In the United States, there has been a connection between music and politics since the nation’s founding. Politicians, social movements, and the citizenry have routinely expressed political views through music. What messages are these actors sending? Are the messages being received? Is there something unique about music that changes the nature of the message? Music has been used for both pro-establishment and anti-establishment purposes. National anthems, patriotic songs, campaign songs, protest songs, and anti-war songs are just some examples of the ways in which politics and music intersect. Unlike other forms of music, political music is usually not ambiguous, and is therefore relatively easily discerned by listeners. In this course we will explore various types of political music and topical songs over time with an emphasis on contemporary music and how it relates to various social movements and issues particularly those involving race, class, and gender.

Through readings, discussion, films, and, of course, music, we will examine how artists such as Billie Holiday, Bob Dylan, John Lennon, Marvin Gaye, and N.W.A. have had their political songs both understood and misunderstood by politicians and citizens alike. We will examine these issues through an historical examination of the development of American popular music from early blackface minstrelsy to blues, country, jazz, folk, rock, rap and how they directly led to the current music of today: popular hip-hop.

POLS 390
Politics & Popular Music
Online Course
Professor Artemus Ward
aeward@niu.edu
Office Hours: T TH 8-9:30am Zulauf 405

The Order of Things
Module 02 - Lecture – The Origins of Popular Music: From Blackface Minstrelsy to Tin Pan Alley
Module 03 - Lecture – Blues, Jazz, and Country: The Segregation of Popular Music
Module 04 - Lecture – The Birth (and Death) of Rock ‘n’ Roll
The Midterm Exam will cover Modules 01-05.
Module 07 - Lecture – The Singer-Songwriter: From Folk to Folk Rock and Beyond
Module 08 - Lecture – The 60s & 70s: Popular Music & Political Culture
Module 09 - Lecture – Musical Fragmentation: Metal, Punk, Disco, and Rap
The Final Exam will cover Module 06-16.

No textbook required!
All course readings are free on Blackboard.

Though some may think there should be a separation between art/music and politics, it should be reinforced that art can be a form of nonviolent protest.

— Eddie Vedder —

Ted Nugent and Kid Rock and their wives with Sarah Palin and President Trump in the Oval Office.
PLAGIARISM, SIMPLY DEFINED, IS TAKING SOMEONE ELSE’S WORDS OR IDEAS AND REPRESENTING THEM AS BEING YOUR OWN. It is specifically prohibited by University regulations, which state: “Good academic work must be based on honesty. The attempt of any student to present as his or her own work which that he or she has not produced is regarded by the faculty and administration as a serious offense. Students are considered to have cheated if they copy the work of another during an examination or turn in a paper or an assignment written, in whole or in part, by someone else. Students are guilty of plagiarism, intentional or not, if they copy material from books, magazines, or other sources without identifying and acknowledging those sources or if they paraphrase ideas from such sources without acknowledging them. Students guilty of, or assisting others in, either cheating or plagiarism on an assignment, quiz, or examination may receive a grade of F for the course.

Due Dates! No Late Work Allowed. 😊
- All Discussion Board posts must be completed by Friday Dec 8 Noon.
- Term Papers due by Friday Dec 8 Noon.
- Both exams must be completed by Wed Dec 13th Noon.

Course Requirements

On-Line Participation
You are required to go to the discussion board on Blackboard and for each forum post one (and not more than two) messages (roughly 3-4 sentences) about the relevant course material or anything that relates to the course. You can either start your own thread or respond to a post that has already been made either by the instructor or another student. You should also read the posts that the other students in the class make. Your participation grade will be posted at the end of the course and is based on making at least one quality post in each of the different forums. Thus, making one quality post in each forum will earn you a perfect score for participation. You must complete all of your posts by the end of the semester by the date and time posted on the syllabus. No exceptions.

Mid-Term Exam
The mid-term will be an on-line, objective test consisting of both true-false and multiple choice questions. Once you begin the exam, you will have 30 minutes to answer 25 questions. Each question is worth 4 points each for a total of 100 points. The test will cover all of the material listed on the syllabus up until mid-term exam point on the syllabus. The test will be available on Blackboard throughout the semester. You may take the test at any time but you must complete it before the end of the course on the date specified on the syllabus.

Research Paper
You are required to do a research paper on some aspect of politics and popular music such as an artist, song, album, concert, political candidate or campaign, or any topic that fits with the course. Some topics are too broad and must be narrowed down. For example, “The Beatles” is far too broad a topic. “The Beatles and the Vietnam War” is narrower and therefore more appropriate. If you are unsure of whether your topic is appropriate be sure to check with the instructor. The paper must be 5-6pp., double-spaced, in length and uploaded to Blackboard through SafeAssign. Be sure to read the Paper Requirements document on Blackboard for details.

Final Exam
The final exam is the same format as the midterm but will only include the course material covered AFTER the midterm exam.

Recommended (but not Required) Reading


The Fine Print
Cheating and Plagiarism - PLAGIARISM SIMPLY DEFINED IS TAKING SOMEONE ELSE’S WORDS OR IDEAS AND REPRESENTING THEM AS BEING YOUR OWN. It is specifically prohibited by University regulations, which state: “Good academic work must be based on honesty. The attempt of any student to present as his or her own work which that he or she has not produced is regarded by the faculty and administration as a serious offense. Students are considered to have cheated if they copy the work of another during an examination or turn in a paper or an assignment written, in whole or in part, by someone else. Students are guilty of plagiarism, intentional or not, if they copy material from books, magazines, or other sources without identifying and acknowledging those sources or if they paraphrase ideas from such sources without acknowledging them. Students guilty of, or assisting others in, either cheating or plagiarism on an assignment, quiz, or examination may receive a grade of F for the course involved and may be suspended or dismissed from the university.” [Undergraduate Catalog]

Accessibility Statement - Northern Illinois University is committed to providing an accessible educational environment in collaboration with the Disability Resource Center (DRC). Any student requiring an academic accommodation due to a disability should let his or her faculty member know as soon as possible. Students who need academic accommodations based on the impact of a disability will be encouraged to contact the DRC if they have not done so already. The DRC is located on the 4th floor of the Health Services Building, and can be reached at 815-753-1303 (V) or drc@niu.edu. To assist NIU in providing an accessible and inclusive environment, the following suggested accessibility statements are provided for departmental and programmatic use. Please contact a DRC staff member with questions or concerns about regarding access for and inclusion of students with disabilities at NIU.