

# Politics of Pop

(English 2173)  
Lorton Hall, Room 314



Prof. Sean Latham

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### Contact Me!

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### Description

In 2016, Beyoncé invoked Black Power movements to shock a Super Bowl audience, just as Jennifer Lopez and Shakira did again this year when Latin sounds sparked furious debates about race, sexuality, and immigration. Kanye West declared on live TV that “George Bush hates black people,” later visited President Trump in the Whitehouse, and is now a candidate for office. Lil Nas X created a global hit about a cowboy and his horse that *Billboard* refused to list on the country charts, even after Billy Ray Cyrus added a chorus. Toby’s Keith’s lyrics pronounce an ardent nationalism every July 4<sup>th</sup>, while rappers mix beats with police sirens to protest racist violence in their communities. Pop music has been always political and this course will explore this connection by surveying folk songs, electric blues, punk rock, Riot Grrrl feminism, gangsta rap, down-home country, and more. We will listen carefully to hit songs while also exploring

spectacles like the Grammy Awards, sporting events, political campaigns, and Coachella. Our work in class will be supplemented by visits from songwriters, concerts, and a visit to the Woody Guthrie Center. No previous musical knowledge is required.

## **Learning Objectives**

### Institutional Learning Objectives for Block One:

Students will:

1. Apply knowledge of texts, media, forms, practices, and/or systems of knowledge in the arts and humanities through reading, viewing, analysis, and writing or creative production.
2. Analyze, synthesize, and evaluate texts, media, forms, practices, and/or systems of knowledge relevant to the arts and humanities through writing, creative production, and/or the application of theories and approaches addressing fields such as textual studies, literary studies, philosophy, and the arts.
3. Write and communicate clearly and effectively about the arts and/or humanities through genres common to their field of study such as essays, response pieces, presentations, and creative works.
4. Recognize and analyze ethical issues from a range of perspectives raised by the arts and humanities.
5. Use the arts and humanities to identify and address problems in local and global communities.

### Student Learning Objectives for this Course:

By successfully completing this course, students will:

1. Demonstrate knowledge of the recent history of popular American music as well as key theories about its development, structure, and cultural impact. (PLO 1 and 2, tested by final exam)
2. Practice locating works of popular culture within social, political, and global contexts through analysis, discussion, and group projects (PLO 4 and 5, tested by short assignments in Harvey)
3. Write effective critical essays on creative, multi-media work that engage their historical, formal, ethical, and creative import and structure. (PLO 2 and 3, tested by short papers and final essay)
4. Write clear, concise critical arguments about works of literature, music, and film in which a clear thesis is supported by internal and external evidence. (PLO 3, tested by short papers)

## **Graded Assignments**

### One-Page Essays (20%)

You will write two one-page essays over the course of the semester. These papers must be between 450 and 500 words (exactly!). They should begin with a clear, concise thesis that responds to the prompt and each paragraph should

advance that argument by providing clear evidence, analysis, and/or critical context.

#### Harvey Assignments (20%)

Each week, you will be asked to complete an assignment in Harvey. These are listed on the syllabus (as POST) and must be completed no later than 9:30am on the due date. The assignments will vary in form and range from collaborative documents, to shared playlists, to short responses and live-blog conversations. These will be assessed as portfolio at the midterm and at the end of the semester.

#### Research Essay (20%)

You will write a 10-page essay on a topic that you devise in consultation with me. The papers will be submitted in three stages: as an initial outline, a rough draft, and a final version.

#### Creative Assignments (10%)

Understanding how pop music works means that you need to understand something about how it is made. Over the course of the semester, you will complete two creative assignments: a listening auto-ethnography and a protest song. Neither exercise requires any musical knowledge.

#### Final Exam (20%)

You will complete the semester with a take-home final exam that will cover all of the material on the syllabus and will include short answer as well as essay questions.

#### Active Engagement (10%)

Although this is a hy-flex course, it is nevertheless a seminar in which you are expected to participate actively both in our synchronous sessions and in our shared digital projects. This means listening actively to me and to your colleagues, posing questions, and communicating your own ideas clearly and concisely. Synchronous attendance (whether in class or online) is mandatory. Three missed classes will lower your grade and five missed sessions will be treated as a drop.

### **Submitting Papers**

All papers are due by 5:00pm on the date indicated. You should submit them both through Harvey and as an email attachment to me. All papers will be run through Safe Assign, which tests your papers for plagiarism and helps assure that your work will not

be plagiarized in the future. You will be able to see your own Safe Assign score before the final submission.

### **Late Papers and Revisions**

Late papers will be penalized 5% per day for the first two days and 10% per day thereafter with a maximum deduction of 50% (with weekends counting as one day). If submitted on time, assignments can be revised and the final grade will be an average of the two marks weighted toward the revision. Late papers cannot be revised.

### **Required Technology**

This is a hy-flex course, which means that you will access part of our live sessions remotely. To be successful, you therefore need:

- A computer with working speakers, a microphone, and the Chrome browser;
- A webcam;
- A stable, highspeed internet connection;
- Access to all TU web services, especially Harvey and Office 365;
- Access to the Zoom client (either via the web or a downloaded client).

### **Plans for Remote Learning**

Given the current global pandemic, it is possible that TU may quickly pivot to remote learning for most coursework. In the event that this occurs, you will be notified via e-mail through your TU e-mail address. For this class, we will use Harvey to conduct our regular class meetings at the scheduled time. We will also extend our use of Harvey for asynchronous assignments and pre-recorded lectures.

### **Online Access Request**

Many in-person courses are designated as such because they require in-person elements that cannot be substituted. If you get ill and are attending in-person classes, please fill out the [Online Access Request](#) form and Student Success will work with you and your instructors to determine if there is a way to meet course expectations online. Please note that this course can be completed remotely and I will make every effort to accommodate your circumstances.

### **Writing Center**

I urge you to take early drafts of all your critical papers (and especially your research paper) to the Wallace Writing Center, located in McFarlin Library. The tutors in the center can help you refine your ideas, sharpen your arguments, and improve the clarity of your prose. They are not proofreaders, but they will help you strengthen your writing. To make an appointment, book online at <https://utulsa.mywconline.com/>.

## **Academic Honesty**

In keeping with the intellectual ideals, standards for community, and educational mission of the University, students are expected to adhere to all academic policies. Cheating on examinations, plagiarism, and other forms of academic dishonesty violate both individual honor and the life of the community, and may subject students to penalties including failing grades, dismissal, and other disciplinary actions. Plagiarism consists of the unacknowledged use of the work of another and will cause you to fail the course and be reported to the Dean for further review and possible sanctions.

## **Academic Misconduct**

The Academic Misconduct Policy of the College of Arts and Sciences is linked here:

<https://artsandsciences.utulsa.edu/advising/academic-misconduct-policy/>

All students should become familiar with this policy and note that cheating, plagiarism, and all other forms of academic misconduct come with serious consequences.

## **Electronic Device Policy**

Electronic devices (phones, tablets, laptops) are obviously essential for this course and I will often require you to use them in our sessions. They should not, however, be used for non-class related activities.

## **Student Success Team**

All students are encouraged to familiarize themselves with and take advantage of services provided by The Student Success Team, including Student Access, Student Success Coaching, and tutoring. To request a student success coach to improve study skills, email [successcoaches@utulsa.edu](mailto:successcoaches@utulsa.edu). To request a tutor, email [tutoring@utulsa.edu](mailto:tutoring@utulsa.edu).

## **Student Access**

Students who have or believe they may have a disability and would like to set up accommodations should contact Student Access within the Student Success Team to discuss their needs and facilitate their rights under the Americans with Disabilities Act and related laws. Student Access provides private consultations to any student. Contact Student Access staff by email at [studentaccess@utulsa.edu](mailto:studentaccess@utulsa.edu) or by phone at 918-631-2315. The online application for accommodations may be obtained [here](#). Student Access staff will assist students in the implementation of approved accommodations. Students who qualify for accommodations should meet with the instructor privately (during office hours or by appointment) as soon as possible to arrange for their needs and obtain support for the class.

### **Classroom Standards (In-Person, Virtual, and Asynchronous)**

Collaboration, interaction, debate, and respectful disagreement are fundamental to this course. This means you need to come prepared to each session by having read or viewed the material on the syllabus and thought about issues it raises. I expect you to venture tentative ideas, see if they work, learn about their limits, and negotiate their various strengths and weaknesses. In such an environment, it is essential that you listen respectfully, focus on ideas (never on individuals), and make space for everyone to participate in our conversations.

### **Mature Content**

In this course we will read, hear, and view materials that contain frank representations of sex and violence as well as words that are contextually racist and offensive. Our discussions will be scholarly and critical in nature, but some students may find the topics offensive, upsetting, or distasteful. If you object to such materials, then please speak with me so I can help you find another course. In our oral and digital discussions, please refrain from using offensive terms directly and always be aware that their meanings are contextual and change depending on how and when they are used.

### **Required Books and Services**

- Subscription to a robust musical streaming service, preferably Apple Music or Spotify.
- Jennifer Egan, *A Visit from the Goon Squad*
- Dorian Lynskey, *33 Revolutions per Minute* (optional)

### **Office Hours and Meetings**

Throughout the semester, I will hold both in-person and virtual office hours. Social distancing protocols require that in-person sessions be scheduled in advance by email. Virtual office hours will be held in Harvey. In addition, one-on-one virtual sessions will be conducted by Zoom. Again, just email or message me to set up a time. Finally, I'm happy to consult with you by email and I respond to all messages with 24 hours (excluding the weekends). You will be required to meet with me at least twice during the semester: once to set some goals for the course and then again to plan your final project.

### **Know Your Title IX**

Sexual misconduct is prohibited by Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 ("Title IX") and will not be tolerated within the TU community. Sexual misconduct encompasses all forms of sex and gender-based discrimination, harassment, violence, and assault, as well as dating violence, domestic violence, interpersonal violence, stalking and sexual exploitation. If you or someone you know has been harassed,

assaulted, or stalked, or if you have questions about violence prevention resources available to you, please contact any of the following campus and community resources:

- Title IX Coordinator 918-631-4602
- Office of Violence Prevention 918-631-2324
- TU Counseling and Psychological Services 918- 631-2241
- Campus Security 918-631-5555
- Domestic Violence Intervention Services 918-585-3163 or 918-743-5763
- Tulsa Police Department 918-596-9222 or 911 (emergency situations)

For more information about your rights under Title IX, please visit our *Policies and Laws* page on the TU website or contact the Title IX Coordinator. ***Every student on our campus has the right to resources.*** Please come forward and ask questions, report, and help us eradicate sexual misconduct and interpersonal violence by stopping the silence surrounding it.

## Course Schedule

All readings and films are available in Harvey and organized according to the major units designated on the syllabus. You should complete all assignments for scheduled class before we convene since they will form the basis of our conversation.

### **The Hook**

**8/25**

Watch: Welcome to Politics of Pop  
Do: Pre-Class Survey  
Listen: Lil Naz X, "Old Town Road" (original)  
Watch: Lil Naz X and Billy Ray Cyrus, "Old Town Road" at 2019 BET Awards  
Read: Mark Laver, "Lil Nas X and the Continued Segregation of Country Music"

**8/27**

Read: Frith, from *Performance Rites*  
Listen: "Money, That's What I Want" (versions by Barrett Strong, the Beatles, The Plastic Ono Band, The Stooges, Hansen)  
Watch: The Flying Lizards, "Money, That's What I Want"  
Post: Ask Me Anything Q&A

**9/1**

Read: Stoeber, from *The Sonic Color Line*  
Ted Gioia, from *A Subversive History of Music*  
Listen: Stevie Wonder, "Living for the City"  
Listen: KRS-One, "Sound of Da Police"  
Post: Found Sound

### **Keeping It Real?**

**9/3**

Read: Hugh Barker and Yuval Taylor, from *Faking It*  
Listen: Nirvana, "Smells Like Teen Spirit" and "Come As You Are"  
Watch: Nirvana, "Where Did You Sleep Last Night"  
Listen: Leadbelly, "Where Did You Sleep Last Night"  
Read: Kurt Cobain from *Journals*  
Post: The Sound of Authenticity

**9/8**

Read: Grace Elizabeth Hale, from *A Nation of Outsiders*  
Listen: Johnny Cash, "Folsom Prison"  
Listen: Jimi Hendrix, "Hey Joe"  
Listen: Bruce Springsteen, "Nebraska"  
Listen: Rihanna, "Man Down"

### **The Politics of Taste**

**9/10**

Read: Carl Wilson, from *Let's Talk about Love*  
Listen: Bad Music  
Post: This Song Sucks!

**9/11**

### **Auto-Ethnography Due 5:00pm**

**9/15**

Read: Holt, from *Genre in Popular Music*  
Explore: Musicmap  
Listen: One song from each of the following genres: rock, country, blues, R&B, pop  
Watch: "Smells Like Bootylicious" remix  
Post: Our Genre Map

**9/17**

Read: Ann Powers, from *Good Booty*  
Read: Dorian Lynskey, from *33 Revolutions*  
Listen: Carl Bean, "I Was Born This Way"  
Listen: Prince, "Controversy"  
Listen: Lady Gaga, "Born This Way"  
Watch: Panic at the Disco, "Girls/Girls/Boys"

**9/18**

### **Short Paper 1 Due by 5:00pm**

**9/22**

Read: *No Country for Female Artists* (Annenberg Inclusion Initiative)  
Listen: Carolina Chocolate Drops, "Country Girl"  
Listen: Merle Haggard, "Okie from Muskogee"  
Listen: Toby Keith, "Made in America"

Listen: Martina McBride, "Independence Day"  
Listen: The Chicks, "Not Ready to Make Nice"

**9/24**

Read: Saul Austerlitz, "The Pernicious Rise of Poptimism"  
Read: Maura Johnston, "The New York Times Doesn't Know Shit about Poptimism"  
Watch: Taylor Swift, "You Need to Calm Down"  
Post: or creative assignment

**Writing about Pop**

**9/29**

Read: Egan, *A Visit from the Goon Squad*  
Post: TBD (or paper due)

**10/1**

**ALL REMOTE (ZOOM)**

Read: Egan, *A Visit from the Goon Squad*  
Read: Moulton Article TBA  
Listen: TBA  
Visit: Katie Moulton Q&A

**10/6**

Read: Egan, *A Visit from the Goon Squad*  
Post: Playlist

**10/8**

Read: Egan, *A Visit from the Good Squad*

**10/9**

**Mid-term Evaluation**

**Protest!**

**10/13**

Read: *Broadside Magazine 20*  
Listen: Woody Guthrie  
Listen: Bob Dylan, "Blowin in the Wind"  
Listen: Lil Baby, "The Bigger Picture"  
Listen: Gil Scott Heron, "No Knock"  
Watch: Regina Spector, "Blowin in the Wind"

**10/15**

Write: Topical Song  
Optional : Visit Woody Guthrie Center

**10/16** **Topical Song Due 5:00pm**

### **Spectacles**

**10/20**

Read: lawsuit  
Watch: Bruce Springsteen and Pete Seeger, "This Land is Your Land"  
Listen: Neil Young  
Listen: Dolly Parton, "9 to 5"  
Post: Music in Political Campaigns

**10/22**

Read: Kembrew McLeod, "Authenticity within Hip Hop"  
Listen: Public Enemy, *Fear of a Black Planet*

**10/27**

Watch: *Straight Outa Compton* (dir. Gary Gray, 2015)  
Post: The Sound of Authenticity II

**10/29**

Listen: Janelle Monae, *Dirty Computer*  
Watch: *Dirty Computer*

**10/30** **Short Paper 2 Due**

**11/3**

Listen: Janelle Monae, *Dirty Computer*  
Watch: *Dirty Computer*  
Post: Transmedia Pop

**11/5**

TBD: American Idol OR Awards Show  
Post: Live Blogging

**11/6** **Final Paper Outline Due 5:00pm**

**11/10**

Read: Debord, from *The Society of the Spectacle*  
Watch: Beyoncé, Superbowl Halftime Show (2016)  
Watch: Beyoncé, "Formation"  
Watch: Jennifer Lopez and Shakira, Superbowl Halftime Show (2020)

### **Anarchy and Rebellion**

**11/12**

Read: Ted Gioia, from *A Subversive History of Music*  
Listen: The Who, "My Generation" and "Behind Blue Eyes"  
Watch: The Who at Woodstock  
Listen: The Rolling Stones, *Get Yer Ya Yas Out*  
Watch: The Rolling Stones at Altamont  
Post: Pop Anarchy

**11/17**

Read: Dorian Lynskey, from *33 Revolutions*  
Listen: Sex Pistols, *Never Mind the Bollocks*  
Listen: Green Day, "American Idiot"

**11/19**

Read: Riot Grrrl Manifesto  
Explore: Riot Grrrl Zines  
Listen: Patti Smith, "Gloria"  
Listen: 7 Year Bitch, "Dead Men Don't Rape"  
Watch: Bikini Kill, "Sugar" at Hong Kong Café  
Post: Zine Page

**11/20**

**Final Paper Draft Due**

**11/23**

**Thanksgiving Break**

### **Global Grooves**

**12/1**

**ALL REMOTE**

Read: Weheliye, from *Phonographies*  
Listen: Fugees, *The Score*  
Listen: Wyclef Jean, "Wish You Were Here"

**12/3**

Listen:

Read:

Explore:

**ALL REMOTE**

Closing Thoughts

Kathleen Hou, "The K-Pop Stans Are Radicalizing"

K-Pop Social Media

**12/7**

**Final Paper Due**

**Harvey Discussion Boards Close**

**Take Home Exam Posted**

**12/11**

**Take Home Exam Due 5:00pm**