

Music 126/Ethnic Studies 178

The Blues: An Oral Tradition

Fall 2017 Course

Page/Syllabus

Instructor [Asher Tobin Chodos](#)

Lecture Tuesday and Thursday 6:30p-7:50p in Center Hall, room 216

Office Hours Thursdays 4:00pm - 6:00pm at the Art of Espresso

Teaching Assistants hold office hours by appointment

- [Leah Bowden](#) -- (Ahmed-Jarret)
- [Kyle Motl](#) -- (Jung-Nygaard)
- [Eliot Patros](#) -- (Oulad-Zou)

Final Exam Tuesday, 12/12/2017, 7:00p-9:59p, location TBA

Course Overview

Objectives

This course traces the history of the blues from their beginnings to the present. We will approach the subject in two ways:

1. As a musical form. Here students will learn to appreciate and analyze the evolution of the diverse musical techniques that fall under the broad generic banner of "blues." Students will also enrich their understanding of American popular music in general by learning to hear the ways in which it derives from blues.
2. As a cultural product that can be uniquely instructive for the study of

American history and culture. After learning to hear the spectrum of stylistic nuance in the blues, students will learn to interpret its significance. In this way students will not only deepen their knowledge of the narrative history of the United States, but will do so from the perspective that only aesthetic analysis can offer. The idea that music discloses basic truths about its social environment is a fundamental principle of musicology; in addition to offering students a course in American history through the lens of one of its most important cultural products, this course introduces students to the practice of musicology.

Summary

The blues has meant many different things over the course of the 20th century. As an extension of African musical practices within the American slave population and the black communities of the Jim Crow south, the blues puts us in touch with the resilience of African American cultural expression in the face of extreme cruelty and repression. We will trace the changes wrought upon this music by the urbanization of America's black population, and its re-signification as an emblem of far left politics across the racial divide after the depression. We will study its decisive importance for the advent of Rock-n-Roll in the 1950s and the radical counter-cultural movements of the 1960s, as well as its influence on popular musical forms all over the world, continuing to the present day. This is a course that will help students to understand how blues music works, but it is also a chance for students to consider its means in the context of the history of race, class, and gender in the United States.

Course Requirements

Preparation

Each lecture has a reading and listening assignment. These should be

completed before the lecture in question.

Reading assignments are either linked to on this page or available through course reserves. There will frequently be optional readings; these are intended as further reading for anyone who is interested, and they can be useful resources for the final paper.

Listening assignments are linked to on this page.

Note that in many cases a UCSD IP address (or the VPN) will be required to access course materials.

Exams

Written exams will be held on **Nov. 7** (midterm) and **Dec. 12** (final). Both exams are cumulative, including for listening material. Makeup exams will not be offered.

Exams will not be multiple choice; instead, they will combine short answer and long-form essay writing. **Each exam will begin with a listening identification section.** I will maintain a [comprehensive listening list](#), distilled from listening assignments and selections played in lecture, from which (exclusively) listening identifications on the exams will be drawn. This list will be updated at the end of each week.

Pop quizzes will be given at the beginning of lecture several times throughout the quarter. These cannot be made up.

Don't put off the listening assignments; cramming for listening IDs is usually ineffective.

Attendance

Attendance is required at all lectures. The lectures will follow the readings, but **not everything you'll be responsible for knowing is**

covered in the reading or lectures alone. Lecture slides will be posted each day after class, and they will contain material, **including additional listenings not necessarily assigned as homework**, that will appear on exams.

Required work/grade breakdown

- Pop quizzes (5%)
- Writing assignment 1 (due **Oct 17** at the beginning of lecture **in hard copy**) ([guidelines](#)) -- 10%
- Writing assignment 2 (due **Nov. 21** at the beginning of lecture **in hard copy**) ([guidelines](#)) -- 15%
- Final paper (due **Dec. 7** at midnight, **submitted via TritonEd**) ([guidelines](#)) -- 20%
- Midterm exam **on Nov. 7** - 20% -- **please bring a bluebook**
- Final exam **on Dec 12** -- 30% -- **please bring a bluebook**
 - [comprehensive listening list for exams](#)

Writing assignment submission

The smaller writing assignments are due in **hard copy** in lecture. The final paper can be submitted via TritonEd by midnight on Nov. 7.

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism, cheating, or other forms of academic dishonesty can result in an “F” for the course and can lead to further disciplinary action by the University. (For more information see the section entitled “UCSD Policy on Integrity of Scholarship” in the UCSD General Catalogue.)

Course Schedule -- subject to change; check back regularly

Week 0

Week 1

Week 2

Week 3

Week 4

Week 5

Week 6

Week 7

Week 8

Week 9

Week 10

Week 0

0.1 -- Sept 28 -- Course Introduction / Defining the Blues (I)

No preparation due before first lecture

lecture draws heavily from Johnson, Walter, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market*, Harvard Univ. Press, 2001

Week 1

1.1 -- Oct 3 --Defining the Blues (II): Blues and Racial Consciousness

Reading

required:

1. THOMPSON, KATRINA DYONNE. "Casting: 'They Sang Their Home-Songs, and Danced, Each with His Free Foot Slapping the Deck.'" *Ring Shout, Wheel About: The Racial Politics of Music and Dance in North American Slavery*, University of Illinois Press, 2014, pp. 42–68.
2. Baldwin, James, "The Uses of the Blues," in *The Cross of Redemption* (course reserves)
3. Oliver, "The Blues" entry in *The New Grove Dictionary of American Music* (course reserves)

optional:

1. Dixon, Willie and Don Snowden, "Introduction", from *I am the Blues: The Willie Dixon Story*
2. Jones, LeRoi (Amiri Baraka). Selections from *Blues People: Negro Music in White America*. (New York: William Morrow, 1963):
 - "The Negro as Non-American: Some Background" and "The Negro as Property"
 - "Slave and Post Slave"
3. Barbara Fields, "Race and Ideology"

Listening

- [Willie Dixon, I can't quit you, Baby](#)
- [Bessie Smith, Back-water Blues \(1927\)](#)
- [Bessie Smith, Gin House Blues \(1926\)](#)
- [Hart Wand, Dallas Blues\(pub 1912\)](#)
- [Nat Ayer, "Oh, You Beautiful Doll" \(1911\)](#)

- [WC Handy, St. Louis Blues \(pub 1914\)](#)

1.2 -- Oct 5 -- African Music and the Blues

Reading

1. Palmer, Robert. Excerpt from *Deep Blues: A Musical and Cultural History of the Mississippi Delta*. New York: Penguin, 1981, pp.25-43 (course reserves)
2. Maultsby, Portia. "Africanisms in African-American Music" [Excerpt]. In *Africanisms in American Culture*, edited by Joseph Holloway. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990, pp.185-195 (course reserves)

Listening

1. [Nalanke Pular, N'Dewe Dewe Yo \(Follow, follow! -- \(the griot\)\)](#)
2. [Nalanke Pular, Senegambie](#)
3. [Selections of Sansa and Chorus performances from Western Congo](#)
4. [Banjo maker Jim Hartel discusses the origins of the modern banjo](#)
5. [Lomax recording of African American fife music](#)
6. [Ali Farka Toure, The River \(first track only\)](#)
7. [Ali Farka Toure against John Lee Hooker video](#)

Week 2

2.1 -- Oct 10 -- Minstrelsy

Reading

1. Lott, "Blackface and Blackness," in *Inside the Minstrel Mask*
2. Lhamon, "Ebery Time I Wheel About I Jump Jim Crow: Cycles of Minstrel Transgression from Cool White to Vanilla Ice" in *Inside the Minstrel Mask*

3. Frederick Douglass, "The Hutchinson Family.—Hunkerism." in *The North Star*, Oct 1848

Listening

1. Bert Williams, Nobody (1905)
2. Bert Williams, Unlucky Blues
3. Emmet Miller, Lovesick Blues
4. Emmet Miller, Anytime
5. Merle Haggard on Emmet Miller
6. Hank Williams, Lovesick Blues
7. Jimmy Rodgers and Louis Armstrong, Blue Yodel No. 9
8. Jimmy Rodgers, TB Blues
9. Vanilla Ice, Ice Ice Baby

2.2 -- Oct 12 -- Blues Queens and Vaudeville

Reading

1. Harrison, Daphne Duvall. "Wild Women Don't Have the Blues': Blues from the Black Woman's Perspective." *Black Pearls: Blues Queens of the 1920s*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1993(1988).
2. Davis, Angela. "Blame it on the Blues: Bessie Smith, Gertrude 'Ma' Rainey, and the Politics of Blues Protest." *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*

Listening

1. Mamie Smith, Crazy Blues (1920)
2. Bessie Smith, Downhearted Blues (1923)
3. Ma Rainey, See See Rider Blues (1924)
4. Bessie Smith, Take me for a Buggy Ride
5. Ma Rainey, Blame it on the Blues
6. Ma Rainey, Sweet Rough Man

7. Ma Rainey, Shave 'em Dry
8. Ma Rainey, Misery Blues (1927)
9. Ma Rainey, Soon This Morning (1927)
10. Ma Rainey, Prove it on Me Blues
11. Bessie Smith, Young Woman's Blues
12. Bessie Smith, Hateful Blues (1924)
13. Bessie Smith, Yes Indeed he Do
14. Ida Cox, Wild Women Don't Have the Blues (1925)
15. Ida Goodson, Tell me Baby Blues
16. Ethel Waters, Lucille Hegamin, Alberta Hunter, Edith Wilson, Ida Cox, Sippie Wallace, Ma Rainey, Clara Smith
17. Charles Anderson

Week 3

3.1 -- Oct 17 -- Rural Blues and Recording I

Writing assignment #1 due at the beginning of lecture

Reading

1. Gioia, Ted. "Dockery's Plantation." *Delta Blues*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2008.

Listening

1. Charley Patton, Down the Dirt Road Blues (1929)
2. Willie Brown, Future Blues
3. Son House, Preachin' the Blues (1930)
4. Son House, Preachin the Blues (1965)
5. Son House, John the Revelator (1965)
6. Mississippi Sheiks (Lonnie and Bo Chatmon), I am the Devil
7. Bo Chatmon (Bo Carter), Banana in Your Fruit Basket

8. Bo Chatmon (Bo Carter), Please Warm my Weiner
9. Tommy Johnson, Big Road Blues
10. Tommy Johnson, Canned Heat Blues
11. Booker T. Washington White (Bukka White), Parchman Farm Blues
12. Blind Willie McTell, Statesboro Blues (1928)
13. Nehemiah Skip James, Little Cow and and Calf is Gonna Die Blues
14. Skip James, Devil Got My Woman

3.2 -- Oct 19 -- Rural Blues and Recording II

Reading

1. Wald, Elijah. "The Bluesman Who Behaved Too Well." *The New York Times* (July 18, 2004)
2. Govenar, Alan. "That Black Snake Moan: The Music and Mystery of Blind Lemon Jefferson." In *Bluesland: Portraits of Twelve Major American Blues Artists*, edited by Pete Welding and Toby Byron. New York: Dutton Books, 1991, pp.16-37.

Listening

1. Blind Lemon Jefferson, Matchbox Blues (1927)
2. Blind Lemon Jefferson, Black Snake Moan (1927)
3. Blind Lemon Jefferson, See that My Grave is Kept Clean
4. Ed Bell, Mean Conductor Blues
5. Sonny Scott, Red Cross Blues
6. Leroy Carr, How long, how long blues
7. Jaybird Coleman, No More Good Water (Cuz the Pond is Dry)
8. Alger 'Texas' Alexander, Justice Blues
9. Blind Willie Johnson, Dark was the Night, Cold was the Ground (1928?)
10. Blind Blake, Police Dog Blues
11. Beale Street Sheiks, Mr. Crump Don't Like It

12. Lizzie Douglas (Memphis Minnie), Bumble Bee
13. Memphis Jug Band, Cocaine Habit Blues
14. Gus Cannon Jug Stompers, Can You Blame the Colored Man

Week 4

4.1 -- Oct 24 -- Blues and Country Music

Reading

1. Wolfe, Charles. "A Lighter Shade of Blue: White Country Blues." *Nothing But the Blues*. New York: Abbeville Press, 1993.

Listening

4.2 -- Oct 26 -- Robert Johnson

Reading

1. Gioia, Ted. "Hellhound on My Trail." *Delta Blues*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2008.
2. Lipsitz, George. "White Desire: Remembering Robert Johnson." *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit From Identity Politics*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998. 118-138.

Listening

1. Influences:
 - Son House, Willie Brown, Skip James, Hambone Willie Newbern
2. Cross Road Blues
3. Preachin Blues
4. If I had Possession Over Judgment Day
5. Hellhound on my Trail
6. I believe I'll dust my broom
7. Drunken Hearted Man

8. [Come on in my kitchen](#)
9. [Love in Vain](#)

Week 5

5.1 -- Oct 31 -- Leadbelly and the Lomaxes

Reading

1. Davis, Francis. "Leadbelly." *The History of the Blues*. New York: Hyperion, 1995.
2. Filene, Benjamin. "'Our Singing Country': John and Alan Lomax, Leadbelly and the Construction of an American Past." *American Quarterly*. 43.4 (December 1991).

Listening

1. Black Girl (Leadbelly cf. Kobain version)

5.2 -- Nov 2 -- Blues and Jazz

Readings

1. Wald, Elijah. "Blues and Jazz." *Blues: A Very Short Introduction*

Listening

Week 6

6.1 -- Nov. 7 -- Midterm Exam

6.2 -- Nov. 9 -- Urban Blues

Reading

1. Wald, Elijah. "Modern Blues." *Blues: A Very Short Introduction*

Listening

Week 7

7.1 -- Nov. 14 -- Blues and Rock

Reading

1. Walker, Alice. "1955." *You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down*. New York: Harcourt Press, 1981.
2. George, Nelson. "The New Negro (1950-65)" [Excerpt]. *The Death of Rhythm & Blues*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1988, pp.59-70.

7.2 -- Nov. 16 -- Folk Blues Revival

Reading

1. Tilton, Jeff Todd. "Reconstructing the Blues: Reflections on the 1960s Blues Revival." *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined*. Ed. Neil V Rosenberg. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993
2. Narváez, Peter. "Living Blues Journal: The Paradoxical Aesthetics of the Blues Revival." *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined*. Ed. Neil V Rosenberg. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993.

Listening

1. Junior Kimbrough
2. RL Burnside

Week 8

8.1 -- Nov. 21 -- British Blues

Writing assignment #2 due at the beginning of lecture

Reading

1. Hellmann, John M. Jr. "‘I’m a Monkey’: The Influence of the Black American Blues Argot on the Rolling Stones." *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 86, No. 342 (Oct. - Dec., 1973), pp. 367-373

8.2 -- Nov. 23 is Thanksgiving -- no class

Week 9

9.1 -- Nov. 28 -- Bob Dylan, Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin

Reading

1. Albin, J. Zak. "Bob Dylan and Jimi Hendrix: Juxtaposition and Transformation "All along the Watchtower." *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, Vol. 57, No. 3 (Autumn, 2004), pp. 599- 644
2. Whiteley, Sheila. "Try, Just a Little Bit Harder: Janis Joplin and the Search for Personal Identity." *Women and Popular Music: Sexuality, Identity, and Subjectivity*. New York: Routledge, 2000.

9.2 -- Nov. 30 -- Blues and Rap

Reading

1. Rose, Tricia. "Soul Sonic Forces: Technology, Orality, and Black Cultural Practice in Rap Music." In *Sounding Off!: Music as Subversion/Resistance/Revolution*, ed. Ron Sakolsky and Fred Wei-Han Ho. New York: Autonomedia, 1995.

Week 10

10.1 -- Dec. 5 -- The Blues Today I

Readings

1. Arthur, L. Dyann. "Contemporary Women Musicians in the Delta." *Defining the Delta: Multidisciplinary Perspectives on the Lower Mississippi River Delta*, edited by Janelle Collins, University of Arkansas Press, Fayetteville, 2015, pp. 219–238.
2. Lieberfeld, Daniel. "Million-Dollar Juke-Joint: Commodifying Blues Culture." *African American Review*. 29.2 (Summer 1995).

10.2 -- Dec. 7 -- The Blues Today II / Exam Review

No preparation for today; final paper due at the beginning of lecture