

AMST 430
SONGS OF PROTEST SONGS OF PRAISE
ROGER WILLIAMS UNIVERSITY
GHH 208
M, TH 2:00 -3: 20
Spring, 2013

MICHAEL R. H. SWANSON Ph. D.
OFFICE: GHH 215
Hours: T, TH 9:00 - 11:00
M, W, 1:00-2:00
PHONE: (254)-3230
E-mail: mswanson@rwu.edu

Course Introduction

Required Books (In order of use)

Randall, Linda K.

Finding Grace in the Concert Hall: Community and Meaning among Springsteen Fans.

Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc. 2011

Heilbut, Tony

The Gospel Sound: Good News and Bad Times

New York: Proscenium Publishers, Inc. 2002

Weissman, Dick

Talkin' 'Bout a Revolution: Music and Social Change in America

Milwaukee, WI: Backbeat books, 2010

Dunaway, David, King, and Beer, Molly

Singing Out: An Oral History of Folk Music Revivals

New York: Oxford University Press, 2011

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”

And there was captain Washington,
And gentle folks about him;
They say he's grown so ternal 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.

WHY THESE BOOKS?

- I've decided to begin with *Finding Grade in the Concert Hall*, by Linda K. Randall. On our first day together I'll ask everyone if they've ever attended a large concert (I'm thinking in the thousands here—preferably outdoors). I'll ask those who have had to at experience to reflect on it for a few moments and then share what the experience "felt" like. This will lead us into Randall's book, and an analysis of the almost religious fervor of the true fan.
- From there, we'll transition to Tony Heilbut's book *The Gospel Sound: Good News and Bad Times*. As Heilbut writes in the introduction, "The very existence of hymns like "Amazing Grace" and "The Day Is Past and Gone" symbolizes the awful consciousness black Americans have always lived with. It also should forever banish the notion of the "contented darkie" still propagated by some historians. People who moan about dangers, toils and snares, and death disrobing us all, are scarcely unaware of the lives they lead. The Dr. Watts hymns seldom contain the

lavish imagery of the spirituals, but the stark language speaks to the most desperate side of black life. In bad times, gospel lovers always go back to "Amazing Grace" or "Must Jesus Bear the Cross Alone." *The public keeps hearing about new civil-rights laws. But the fact that Dr. Watts hymns continue to matter tells something about the political and social conditions in this country. For the gospel poor, things have scarcely changed.*"

Anthony Heilbut. *The Gospel Sound: Good News and Bad Times - 25th Anniversary Edition* (Hal Leonard Reference Books) (p. xxiii). Kindle Edition.

- *Talkin' 'Bout a Revolution* will not be the most interesting book you'll ever have read. It is encyclopedic in its areas of discussion, but then nobody every called an encyclopedia the most interesting book he/she ever read. But it will 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.
- *Sing out: An Oral History of America's Folk Music Revivals* From the Introduction: "In sound recordings, the revivals' origins might date from the 1890s, with the first ethnographic recordings of the people of North America's first nations. Preservationists of stories, jokes, or tunes visited libraries; they drove or hiked across damp and dusty byways to find a local storyteller, or that "fiddler in the woods," only to be told: "But you should have seen his uncle—he was really good." Out of these collectors' efforts, a folk music revival movement was born. In the winter of 1940 in Arlington, Virginia, John Lomax's son, Alan, was briefly the roommate of Charles Seeger's son, Peter. Together they would help make folk music respectable and fun, bringing it to millions of folks aching for the sounds of home. But the Lomax-Seeger cultural axis sought something different from what the earlier folk music antiquarians had sought: they wanted to sing their way to action, to build labor unions, to remind people the world over that they were brothers and sisters. With coast-to-coast radio available for the tuning in, a new audience was born. Out of this collector-based revival, beginning with the publication of *Cowboy Songs* and ending with the disbanding of the *Weavers* (1910–53), would eventually come a nation of singers and pickers." Dunaway, David King; Beer, Molly (2010-03-17). *Singing Out: An Oral History of America's Folk Music*

Revivals (Oxford Oral History) (p. 2). Oxford University Press. Kindle Edition.

These four, plus sources on the “Webliography” should give us plenty to work with over the next several months. Of course a good portion of our work shall be listening and watching as well. I haven’t quite decided whether to show off the collection I’ve been assembling over the past year during our first class. Maybe I will, Maybe I wont.

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 a key to 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](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.

WRITTEN WORK FOR THE CLASS MUST BE TURNED IN VIA [BRIDGES](#) UNLESS OTHER INSTRUCTION ARE GIVEN.

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 above.
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, 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.

Read more about the pledge in the current issue of the University Catalogue. If you have a question, ask me.