the music pulsated, the guitarist fondled his instrument, and the singer undulated sensuously. Rock 'n' roll seemed to be an anti-inhibitor, provoking erotic vandalism.*

#### Reading

Glen Altschuler, *All Shook Up: How Rock 'n' Roll Changed America* (Chapter No. 3, 40 pages)

#### Additional Reading

*Alfred Kinsey - Biographical information (4 pages)*

#### Video/audio

*Performances of Jerry Lee Lewis, Big Mama Thornton & Elvis on American Bandstand and the Ed Sullivan Show.*

#### Evaluation

*Written Assignment #3 (15 points)*

*Test on Chapter No. 3 (100 points) this test will include multiple choice, matching and true/false questions.*

### **Module 4** (*Rock Music and Generational Conflict*)

*Many Americans believed that rock 'n' roll was an irritant that provoked conflict between parents and teenagers and increased antisocial behavior.*

#### Reading

Glen Altschuler, *All Shook Up: How Rock 'n' Roll Changed America* (Chapter No. 4, 40 pages)

#### Additional Reading

J. D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye* (300 pages)

*The Vanishing Adolescent – abstract (4 pages)*

#### Video/audio

*Blackboard Jungle (complete movie)*

*Rebel Without a Cause (complete movie)*

#### Evaluation

*Written Assignment #4 (15 points)*

*Mid-term paper (100 points): compare and contrast the portrayal of youth culture in the movies Blackboard Jungle & Rebel Without a Cause.*

*Test on Chapter No. 4 (100 points) this test will include multiple choice, matching and true/false questions.*

### **Module 5** (*Rock 'n' Roll and the Pop Culture Wars*)

*"My heart's beating rhythm / and my soul keeps singing the blues. / Roll over Beethoven, / tell Tchaikovsky the news." The news, of course, was that rock 'n' roll was a "national pastime," a powerhouse in American popular culture.*

Reading

Glen Altschuler, *All Shook Up: How Rock 'n' Roll Changed America* (Chapter No. 5, 32 pages)

Additional Reading

*The Hidden Persuaders* (250 pages)

*Payola – Summary* (4 pages)

Evaluation

*Written Assignment #5* (15 points)

*Test on Chapter No. 5* (100 points) this test will include multiple choice, matching and true/false questions.

**Module 6** (Rock 'n' Roll's Lull and Revival)

*Between 1958 and 1963, rock 'n' roll faltered. Several factors contributed to the lull. The ASCAP-led assault was the most important. The payola probes left rock 'n' roll gasping for airtime, as many radio stations switched to mellow, melody music. Large record companies promoted polka, calypso, folk music, ballads, novelty songs, and a softer, lushly orchestrated fare. Some independents went pop or merged with a major label. In these years, moreover, the ranks of more hardline rock 'n' roll performers were depleted.*

Reading

Glen Altschuler, *All Shook Up: How Rock 'n' Roll Changed America* (Chapter No. 6, 30 pages)

Additional Reading

*The British Invasion – Summary* (6 pages)

*Rock Music and Scandal* (5 pages)

Evaluation

*Written Assignment #6* (15 points)

*Test on Chapter No. 6* (100 points) this test will include multiple choice, matching and true/false questions.

**Module 7** (The Persistent Power of Rock 'N' Roll)

*In the 1950s rock 'n' roll was a meeting place, a breeding ground, and a staging area. The metaphorical equivalent to the interstate highway system built by President Eisenhower during the decade, the music carried messages across the country. The influence of rock 'n' roll was not always pivotal. Although it accelerated the pace of integration in the entertainment industry and raised questions about racial boundaries in the United States, the Civil Rights Movement would have unfolded much as it did without rock 'n' roll.*

### Reading

Glen Altschuler, *All Shook Up: How Rock 'n' Roll Changed America* (Chapter No. 7, 25 pages)

### Additional Reading

*Woodstock – Summary (8 pages)*

*Vietnam War – Summary (10 pages)*

*Watergate – Summary (6 pages)*

### Evaluation

*Comparative Listening Paper (100 points): Throughout the early days of Rock 'n' Roll, most white artist covered songs originally written and recorded by African American artists. In this short project, compare and contrast the song "Hound Dog". Originally recorded by Willie Mae "Big Mama" Thornton then covered by Elvis Presley.*

*What are the similarities and differences about the two versions? Did the practice of having white artists cover Blues and R & B hurt or help racial situations in the 1950s? What is a contemporary example of this practice, does it still exist?*

## **GRADING**

*The following grading scale will be used in this class. Please note that I do not round up grades.*

<i>A</i>	<i>(94-100)</i>
<i>A-</i>	<i>(90-93)</i>
<i>B+</i>	<i>(87-89)</i>
<i>B</i>	<i>(84-86)</i>
<i>B-</i>	<i>(80-83)</i>
<i>C+</i>	<i>(77-79)</i>
<i>C</i>	<i>(74-76)</i>
<i>C-</i>	<i>(70-73)</i>
<i>D+</i>	<i>(67-69)</i>
<i>D</i>	<i>(60-66)</i>
<i>F</i>	<i>(below 60)</i>

***Late Work:*** *Late work will not be accepted! Only in extreme circumstance will any allowance be made. The student must provide documentation directly to Mr. Falwell (example: a doctors note). Once documentation has been received only then will there be chance for any allowance.*

## WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT RUBRIC

Criteria/value	0-3 Points	3-9 Point	10-15 Points
<b>Depth of analysis</b>	<i>Paper does not address the assignment. (and/or...)</i>	<i>Posts adequate response with superficial thought and preparation; doesn't address all aspects of the discussion.</i>	<i>Posts well developed response that fully addresses and develops all aspects of the assignment.</i>
<b>Grasp of reading(s)</b>	<i>Paper is off-topic, incorrect, or irrelevant to reading.</i>	<i>Basic grasp of reading(s). minimal attempt is made at expanding of the material.</i>	<i>Demonstrates analysis of supplemental readings; extends meaningful discussion by building on previous posts</i>
<b>References &amp; Support</b>	<i>Includes no references or supporting experience.</i>	<i>Uses personal experience, but no references to readings or research.</i>	<i>Uses properly cited references to literature, readings, or personal experience to support statements.</i>
<b>Quality of writing and proof reading</b>	<i>Writes long, unorganized content that may contain multiple errors or may be inappropriate.</i>	<i>Communicates in easy to read manner with some errors in clarity or grammatical, spelling errors.</i>	<i>Coveys clear and concise ideas formatted in an easy to read style that is free of grammatical or spelling errors.</i>

## MID-TERM & FINAL ASSIGNMENT RUBRIC

Criteria/value	0-59 Points	60-85 Point	86-100 Points
<b>Depth of analysis</b>	<i>Paper does not address the assignment. (and/or...)</i>	<i>Posts adequate response with superficial thought and preparation; doesn't address all aspects of the discussion.</i>	<i>Posts well developed response that fully addresses and develops all aspects of the assignment.</i>
<b>Grasp of reading(s)</b>	<i>Paper is off-topic, incorrect, or irrelevant to reading.</i>	<i>Basic grasp of reading(s). Minimal attempt is made at expanding of the material.</i>	<i>Demonstrates analysis of supplemental readings; extends meaningful discussion by building on previous posts</i>
<b>References &amp; Support</b>	<i>Includes no references or supporting experience.</i>	<i>Uses personal experience, but no references to readings or research.</i>	<i>Uses properly cited references to literature, readings, or personal experience to support statements.</i>
<b>Organization</b>	<i>Organization of the paper as a whole is not logical or discernable.</i>	<i>Organization of paper as a whole is logical and apparent, but transitions between paragraphs are not consistently smooth. Every paragraph makes one distinct and coherent point and, for the most part, the parts of each paragraph connect logically and effectively.</i>	<i>Organization of paper as a whole is logical and quickly apparent. Connections among paragraphs are clearly articulated. Transitions between paragraphs are smooth.</i>
<b>Quality of writing and proof reading</b>	<i>Paper is unacceptably sloppy. (and/or...) Quotes are frequently not attributed or improperly cited.</i>	<i>Communicates in easy to read manner with some errors in clarity or grammatical, spelling errors.</i>	<i>Paper is clean and appropriately formatted. There are no incomplete or run-on sentences. Quotes are all properly attributed and cited. There are virtually no spelling or grammatical errors.</i>