

ARTS 617: HISTORY OF ROCK and R&B **Wesleyan University GLS, Spring 2020**

Instructor: Eric Charry, MS201, 860-685-2579, echarry@wesleyan.edu
Course hours: Mondays, January 27-Dec. 14, 6:30pm-9:00pm, MS301, MS301
Office hours: TBA and by appointment
Course websites: <http://arts617.blogs.wesleyan.edu/>

SYLLABUS (draft 12/18/2019)

Course description

In this course we will use the history of rock and R&B (rhythm & blues)—broadly defined as a conglomeration of loosely related American popular musical styles—to explore American history of the 1940s through the early 1990s, and vice versa. Several parallel goals will be pursued. We will become literate in the broad range of the constituent traditions of rock and R&B, studying primary artists, their classic works, and the web of connections that link them. We will engage with a variety of theoretical and journalistic approaches to understanding the music and its culture over the past six decades, tying them to such issues as race relations and identities, youth culture and its relationship to American popular culture, and popular music as a creative, cultural, and social force. And we will become familiar with, critically interpret, and evaluate the significant body of film and video that has been concerned with the music.

A new book by the instructor will provide the basic history and issues, serving as one entry point. A 10-part video series produced in the mid-1990s (BBC/WGBH)—available for independent viewing—will enhance this history and serve as a framework for critical discussion of how a seemingly unwieldy expressive form such as rock can be encapsulated, understood, and formally taught. A selection of additional articles and chapters ranging from primary newspaper and magazine sources to academic analyses will fill in the cultural and social contexts.

Classes will consist of guided listening (about 120 pieces in all), viewing of video excerpts, student presentations, and discussion. Assignments include weekly written responses or short research projects, student presentations based on independent supplemental research, and a final project to be chosen in consultation with the instructor.

Required texts

Eric Charry. 2020. *A New and Concise History of Rock and R&B, through the early 1990s*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.

Articles and chapters on Electronic Reserve

Course Requirements

Reading: Reading the articles and chapters is required as indicated in the syllabus and announced each class.

Listening: All of the required listening is on Spotify (see Announcements in Moodle for information on how to subscribe). A listening playlist (available on Moodle) contains all of the details for the 120 pieces. Additional audio and video links will be posted on the course blog. Students should listen to and study the pieces discussed in each class.

Viewing: A 10-part BBC/WGBH *Rock & Roll* video series is available for online viewing via E-Res or Moodle. Each episode is just under one hour long. Students are required to view each episode on their own as indicated in the syllabus and post responses on Moodle for each episode.

Writing: Regular short written responses on the listening and reading, and a final project on any relevant topic to be chosen in consultation with the instructor. Complete citations and/or footnotes should be given for all of the sources used.

Class Presentations: Students will make short oral presentations during the semester in their areas of interest. Final project presentations will take place the last weeks of class.

Attendance Policy: Due to the intensity of the semester, consistent class attendance is required and students are expected to arrive on time. Any problems should be discussed with the instructor as unexcused absences may result

in a lowered grade. Please keep cell phones silent while in class.

Grades: Your grade will be determined by the short written assignments, online forum participation, class presentations, and final project (which should reflect the culmination of a semester's work). Class participation may also be factored in.

SCHEDULE OF CLASS WORK

ARTS627, Charry, Spring 2020
(Subject to change)

Week 1**Introduction, The Music Industry**Week 2**Blues, Rhythm and Blues, Gospel, Country**

Charry, Introduction, Chapter 1 (“Music Industry, Media, and Technology”),

Chapter 2 (“1920s-50s”), Chapter 8 (“Identities”)

hooks, “Forever” (2012: 71-80)

Hughes, “Highway Robbery Across the Color Line” (1955)

Ruth Brown, from *Miss Rhythm: The Autobiography* (1996: 68-73, 76-79, 109-111, 123-126, 130-132, 141-146, 228-232, 284-290)

BBC/WGBH video 1: *Renegades* (video response)

Week 3**Early Rock 'n' Roll**

Charry, Chapter 3 (“1954-59: early Rock and Roll”)

Chuck Berry, from *Chuck Berry: The Autobiography* (1987: 88-91, 94-107, 119-120, 123-127, 135-136, 141-145, 150-151)

Six on Elvis

Gould, “TV: New Phenomenon, Elvis Presley Rises to Fame” (6/6/1956a)

Crosby, “Could Elvis Mean End of Rock ‘n’ Roll Craze?” (6/18/1956)

Gary, “It’s A Money Maker: Elvis Defends Low-Down Style” (6/27/1956)

Gould, “Elvis Presley: Lack of Responsibility is Shown by TV” (9/16/1956b)

Robinson, “The Truth about That Elvis Presley Rumor” (8/1/1957: 58-61)

Graham, “Suspicious Minds: Even Now, Many African-Americans Have an Ambivalent Relationship with Elvis Presley” (2002: L1, L7)

Bunzel, “Music Biz Goes Round and Round” (1960: 118-120, 122, 125)

BBC/WGBH video 2: *In the Groove* (video response)

Week 4**1960s, Part 1 (1960-64)**

Charry, Chapter 4 (“1960-64”)

Time Magazine, “Folk Singing: Sibyl with Guitar” (1962: 54-56, 59-60)

Willis, “Dylan” (1968/2014: 20-35)

Aronowitz, “Eyewitness: Dylan Turns the Beatles on to Dope” (1994)

BBC/WGBH video 3: *Shakespeares in the Alley* (video response)

Week 5**1960s, Part 1 (1960-64) continued**

Charry, Chapter 9 (“Aesthetic Preferences and Sonic Markers”)

BBC/WGBH video 4: *Respect* (video response)

Week 6**1960s, Part 2 (1965-69)**

Charry, Chapter 5 (“1965-69”)

James Brown, *The Godfather of Soul* (1986: 18, 22-23, 106, 152-159)

Garland, “Aretha Franklin: Sister Soul” (1967: 47-48, 50-52)

BBC/WGBH video 5: *Crossroads* (video response)

Week 7**1960s, Part 2 (1965-69) continued**

Charry, Chapter 10 (“When Cultures Cross”)

Woodstock and Altamont

Collier, “300,000 at Folk-Rock Fair Camp Out in a Sea of Mud” (1969)

Dalton, “Woodstock” (1999)

Dalton, “Altamont” (1999)

BBC/WGBH video 6: *Blues in Technicolor* (video response)

Week 8**1970s, Part 1**

Charry, Chapter 6 (“1970s”)

Robbins, “Ladies and Gentlemen of the Jury,” “Letters to the Editor” (2000)

BBC/WGBH video 7: *Wild Side* (video response)

Week 9**1970s, Part 2**

Braunstein, “The Last Days of Gay Disco” (1998)

Willis, “Beginning to See the Light” (1977/2014: 51-58)

BBC/WGBH video 8: *Make it Funky* (video response)

Week 10**1980s, part 1**

Charry, Chapter 7 (“1980s”)

United States Senate, “Record Labeling: Hearing” (1985: 1-17, 43-45; skim: 51-82)—see

References below for details

Tate, “I’m White! What’s Wrong with Michael Jackson” (1987)

hooks, “Madonna: Plantation Mistress or Soul Sister?” (1992: 157-164)

BBC/WGBH video 9: *Punk* (video response)

Week 11**1980s, Part 2**

Morgan, “From Fly-Girls” (1999: 65-81)

BBC/WGBH video 10: *Perfect Beat* (video response)

Week 12**PRESENTATIONS**Week 13**PRESENTATIONS****Final Project Due**

References (ARTS627)

- Aronowitz, Al
1994 "Eyewitness: Dylan Turns the Beatles on to Dope," *Q* (May)
- Berry, Chuck
1987 *Chuck Berry: The Autobiography*. Harmony Books.
- Braunstein, Peter
1998 "The Last Days of Gay Disco," *Village Voice* (Jun. 30).
<http://www.villagevoice.com/news/the-last-days-of-gay-disco-6423738>
- Bromell, Nick
2000 "'Evil' is 'Live' Spelled Backwards: The Radical Self in *Highway 61 Revisited* and *The White Album*," in Bromell, *Tomorrow Never Knows: Rock and Psychedelics in the 1960s*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 122-145.
- Brown, James with Bruce Tucker
1986 *The Godfather of Soul*. New York: Scribner.
- Brown, Ruth and Andrew Yule
1996 *Miss Rhythm: The Autobiography of Ruth Brown, Rhythm and Blues Legend*. New York: Donald I. Fine Books.
- Bunzel, Peter
1960 "Music Biz Goes Round and Round: It Comes out Clarkola," *Life* (May 16): 118-120, 122, 125.
<http://books.google.com/books?id=-U4EAAAAMBAJ&lpg=PA118&pg=PA118#v=onepage&q&f=true>
- Charry, Eric
2020 *A New and Concise History of Rock and R&B, through the early 1990s*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- Collier, Barnard L.
1969 "300,000 at Folk-Rock Fair Camp Out in a Sea of Mud," *New York Times* (Aug. 17): 1, 80.
- Crosby, John
1956 "Could Elvis Mean End of Rock 'n' Roll Craze," *Washington Post and Times Herald* (June 18): 33.
- Dalton, David
1999 "Woodstock," *Gadfly* (Aug.).
<http://www.rocksbackpages.com.ezproxy.wesleyan.edu/Library/Article/woodstock-2>
1999 "Altamont: End of Sixties or Big Mix-up in the Middle of Nowhere?," *Gadfly* (Nov./Dec.)
<http://www.rocksbackpages.com.ezproxy.wesleyan.edu/Library/Article/altamont-an-eyewitness-account>
- Garland, Phyll
1967 "Aretha Franklin: 'Sister Soul'," *Ebony* (Oct.): 47-48, 50-52.
- Gary, Kays
1956 "It's a Money-Maker: Elvis Defends Low-Down Style," *Charlotte Observer* (June 27): 1B.
- Gould, Jack
1956a "TV: New Phenomenon, Elvis Presley Rises to Fame as Vocalist Who is Virtuoso of Hootchy-Kootchy," *New York Times* (Jun. 6): 67.
1956b "Elvis Presley: Lack of Responsibility is Shown by TV in Exploiting Teen-Agers," *New York Times* (Sep. 16): X13.
- Graham, Renée
2002 "Suspicious Minds: Even Now, Many African-Americans Have an Ambivalent Relationship with Elvis Presley," *Boston Globe* (Aug. 11): L1, L7.
- hooks, bell
1992 "Madonna: Plantation Mistress or Soul Sister?" in hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, Boston: South End Press, 157-164. Reprinted in Evelyn McDonnell and Ann Powers (eds.), *Rock She Wrote: Women Write about Rock, Pop, and Rap*, 1995, New York: Delta, 318-325.
2012 "Forever," in Rebecca Walker (ed.), *Black Cool: One Thousand Streams of Blackness*, Berkeley: Soft Skull Press, 71-80.
- Hughes, Langston
1955 "Highway Robbery Across the Color Line in Rhythm and Blues," *Chicago Defender* (Jul. 2): 9.
- Morgan, Joan
1999 "From Fly-Girls to Bitches and Hos," in *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost: My Life as a Hip-Hop Feminist*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 65-81.

Robbins, Ira

- 2000 "Ladies and Gentlemen of the Jury . . . There Stands Before You a Murderer--The Band that Killed Rock 'n' Roll," *salon.com* (Apr. 10).
http://www.salon.com/2000/04/10/rock_killer/
 Letters to the Editor (Apr. 13): <http://www.salon.com/2000/04/13/gfr/>

Robinson, Louie

- 1957 "The Truth about That Elvis Presley Rumor," *Jet* (Aug. 1): 58-61.

Tate, Greg

- 1987 "I'm White! What's Wrong with Michael Jackson," *Village Voice* (Sep. 22).

<http://www.villagevoice.com/music/from-the-voice-archives-greg-tate-on-michael-jackson-in-1987-6631218>

Time Magazine

- 1962 "Show Business. Folk Singing: Sibyl with Guitar," *Time* (Nov. 23): cover, 54-56, 59-60.

United States Senate

- 1985 *Record Labeling: Hearing Before the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, United States Senate, Ninety-ninth Congress, First Session, on Contents of Music and the Lyrics of Records, September 19, 1985*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. Senators Danforth, Hollings, Tribble, Gore, and Hawkins (1-10), Susan Baker (10-12), Tipper Gore (12-13), Jeff Ling (13-17), Sheila Davis (43-45), Frank Zappa (51-64), John Denver (64-72), Dee Synder (72-82)
<http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015011009050;view=lup;seq=1>

Willis, Ellen

- 1968 "Dylan," *Cheetah* (Mar.). Revised version of "The Sound of Bob Dylan," *Commentary* (11/1/1967). Reprinted in Willis (2014: 20-35).
 1977 "Beginning to See the Light," *Village Voice*. Reprinted in Willis (2014: 51-58).
 2014 *The Essential Ellen Willis*. (ed. Nona Willis Aronowitz) Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Video

Espar, David and Hugh Thomson (prods.)

- 1995 *Rock & Roll*. 10 episodes. BBC and WGBH Boston.