

# NEW JERSEY INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

## *DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES*

### **COURSE INFORMATION**

#### **STS 325 - ST: Music & The American Experience - Fall 2025**

- Professor: Dr. Laura Montanari
- Class Days/Time TR 4 - 5.20
- Location: CULM 311
- Credits: 3 credits
- Email Address: [laura.montanari@njit.edu](mailto:laura.montanari@njit.edu)
- Office Hours: after class or by appointment on Zoom

### **COMMUNICATION**

Typically I respond within 24 hours, excluding weekends and holidays. If you do not hear back within 24 hours, resend your email. Your wellbeing and success in the course are central. If you are experiencing any challenges completing course requirements, please reach out early and often—I am here to help!

### **COURSE DELIVERY**

This course is a participatory class with collaborations and hands-on activities. **NO LAPTOPS, iPADS, OR CELL PHONES** during class times unless needed for the activities or exercises assigned. If you need to take a call or text you can step outside of the classroom. Stepping outside more than 10/15 minutes will count as an absence.

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course aims to analyze how songs and musical artists have impacted social justice movements and cultural changes in the US with a specific focus on the XX century. Students will explore different music genres, time periods, and social justice movements utilizing song lyrics as a prism to observe cultural and social changes and to access non-dominant historical discourses. Students will also join small group book clubs where they will read (auto)biographies on a famous artist of their choice.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will

- Select songs that epitomize a music genre and/or historical time
- Analyze lyrics to highlight cultural and historical nuances of a specific subculture or historical period
- Summarize and reflect on the impact of the life of a chosen musical artist
- Research the impact of a song for a specific culture, genre, and/or historical period
- Compose a song that reflects current historical times
- Research the impact of an album/genre/music artist for a specific culture, genre, and/or historical period

## COURSE POLICIES

- **Participation:** This is a discussion-based course and your participation is very important. Time will be devoted in class to listening to songs, reading, and working on personal research. When the class is in session you are expected to remove cell phones and any technology that can interfere with your focus.
- **Attendance:** You have **4 unexcused absences** allowed. Please let me know if your absence is of a serious nature, such as an illness, death in family, or other similar circumstances. More than 8 absences will result in failure for the entire course. If you are going to be out of class for more than 10/15 minutes you will be marked absent for the day. Each absence beyond the 4 allowed will lower your grade by half a letter grade.
- **Lateness:** Punctuality is a top priority. Four late arrivals will count as 1 absence. Leaving class early is considered “lateness”.
- **Emergency class cancellation plan:** If a class needs to be canceled (which will probably never happen), I will send an announcement via canvas email.
- **Classroom expectations for behavior/etiquette:** No Laptops, iPads, or cell phones unless needed for activities. No food or drinks in the classroom to take care of the music gear.
- **Plagiarism/AI:** Student use of artificial intelligence (AI) is permitted in this course for certain assignments and activities. It is not permitted to be used in the following assignments as doing so would undermine student learning and achievement of course learning outcomes: Book-club journals. Additionally, if and when students use AI in this course, the AI must be cited as is shown within the NJIT Library AI citation page for AI. If you have any questions or concerns about AI technology use in this class, please reach out to your instructor prior to submitting any assignments.
- **Student Absences for Religious Observance:** NJIT is committed to supporting students observing religious holidays. Students must notify their instructors in writing of any conflicts between course requirements and religious observances, ideally by the end of the second week of classes and no later than two weeks before the anticipated absence. For questions or additional guidance, please review the policy or contact the Office of Inclusive Excellence at [inlusiveexcellence@njit.edu](mailto:inlusiveexcellence@njit.edu).

## ASSIGNMENTS

**Rubrics for each assignment will be posted in Canvas.**

- Weekly songs contribution: 15%
- Book-club journals (part I and part II): 25%
- Mid-term song research presentation slideshow (w/performance for those who want to perform): 30%
- Final genre, album, or artist research project: 30%
  - **Modality:** essay, video essay, podcast (w/performance for those who want to perform)
  - **References:**
    - At least one record
    - At least one book
    - At least one article from NPR or music magazines
    - At least one documentary/movie

*Academic Integrity is the cornerstone of higher education and is central to the ideals of this course and the university. Cheating is strictly prohibited and devalues the degree that you are working on. As a member of the NJIT community, it is your responsibility to protect your educational investment by knowing and following the academic code of integrity policy that is found at: [NJIT Academic Integrity Code](#).*

*Please note that it is my professional obligation and responsibility to report any academic misconduct to the Dean of Students Office. Any student found in violation of the code by cheating, plagiarizing or using any online software inappropriately will result in disciplinary action. This may include a failing grade of F, and/or suspension or dismissal from the university. If you have any questions about the code of Academic Integrity, please contact the Dean of Students Office at [dos@njit.edu](mailto:dos@njit.edu).*



### Letter Grades

Add the grading system followed for your course below. Letter grades for the entire course will be assigned as follows. A 100-point system is used. At the end of the semester, the numerical grades earned for each written assignment will be averaged and translated into letter grades using the following formula.

Letter Grade	Percent Grade
A	94-100%
A-	90-93%
B+	87-89%
B	84-86%

Letter Grade	Percent Grade
B-	80-83%
C+	77-79%
C	74-76%
C-	70-73%
D+	67-69%
D	64-66%
D-	60-63%

MODULES	LYRIC ANALYSIS & (HI)STORIES	READINGS VIDEOS	EXTRA
1. XXI Music Music from elsewhere Music with a message for the future	<p>“Lockdown” by Anderson.Paak</p> <p>“Bella Ciao” Italian traditional</p> <p>“Emergency on Planet Earth” by Jamiroquai</p> <p>“Mercy, Mercy Me” by Marvin Gaye</p>		<b>Students</b> will bring songs from different cultures and/or XXI century to analyze current events
2. Indigenous Music	<p>“Mahk Jchi” by Ulali</p> <p>“Stand up (for Standing Rock)”</p> <p>Supaman: past &amp; present + dance</p>	<p>Videos &amp; readings:</p> <p><a href="#">Tiny Desk playlist</a></p> <p><a href="#">Interview with Supaman</a></p> <p><a href="#">Celebration of Powwow</a></p> <p><a href="#">Teaching appreciation and understanding for Native</a></p>	Students’ proposals

		<a href="#">American music and culture</a>	
<b>3. Echoes of the Underground Railroad</b>	<p>Spirituals and hidden messages</p> <p>Analysis of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Wade in the Water</li> <li>- Swing Low, Sweet Chariot</li> <li>- Follow the Drinking Gourd</li> </ul>	<p>Videos &amp; documentaries:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Negro Spirituals: The Music...</li> <li> Chapter 1   Jubilee Singers  ...</li> <li> The Underground Railroad: ...</li> </ul> <p>PBS documentary:</p> <p><a href="#">Harriet Tubman: visions of freedom</a></p>	<i>Book club introduction</i>
<b>4. The Blues: A change is gonna come?</b>	<p>“Backwater Blues” by Bessie Smith</p> <p>“Alabama Blues” by JB Lenoir</p>	<p><a href="#">Lomax, A. <i>The land where the Blues began</i></a> (documentary)</p> <p>Jones, L. <i>Blues People</i> (selection)</p> <p>Baraka, A. <i>Digging: The Afro-American Soul of American Classical Music</i> (selection)</p> <p>Davis, A. Y. <i>Blues Legacy and Black Feminism</i> (selection)</p> <p><i>Blues America</i> (documentary selections)</p>	Students’ proposals
<b>5. Jazz: Freedom &amp; Democracy</b>	<p>Songs by Nina Simone</p> <p>“Strange Fruit” by Billie Holiday</p>	<p>Porter, E. (2002). <i>What is this thing called Jazz?</i> (selection)</p> <p>O’Meally (1998). <i>The Jazz Cadence of American Culture</i></p>	Students’ proposals

		(selection)	
<b>6. Folk Revival: Which side are you on?</b>	<p>“Which side are you on?” (different versions)</p> <p>“Blowin’ in the Wind”</p> <p>“We Shall Overcome”</p> <p>Joan Baez</p> <p>Odetta</p> <p>Sweet Honey &amp; The Rock</p> <p>“Woodstock” by Joni Mitchell</p> <p>Civil Rights Songs</p>	<p>Portelli, A. <i>We Shall Not Be Moved</i> (selection)</p> <p>Portelli, A. <i>Hard rain: Bob Dylan, oral cultures, and the meaning of history.</i></p> <p>NPR article on This Land is Your Land</p>	Students’ proposals
<b>7. Rock: Revolution</b>	<p>“Johnny B. Goode” by Chuck Berry</p> <p>The Beatles (selection)</p> <p>Bruce Springsteen (selection)</p>	<p>Readings TBD</p> <p>Documentary TBD</p>	Students’ proposals
<b>8. MIDTERM Shares</b>			
<b>9. Soul/Funk/Disco: Community &amp; Activism</b>	<p>Songs by Stevie Wonder TBD</p> <p>Songs by Prince TBD</p> <p>“Sittin’ on the Dock of the Bay” by Otis Redding</p> <p>“Respect” by Aretha Franklin</p> <p>“I Will Survive” by Gloria Gaynor</p>	<p>Phinney, K. (2005). <i>Souled American. How Black Music Transformed White Culture</i> (selection)</p>	Students’ proposals

	<p>“YMCA” by Village People</p> <p>“Grandma’s Hands” by Bill Withers</p>		
10. <b>Hip-Hop don’t stop</b>	<p>“Rapper’s Delight” by Sugar Hill Gang</p> <p>“Fight the Power” - Public Enemy</p> <p>Women’s rappers</p>	<p>Chang, J. (2005). <i>Can’t stop won’t stop: A history of the Hip-Hop generation</i> (selection)</p> <p>Abrams, J. (2023). <i>The come up: An oral history of the rise of Hip-Hop</i> (selection)</p> <p><a href="#">PBS Fight the Power: How Hip-Hop Changed the World</a></p>	Students’ proposals
11. <b>Música latina: Pa’lante</b>	<p>“Azúcar” &amp; “La Vida es una Carnaval” by Celia Cruz</p> <p>“El Derecho de Vivir en Paz” by Víctor Jara</p> <p>“Gracias a la Vida” by Violeta Parra</p> <p>“La llorona” by Lila Downs</p> <p>“Pastures of Plenty” by Lila Downs</p>	<p>Readings TBD</p> <p>Documentary TBD</p>	Students’ proposals
12. <b>Broadway: All the world’s a stage</b>	<p>“West Side Story” (selection)</p> <p>“Rent” (selection)</p> <p>“Hamilton” / “In The Heights”</p>	<p>“West Side Story” (original movie)</p>	Students’ proposals

	(selection)		
13. Final presentations			
14. Final presentations			

**BOOKS (LIST TO BE EXTENDED W/STUDENTS' INPUT):**

Akeacubo. *Rave New World: Confessions of a Raving Reporter*

Tori Amos *Piece by Piece + Resistance*

Beaumont, M. *Kanye West: God & Monster*

Charnas, D. *Dilla Time*

Miles Davis *The Autobiography*

Ani DiFranco *No Walls and the Recurring Dream: A Memoir*

Bob Dylan *Chronicles*

Billie Holiday *Lady Sings the Blues*

Alicia Keys *More Myself: A Journey*

Lory, D. *Jeff Buckley: From Hallelujah to the Last Goodbye*

Charles Mingus *Beneath the Underdog: His World as Composed by Mingus*

Moore, T. *Sonic Life: A Memoir*

Norman, P. *George Harrison: The Reluctant Beatle*

Portelli, A. *Bruce Springsteen America. A Dream Deferred*

Prince *The Beautiful Ones*

Rakim *Sweat the Technique: Revelations on Creativity from the Lyrical Genius*

Nina Simone *I Put a Spell on You*

