

# POSC 239: Power and Politics through Music

Spring 2014  
MWF 1:00 PM-1:55 PM  
Cooke 202

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## 1) Course Description:

Are certain forms of political expression, communicated through music, more successful than others in creating awareness and/or ending an injustice? What matters more: the ability of the music to transcend society and ultimately affect change (the musical message)? Or is it the significance of the political message nestled within the song that triggers interest and action? Is it possible to even separate the musical message from the political message? This course examines the above inquiries through the systematic, in-depth study of how political ideas have traditionally been expressed, and its effectiveness, through music.

## 2) Course Objectives:

The union between music and politics is now a well-known relationship, so much so that asking purely about whether they speak to one another is yesterday's news and, quite frankly, uninteresting. Instead of pursuing that route, we will focus on political messages and discourse related to 3 main global issues. We will study how political ideas of *war and peace*, *patriotism* and *protest* have been expressed through multiple genres of music including folk, popular, hip-hop, classical, rock, among others. Through these domains of music, we consider meaning, impact, significance, and effectiveness of political messages. This class is concerned with **politics**; we will illuminate past and present political events (mainly within American politics) and evaluate music's crucial participation in the political debates surrounding them.

Specifically, the course is divided into three main sections themed around the political debates we will consider in this class. In **Section I** we concentrate on *patriotic* forms of music including, but not limited to national anthems, pursuit of liberty, independence etc. **Section II** pits attention on music aimed at addressing issues of *war and peace*, reflecting stances on the Civil War, the World Wars and the Iraqi War, while in **Section III** we explore music which explicitly takes on matters of *protest* in matters such as the Civil Rights Movement, Women's liberations, LGBTQ acknowledgment, police brutality, among others.

By the end of this course, my expectations are that you become fully aware of the underlying ideological implications of all the music we encounter. Through the study of American historical events, its sonic

landscapes, and implications on political expression, my hope is we forge a productive and effective way to combat political complacency and historical ignorance.

### 3) Course Requirements

- **Class Preparation & Attendance:** Your success in this class depends heavily upon your attendance and participation. You are expected to come to class having read and listened to the material assigned for the day.
- **Quizzes:** There will be six (5 short answer) quizzes given through the semester. There are no make-up quizzes. Missed quizzes will be given a zero. Your lowest quiz score will be dropped.
- **Short Papers:** After each section we complete, you will provide me with a three page, double-spaced paper using a song or songs of your choice to **explain how the theme studied is portrayed through your song(s)**. You will hand in a total of 3 short papers. In particular, I am looking for **how what you've learned in class has helped you better understand the song and the issue it pertains to. I expect you to fully engage in the larger political debate that the song finds itself within.** You must print out a copy of the article and staple it to your paper. Papers are due in class at the next meeting following the conclusion of our section. No late papers will be accepted.
- **Exams:** For the midterm exam, you will be asked to examine, between the choices of 3 songs, **one** song according to its political significance. I will provide the lyrics to the songs and it will be your responsibility to explain the larger political debate it engages as well as its stance. The midterm will closely resemble the format of your short paper assignments; however, the choice of the song will be at the discretion of the professor.

For your final exam, you will have a choice of 2 options. Option A will resemble the midterm examination where you will be charged with explaining the larger political debate a particular song engages as well as its stance. Option B will be to compose a song/spoken word about a particular political issue and present it to the class.

➤ **Grading:**

Attendance	10%
Quizzes	20% (5% each)
Short Papers	30% (10% each)
Midterm	20%
Final	20%
Total	100%

### 4) Course Policies

- **Absences:** Success in this course is contingent on attendance and participation; therefore, multiple absences will result in a reduction of your overall letter grade, while excess absences may result in failure of the course. Students are expected to stay current on the readings and lectures, which is possible only by attending class. The university policy is for 2 unexcused

absences to be allowed during the semester with no penalties incurred. Any additional absences will result in a significant penalty attached to final grades. For **every** additional class missed without a valid excuse, students' final grade will be lowered 1 numerical point. For example, if a student's final numerical grade is 93 (A), then one additional unexcused absence (after the first one has been used) will result in the student's grade being lowered to 92 (A-).

Excused absences are not penalized, but students must provide documentation for an absence to be considered excused. An example of an excused absence is a university sanctioned field trip. An example of an **un**excused absence is leaving a message on my voice mail indicating a student isn't feeling very well. If you are ill, you will need to see the university nurse for documentation. I also reserve the right to administratively drop without prior notification students who develop a pattern of absences.

**Please be aware that being dropped from the course may result in certain financial aid, and/or athletic competition eligibility repercussions, and thus students are strongly advised to keep track of their attendance and progress. If a student wishes to drop this class during the semester, it is the responsibility of the student to make sure that this class is dropped from his or her schedule.**

- **Missed Assignments:** Late assignments will not be accepted. Papers are due, typed, at the beginning of the class period. Missed assignments will be counted as a 0 which will inevitably reduce your overall grade for the course.
- **Cheating & Academic Dishonesty:** Any student found to be in violation of the University's policy on plagiarism and academic dishonesty will receive an F in this course and be reported to the appropriate authorities. If in doubt, please consult the university handbook.

## 5) General Etiquette.

- **Cell phone use:** Students are expected to turn off their cell phones in class. Students receiving calls in class will be asked to leave the room, and will be counted as absent (unexcused) for that day. Students asked to leave the room a second time during the semester will be considered a discipline problem and will be administratively dropped from the course with a "WF" and referred to the Dean of Students as a disciplinary problem (code violation 102) for appropriate punishment.
- **Computer use in the classroom:** Students are expected to use computers in the classroom appropriately. Surfing the net randomly, checking e-mail, playing games, etc, are considered a violation of appropriate tablet use and will be treated seriously. Students violating appropriate computer use or caught using other electronic devices for purposes unrelated to the course will be asked to leave the room, and will be counted as absent (unexcused) for that day. This stipulation includes Facebook, MySpace, blogging, etc.... Students asked to leave the room a second time during the semester will be considered a discipline problem and will be administratively dropped from the course with a "WF" and referred to the Dean of Students as a disciplinary problem (code violations 102 and 117) for appropriate punishment.
- **Food and other items:** Students may bring food and/or sodas or coffee into the classroom, as long as the food or beverage is consumed quietly. Tobacco, however, will not be tolerated. Any

student caught with tobacco products will be asked to leave the room, and will be counted as absent (unexcused) for that day. Students asked to leave the room a second time during the semester will be considered a discipline problem and will be administratively dropped from the course with a “WF” and referred to the Dean of Students as a disciplinary problem (code violation 102) for appropriate punishment.

- **Addressing fellow classmates:** In this course, students will be asked to debate ideas and opinions. At times, I will play devil’s advocate on a broad range of controversial topics. However, the tone of discussion must always remain appropriate. Any name-calling or derogatory comments made concerning an individual’s opinion will not be tolerated. Any student engaging in inappropriate speech will be asked to leave the room, and will be counted as absent (unexcused) for that day. Students asked to leave the room a second time during the semester will be considered a discipline problem and will be administratively dropped from the course with a “WF” and referred to the Dean of Students as a disciplinary problem (code violation 102) for appropriate punishment.

## 6) Textbooks & Class Materials

- There are no required textbooks for this course.
- I will provide all other relevant course material.

## 7) Course Schedule and Reading Assignments

### INTRODUCTION

**Week 1: Why Study Music and Politics?**

Monday, January 13: What is Politics?

Wednesday, January 15: Musical Genre & Meaning

Friday, January 17: Political Expression through Music

### PART I: MUSIC AND PATRIOTISM

**Week 2: What exactly is Patriotic Music?**

Monday, January 20: **MLK Day—No class**

Wednesday, January 22: Theoretical/Background Discussion

Friday, January 24: Debate

**Week 3: National Songs**

Monday, January 27: National Anthem: Listen-Discuss

Wednesday, January 29: Star Spangled Banner: Listen-Discuss

Friday January 31: Still effective with no words?

**Week 4: American Independence**

Monday, February 3: Theoretical/Background Discussion

Wednesday February 5: Johnny Cash- “Ragged Old Flag”

Friday, February 7: Waylon Jennings- “America”

**Week 5: Religious Patriotism**

Monday, February 10: Theoretical/Background Discussion

Wednesday, February 12: Diamond Rio- “In God We Trust”

Friday February 14: Twila Paris- “What Did He Die For”

**PART II: MUSIC AND WAR & PEACE**

**Week 6: Popular American Wars**

Monday, February 17: Theoretical/Background Discussion

Wednesday, February 19: John Lennon – “Imagine”

Friday, February 21: Louis Armstrong – “What a Wonderful World”

**Week 7: The Civil War**

Monday, February 24: Theoretical/Background Discussion

Wednesday, February 26: Mitch Miller Chorus- “When Johnny Comes Marching Home”

Friday, February 28: Jay Ungar and Molly Mason- “Ashokan Farewell”

**Week 8: The World Wars**

Monday, March 3: Theoretical/Background Discussion

Wednesday, March 5: Eric Bogle- “No Man’s Land”

Friday, March 7: **Midterm**

**Week 9: Spring Break—No class**

**Week 10: The Iraqi War**

Monday, March 17: Theoretical/Background Discussion

Wednesday, March 19: System of a Down- “Bring Your Own Bombs”

Friday, March 21: Black Eyed Peas- “Where Is the Love”

## PART III: MUSIC AND PROTEST

### **Week 11: Protest in American Politics**

Monday, March 24: Theoretical/Background Discussion

Wednesday, March 26: Grandmaster Flash- “The Message”

Friday, March 28: Public Enemy- “Fight the Power”

### **Week 12: The Civil Rights Movement**

Monday, March 31: Theoretical/Background Discussion

Wednesday, April 2: Common- “I have a Dream”

Friday, April 4: Lupe Fiasco- “Building Minds Faster”

### **Week 13: Feminist Movement**

Monday, April 7: Theoretical/Background Discussion

Wednesday, April 9: Diana Ross- “It’s Raining Men”

Friday, April 11: Gloria Gaynor- “I Will Survive”

### **Week 14: Resistance to Law, Authority, and “The Man”**

Monday, April 14: Theoretical/Background Discussion

Wednesday, April 16: NWA “Fuck the Police”

Friday, April 18: **Easter Holiday—No Class**

### **Week 15: The LGBTQ Voice**

Monday, April 21: **Easter Holiday—No Class**

Wednesday, April 23: Theoretical/Background Discussion

Friday, April 25: Macklemore- “Same Love”

## FINAL REVIEW PERIOD

### **Week 16: Discussion of Final Exams**

Monday, April 28:

Wednesday, April 30:

Friday, May 2:

### **Week 17: Finals**

Monday, May 5- Friday, May 9.