Course Description:

Rock and roll is the simple name given to the musical/cultural/attitude movement that shook the minds and the pants of thousands of youngsters all around the world. It all started during the early 50's and it all began with the influence of blues, country and r'n'b music; probably the coolest type of music in the world.

From the Urban Dictionary

Music gives us a microphone to speak to the world. And music has the power to bring generations, nationalities and people together. Now more than ever, it’s critical to study and understand how music is changing our world as well as reflecting it.

From the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame website

It has been about 60 years since the popular musical genre called rock and roll or rock ‘n’ roll made its appearance. While Alan Freed, a Cleveland disk jockey, is famed with first using the phrase “rock and roll” back in the early 1950s, there were already songs which coined the term in the 1940s and references to “rocking and rolling” in music much earlier than that in the early 1900s. Whatever its roots and early beginnings, from its inception, rock and roll music has been a distinctly American blend with elements of blues, rhythm and blues, country, folk, and gospel music. This wedding of musical styles in U.S. history with concomitant implications for social relations—race- and classed-based at the outset—is the central focus of this course. It seems fitting, then, to begin this course with a definition and a reference from the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame describing one of the most important musical genres of the 20th and 21st centuries in U.S. society.

Fundamentally, this course is an historical, theoretical, and ultimately, sociological exploration of rock and roll music. The course will examine rock music from its roots, to its appearance in the late 1940s and early 1950s, to its evolution throughout the 20th century and into the 21st century. Students will be invited to explore the socio-cultural aspects reflected in and affected by this popular music including race, class, and gender relationships as well as some of the ways that institutions help to reinforce and shape musical genres.

I would like you to leave this course with 1) an understanding of sociological theory as it pertains to media texts such as rock and roll music; 2) an understanding of the socio-historical environment of each era of rock music and how the times influenced the music; 3) an understanding of the socio-cultural issues treated in rock and roll music; 4) an understanding of the effect of rock and roll music on American culture; 5) knowledge of the representative, pivotal artists, groups, and related individuals in rock and roll music; 6) and a basis for critical thinking about the place of rock and roll music in American history and culture.

Grading:

Your grade will be based on at least one exam, one research paper, quizzes, and any assignments that are given in class. The due dates for the paper and the exams will be "written in stone" unless you have been informed otherwise by me. Late papers will not be accepted nor can exams be rescheduled unless you inform me before the dates in question. If I don't hear from you before the due date of the paper or before the dates of the exams you will be out of luck.

Exam Format

Any exams given in class will consist of a choice of one essay question out of three or four. This may sound fairly easy on its face. However, you will need to incorporate in this one essay quite a bit of material from lectures, readings, theory, and media examples, and you will only have one blank sheet front and back to do this. You absolutely need to write legibly, so make sure that others can read your writing—print if necessary. The final exam is NOT cumulative. There will be no review for either exam; your exam grades will stand or fall based on your notes, your reading, and in class media
discussions. This means you had better take thorough notes on class lectures and discussions. If you cannot attend class, get to know one of the other students. TAs do not give out notes except in emergencies or for students with special circumstances. **An optional final may be offered.** This means a student can opt to keep the grade they are getting so far in the class or choose to take the final to better their grade. **If they take the final, it will count toward their final grade.** If an optional final is offered, and there is no guarantee that it will be, it will be announced near the end of the semester and the criteria used to determine whether or not a student has an option will include the student’s attendance and the student’s grade standing going into the final exam period. **If an optional final is offered, qualifying students can opt to take the final or remain for a discussion; they cannot simply leave.** All students should, of course, prepare to take a final exam in any case.

**Rock and Roll Research Paper (5-7 pages, TYPED Double-spaced)**

The rock and roll research paper consists of an empirical exploration of some aspect of rock and roll music through a critical media literacy lens. There are **three elements within critical media literacy and one or more** can be used in your analysis including: **political economy, textual analysis, and audience reception.** For example, you could focus on the **political economy** surrounding a rock era such as the rise of punk rock or the emergence of hip hop. Or you could conduct a **content or semiotic analysis** of the lyrics of some representative bands of a given genre—the Grateful Dead, Jefferson Airplane, and Big Brother and the Holding Company, as part of the psychedelic sounds era. Or you might want to take on an **audience reception** analysis contrasting dominant readings versus oppositional readings of the work of British invasion artists including the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, and the Who. Or you might just shoot the moon and take on all three—for example, discuss the political economy surrounding the emergence of grunge, conduct a semiotic analysis of some Nirvana, Soundgarden, and Mudhoney lyrics, and discuss a dominant reading of grunge music. The choice is ultimately yours and the possibilities and permutations are pretty wide-ranging, practically infinite. Watch out for regurgitation of class material and lack of depth in analysis. Oh yes, you can use the word “I”. The paper should entail:

1. a **thesis** [no more than a page]—introducing me to the thesis or main point of the paper. What **element of critical media literacy** will you be using and what **aspect of rock and roll music**? Will you be exploring the political economy of the roots of rock and roll or some other era within rock and roll history such as the British invasion, or a textual analysis of representative bands within a musical genre such as punk or rap, or an audience reception analysis of representatives of some rock genre, or will you taking on all three elements to analyze some aspect of rock music like women in rock? Whatever you choose, make sure you introduce it here. This section can be as dramatic as you’d like or include personal insight.

2. a **body** [three to five pages]—this entails your logical and thoughtful exploration of your thesis. If you have chosen the political economy of punk rock, then make a case and stick to it. All papers will require some degree of research with citations (at least 3 from sources other than websites and wikipedia). This section will likely look something like this:

   During the time that Madonna rose to stardom, America was living through the Reagan era. It was a time of cultural shifts in values and thinking from politics to boardrooms to MTV. Let me elaborate…. OR

   The writing of punk rockers easily lends itself to multiple forms of analysis. This **semiotic analysis** will focus on themes emerging in the lyrics of a representative sample of punk rock bands to highlight comparisons and contrasts in the work of punk rockers. These themes include… OR

   A dominant reading of punk rock largely turns the world on its ear, since punk rock was meant to clash, no pun intended, with mainstream thinking and values; while an oppositional reading of punk rock would question the value of this rock music genre and its meaning for generations. Let me begin with a dominant reading of punk rock through a look at the work of some representative bands… OR

   Hip hop emerged within the disenfranchised inner-city neighborhoods of the South Bronx, New York. This political economy backdrop will foreground a content analysis of lyrics by Tupac Shakur, Mos Def, and the Roots whose work I will argue from a dominant reading of their texts. So to begin…
3. a critique or evaluation section [no more than a page]--this section can be as dramatic as you choose to make it and must entail a personal opinion of the task--it is not meant to be a summary of what you have already written. Please DO NOT use plastic folders, cover pages, or bibliography pages unless you are citing sources other than your book(s) and lectures. PROOFREAD!! Poor grammar, spelling, etc... will suffer grade reduction. Also watch font and margin space. Keep font to no more than 12pt (as long as it is not Courier New) and margins to no more than 1 inch on each side. Your grade will be reduced for large font and margins.

Quizzes

A series of 5 randomly scheduled quizzes will be given during the course of the semester which will count toward your final grade. Quizzes will given promptly at 9:10am and will be brief, ranging from 3-5 questions. Quizzes are not meant to be demanding, but just give me a sense of whether you’re keeping up with reading. Students will be allowed to drop one quiz grade—the lowest grade, a no-show, or a late show.

Assignments and Miscellaneous Information...

I reserve the right to give assignments as needed. For example, students who don’t complete readings may be asked to turn in an essay assignment. Since there are no other texts in the class but the readings, they become even that much more important in terms of your work. If assignments are given, they will count toward your final grade. Attendance will be taken regularly and class participation is also considered significant to your grade.

Required Reading:

Reserve readings can be found using the Marriott Library website which is http://www.lib.utah.edu/. When you get to this site, look to the right hand side on the bottom and you will find the My.Utah.edu Student Portal. Login using your uNID and your password. Once you are logged in, on the left hand menu, click on the Academics option that has a little symbol of a graduation cap. Then, in the middle column under My Courses, you should see all the courses for which you have registered for the current semester. You should find Sociology 3041-001. Underneath that you should find Course Reserves. You can click on Course Reserves and it will bring up all the readings for the course.

Information about the Center for Disability Services:

The University of Utah seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services and activities for people with disabilities. If you will need accommodations in this class, reasonable prior notice needs to be given to the instructor and to the Center for Disability Services, 162 Olpin Union Building, 581-5020 (V/TDD) to make arrangements for accommodations. All printed information for this course can be made available in alternative format with prior notification to the Center for Disability Services.

Dates You Should Know:

16 Feb: Exam #1
30 Mar: Rock and Roll Research Paper due
4 May: Final Exam

Course Outline and Reading List:

JAN  12  Introduction to the Sociology of Rock and Roll
14-19  Developing a Critical Media Literacy: Rock and Roll, Race/Class/Gender, and Learning to Read Against the Grain

Reserve Reading: Ellen Seiter, Peggy McIntosh

18  Martin Luther King Holiday
21-26 The Roots of Rock and Roll: Up From Slavery
  Reserve Reading: Robert Gordon

28 The Classic Rockers: Music to the Tune of Integration
  Reserve Reading: Tom Wheeler

FEB 2 The Classic Rockers: Music to the Tune of Integration
4-11 The British Invasion, The Sound of Protest, Folk Rock
  Reserve Reading: Jane Tompkins, Robert Shelton

15 Presidents Day Holiday

16 Exam #1

23-25 Motown and Integration, Soul and Disillusion
  Reserve Reading: Craig Hansen Werner

MAR 2-9 Psychedelic Sound, Militant Blues on Campus, 70s Excess
11-18 Punk Revolution, MTV Generation
  Reserve Reading: Andy Bennett
22-27 Spring Break

30 80s Promise, Gen-X Blues, Metal, and Grunge
  Reserve Reading: Gareth Palmer, Michael Azerrad

30 Rock and Roll Research Paper Due

APR 1-6 80s Promise, Gen-X Blues, Metal, and Grunge
  Reserve Reading: Gareth Palmer, Sarah Ferguson
8-13 The Emergence of Hip Hop and Rap
  Reserve Reading: Tricia Rose

15-20 The Women of Rock and Roll
  Reserve Reading: Keith Negus, Lois Ruskai Melina

22-27 Rock in the 21st Century: No Boundaries
  Reserve Reading: Barry Gewen

MAY 4 Final Exam – Tuesday, 8:00-10:00am
RESERVE READING LIST

Developing a Critical Media Literacy: Rock and Roll, Race/Class/Gender, and Learning to Read Against the Grain


The Roots of Rock and Roll: Up from Slavery


The Classic Rockers: Music to the Tune of Integration


The British Invasion, The Sound of Protest, Folk Rock


Motown and Integration/Soul and Disillusion


Punk Revolution, MTV Generation


80s Promise, Gen-X Blues, Metal, and Grunge


The Emergence of Hip-Hop and Rap


The Women of Rock and Roll


Rock in the 21st Century: No Boundaries