

AMST 371.01
Songs of Protest, Songs of Praise
Roger Williams University
GHH 301, 9:00-9:50
Fall Semester, 2015

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Hours: M 2:00-3:20 Th - Th: 11:00-12:00
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Course Introduction

The Rationale for The Course.

I've wanted to teach a course like this for a number of years now. It is my belief that cultural history and political history need to talk to each other-or perhaps I should say "sing to each other." Song has played a major role in American Religious History and in American Political History, and frequently has connected the two with each other. What was the first "Song of Protest"? One might argue that Yankee Doodle fills that bill. How many know that it was originally anti-revolutionary"? We all know the first verse-feathers called macaroni and all that, but later verse show the satirical side-the Revolution looked at from the underside. For instance:

And there was captain Washington,
And gentle folks about him;
They say he's grown so tarnal proud,
He will not ride without 'em.
Yankee doodle, &c

We won't spend much time being colonial revolutionaries, however. We're going to be looking at subsequent "revolutions" abolitionism, contributions of the Black Church to the American political and religious traditions, the revolt of labor during the Populist and Progressive Eras, Songs of the Depression, and the revival of all these kinds of song during the turbulent 1960s and 1970s. We'll look at Urban versions of what was originally music of the country when we listen to Bruce Springsteen and the E-Street Band, among others.

While many of these songs are "anonymous," and others have an association with a particular singer/composer, they all have one thing in common. They were not only listened to by passive audiences; they were also sung-in marches, congregations, sit-ins, and concerts by audiences who really "got-into" the songs. They were motivators and morale builders, and this is the phenomena we'll investigate, among others.

Books For The Course

- Talking' 'Bout a Revolution (Weisman)
- Delta Blues (Goia)
- The Gospel Sound (Heilbut)
- Singing Out: An Oral History of America's Folk Music Revivals (Dunaway and Beer)
- Songs of Work and Protest (Fowke and Glazer)
- Bruce Springsteen Cultural Studies and the Runaway American Dream¹

¹Available as an e-book.

Why These Books?

- ***Talkin' 'Bout a Revolution*** is encyclopedic in its areas of discussion, which has its good points and its bad points. While nobody every called an encyclopedia the most interesting book he/she ever read, they point us in the directions of people we ought to know something about-so we can dig and delve elsewhere to find more about them. A quick look at the table of contents will demonstrate the breadth of the book. We will not use every section, however. The bibliography and discography at the end will help us find out more about a wide variety of social activists associated with music.
- ***Delta Blues*** will take us to the Mississippi Delta, where African-Americans, many of them slaves or direct descendants of slaves, created this unique musical form. Many of the blues artists were sharecroppers initially. Again, there is an important list of “essential” blues performances following the notes at the end of the book.
- The subtitle of ***The Gospel Sound*** is “Good News and Bad Times” Some of you may remember Mahalia Jackson or “Sweet Honey in the Rock”-and if you don’t you’ll remember (and I think fall in love with) their sound by the end of the course. African Americans moved into northern ghettos following the civil war, and the music in their churches reflected the hopes and disappointments these Americans suffered.
- ***Singing Out: An Oral History of America’s Folk Music Revivals*** will bring us closer to our day and ages. It also contains a discography. I hope to do as much listening as discussing in this class.
- ***Songs of Work and Protest*** is, guess what, a song book. If I can gently twist enough arms we’ll do a little warbling in class. If you don’t join in, you’ll have to listen to me warble by myself.
- ***Bruce Springsteen Cultural Studies and the Runaway American Dream***. This short e-book you’ll get through the RWU Library Helin system will introduce us to “The Boss”- the great urban folk music artist of our day.

Work for the Course.

I want to develop this in concordance with you. The skills we’ll use are analysis of events, texts, and tunes, with the objective of understanding how music has shaped social conscience and political and spiritual points of view in the United States. Precisely how to do this, or rather to demonstrate this, will probably take the form of writing and a possible project. I’m thinking of offering students the chance to create a website as a project. <http://sites.google.com> would be the likely place. It’s free and you can sign up using your RWU e-mail address. We’ll spend some time talking about this the first days of the class. Another possibility might be for you make your own videos-adding appropriate pictures to one of the soundtracks you discover. One tool is this: <http://www.wondershare.net/video-editor/>

Attendance Policy

Show UP!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Much of the work for this class will be interactive. People cannot interact with you if you’re not here. I do take attendance, and a poor record of attendance will have an impact on your grade.

Life Happens. If you need to be absent for illness, family reasons, some university associated event, or the like, notify me. I will excuse absences based on any reasonable explanation.

Help Available

1. [Tutorial Support Services](#): Second Floor of the Library, hours available by clicking on the link.
2. [Student Advocacy](#) “New and returning students making the often difficult and challenging transition from high school to college, from home to residence hall or from another college to RWU, can rely on accurate answers to questions, sensitive and appropriate referrals to other campus agencies as well as support and guidance throughout the school year. The professional staff work directly with students and also guide our trained corps of student advocates, who make it their mission to help their peers succeed.” Drop in over on the ground floor of the Administration building.
3. ME. Contrary to popular rumor I almost never bite, and I’m almost always here. So if you’ve a question about something or need some suggestions, I’d be delighted in showing you my quaintly messy office.

[ACADEMIC INTEGRITY.](#)

If you were part of the Fall Convocation when you joined the Roger Williams University student body, you swore an oath to support this pledge:

We, the students of Roger Williams University, commit ourselves to academic integrity. We promise to pursue the highest ideals of academic life, to challenge ourselves with the most rigorous standards, to be honest in any academic endeavor, to conduct ourselves responsibly and honorably, and to assist one another as we live and work together in mutual support.

I’m writing this a few days before the beginning of the semester. I’m looking forward meeting you and to teaching this course, and I hope you’re looking forward to participating in it as well.