

Search for an American Voice: Huck Finn to Harlem

Instructor: Dr. Susan Key

Spring 2018

Honors 419

4-5:15 BH 124

Prerequisite: acceptance into the University Honors Program, or consent of instructor.

3 credits

Catalog Description

What should America sound like? For musicians and writers in an emerging nation attempting to forge an identity separate from Europe, this was a burning question. In this course we explore key issues in the search for a distinctively American identity during the 19th and early 20th centuries, with emphasis on the ways that both music and literature increasingly reflected the use of vernacular sources to sound “American.” We consider the problematic yet productive tensions that have shaped this process: between high and low; between established and upstart; and - most vividly - between black and white.

General Education Learning Outcomes

GE7SI: Students explore processes by which human beings develop social and/ or historical perspectives.

GE7WI: Provides students an intensive course in academic writing at the first-year or intermediate level according to demonstrated competence, with attention to media-based composing and delivery.

Honors Program Learning Outcomes

Upon completing a course in the University Honors Program students will have:

- a. Obtained a starting point for integrative exploration of the development of cultures and intellectual achievements through a variety of disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives;
- b. Sharpened their ability to critically analyze and synthesize a broad range of knowledge through the study of primary texts and through engagement in active learning with fellow students, faculty, and texts (broadly understood);
- c. Understood how to apply more integrative and interdisciplinary forms of understanding in the advancement of knowledge and in addressing complex challenges shaping the world;
- d. Developed effective communication skills, specifically in the areas of written and oral exposition and analysis.

Course Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, students will have:

- a. Understood the influence of Emerson and the transcendentalists on the development of a distinctly American voice in literature and music
- b. Explored the way vernacular sources have shaped the styles of disparate artists
- c. Explored the Harlem Renaissance and its impact on American style in literature and music
- d. Understood how social dialogue is carried out through music
- e. Engaged in research, writing, and design of a web-based tool for analyzing and articulating the relationships and cultural products explored in the course

Instructional strategies

This course will consist primarily of seminar-style discussions based on material drawn from books, essays, music, maps, radio archives, and online material. Each student will be asked to prepare discussion questions and lead one class discussion using appropriate technology. Emphasis will also be placed on the development of listening strategies through various listening exercises, both group and individual. Certain topics will be introduced by mini-lectures; guest lecturers and performers will give special presentations.

Course Requirements

1. *Class attendance* is required. If you miss a class, you will need to make up the in-class writing and / or listening assignments within 3 days unless you are given an extension by the instructor.
2. *Class participation* is essential to the nature of the discussions and listening assignments in this interdisciplinary class. In addition to discussion of the reading assignments, some classes will include a written listening exercise that will form the basis of discussion about the music. You will also lead class discussion once during the semester.
3. *Weekly essays*: You will submit short (400 – 600 word) essays each week in response to the reading and listening. These should be emailed to me by 8:00 on the due date..
4. *Midterm project*: during the two weeks before spring break, the class will develop an online cultural map of New York City, 1850 – 1930. Each student will be assigned a literary or musical figure to research outside of class on his / her own. Then in three groups you will create multi-media online “walking tours” of New York City during three eras (1850-1890; 1890-1910; 1910-1930) featuring your research and animated by period music and archival images. We will allow class time to discuss the design of this map; however, most of the work will be completed outside of class.
5. *Final exam*: A final essay exam will ask you to synthesize your knowledge.

Methods of Evaluation

Attendance: You are expected to attend all classes unless you have permission from the instructor or a doctor’s note. Missing 3 classes or more will result in a 5% deduction from your final grade)

25%	Class participation, discussion leading, and response to in-class listening exercises
25%	Weekly response writings
25%	Midterm project
25%	Final exam

Grades will be assigned as follows:

A+ = 100-96; A = 95-93; A- = 92-90
B+ = 89-87; B = 86-83; B- = 82-90
C+ = 79-77; C = 76-73; C- = 72-70
D+ = 69-67; C = 66-63; D- = 62-60
F = 59 and below

Chapman University Academic Integrity Policy

Chapman University is a community of scholars which emphasizes the mutual responsibility of all members to seek knowledge honestly and in good faith. Students are responsible for doing their own work, and academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated anywhere in the university.

Students with Disabilities Policy

In compliance with ADA guidelines, students who have any condition, either permanent or temporary, that might affect their ability to perform in this class are encouraged to inform the instructor at the beginning of the term. The University, through the Center for Academic Success, will work with the appropriate faculty member who is asked to provide the accommodations for a student in determining what accommodations are

suitable based on the documentation and the individual student needs. The granting of any accommodation will not be retroactive and cannot jeopardize the academic standards or integrity of the course.

Chapman University Diversity Policy

Chapman University is committed to fostering learning and working environments that encourage and embrace diversity, multiple perspectives, and the free exchange of ideas as important measures to advance educational and social benefits. Our commitment and affirmation are rooted in our traditions of peace and social justice and our mission of producing ethical and responsible global citizens. The term diversity implies a respect for all and an understanding of individual differences in age, class, disability, ethnicity, gender, language, national origin, race, religion, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status.

Course Description and Schedule

This course will explore how American writers and composers have mined the vernacular in pursuit of an artistic voice distinct from European practice. We begin by surveying the soundscape of mid-nineteenth century America, with a particular focus on the stylistically eclectic music of our first professional songwriter, Stephen Foster. We then heed Ralph Waldo Emerson's call to abandon the "courtly muses" of Europe in favor of a more democratic aesthetic, and we trace the progression of this aesthetic dialogue through Walt Whitman, Henry David Thoreau, Emily Dickinson, and Mark Twain and through composers Antonin Dvořák and the Americans he inspired. The first half of the course will culminate with a cross-disciplinary study of Mark Twain (*Huckleberry Finn*, which Ernest Hemingway famously claimed was the starting point of American literature) American writers and musicians also fundamentally dealt with race, an issue that takes on new urgency as we consider the ways that artistic dialogue was shaped by the demographic and social dislocations of the emerging modern world. We will explore writers Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, and Carl van Vechten and composer George Gershwin. Many African-Americans, however, have disparaged his *Porgy and Bess* as the work of an interloper; his relationship to the Harlem Renaissance is a vexed but rewarding topic. We will conclude our course at a point – the mid-30s – when Emerson's vision of a century earlier had generated not one but a plethora of distinctively American voices.

Throughout the course we will consider the importance of New York City, significant to all of our cultural figures as home, businessplace, ideal, or anathema. A collaborative map project will give you a chance to understand more deeply the importance of cultural intersections, to engage in primary research, and to articulate and synthesize your knowledge into a web-based format.

Week	Date	Weekly Topic	Assignments
1	Monday 1/29	The 19 th -century American Soundscape	
	Wednesday 1/31		Song of America radio series: Stephen Foster
2	Monday 2/5	Core issues in American Popular Culture	Root, <i>Performing Foster</i> Minstrelsy videos Week 2 response
	Wednesday 2/7	A Call for Self-Reliance / Transcendentalism	Emerson, <i>Self-Reliance</i>
3	Monday 2/12		Emerson, excerpts from <i>The Poet</i> Thoreau, “Walking” Week 3 (Emerson) response
	Wednesday 2/14	I Hear America Singing: Whitman and Dickinson	Selected Whitman poems <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Miracles” • “I Hear America Singing” • “Hush’d Be the Camps Today” Whitman essay, Art Singing and Heart Singing Reynolds. “I hear America Singing”: Whitman and the Music of His Time
4	Monday 2/19		Selected Dickinson poems <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Someone Prepared this mighty show” • “Some Keep the Sabbath Going to Church” • “My Life Closed Twice Before Its Close” Week 4 response
	Wednesday 2/21	You don’t know about me: Huckleberry Finn	Twain, <i>Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i> chapters 1-15 Peter Salwen, Mark Twain and Walt Whitman Twain, Letter to Walt Whitman
5	Monday 2/26		Twain, <i>Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i> , chapters 16-30 Week 5 response

	Wednesday 2/28		Twain, <i>Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i> , chapters 31-end Fishkin, Was Huck Black? (Introduction) Twain, “Sociable Jimmy”
6	Monday 3/5	A European’s perspective: Antonin Dvořák	Short video about Harry Burleigh Dvořák, Symphony No. 9 “From the New World” Movements I and II Week 6 response
	Wednesday 3/7		“Transatlantic Debate” Dvořák, Symphony No. 9 “From the New World” Movements III and IV
7	Monday 3/12	New Strains of Nationalism	Research and “Paths Crossing” class map project Farwell and Cadman, selected Indianist music Sousa, selected marches Excerpts from <i>Marching Along</i> Week 7 response
	Wednesday 3/14	Emerging modernism: The new urban landscape	Research and “Paths Crossing” class map project Selections from ragtime and Tin Pan Alley van Vechten, essay <i>The Great American Composer</i> James Reese Europe: “The Jazz Lieutenant”
	3/19-25	Spring break	
8	Monday 3/26	The new urban landscape, cont.	Excerpts from James Weldon Johnson Will Marion Cook and Scott Joplin, selected music Selections from 1920s jazz and popular music
	Wednesday 3/28		Online New York Public Library essay and exhibition: The New Negro Renaissance Selections from 1920s jazz and popular music
9	Monday 4/2	I Too Sing America: the Harlem Renaissance	Alain Locke, “The New Negro” Selections from Locke, “The Negro and His Music”
	Wednesday 4/4		W.E.B. DuBois, Criteria of Negro Art J.A. Rogers, “Jazz at Home”

10	Monday 4/9		Song of America radio series: Langston Hughes and the Harlem Renaissance Selected Hughes poems
	Wednesday 4/11		Zora Neale Hurston, " Sweat " Week 10 response
11	Monday 4/16	Appropriating a voice?	Heyward, <i>Porgy</i> , parts I - III
	Wednesday 4/18		Heyward, <i>Porgy</i> , parts IV-VI Week 11 response
12	Monday 4/23	<i>Porgy and Bess</i>	Gershwin, <i>Porgy and Bess</i> Week 12 response
	Wednesday 4/25		<i>Porgy and Bess</i> , cont. Gershwin, "Fifty Years of American Music"
13	Monday 4/30		Excerpts from Horowitz, " <i>On My Way</i> ": <i>The Untold Story of Rouben Mamoulian, George Gershwin, and Porgy and Bess</i>
	Wednesday 5/2		Week 13 response Excerpts from Noonan, <i>The Strange Career of Porgy and Bess: Race, Culture, and America's Most Famous Opera</i>
14	Monday 5/07	American Voices: Mid-Century and Beyond	Selections from Depression-era vernacular and classical music
	Wednesday 5/09		Synthesis and reflection
	Monday May 14 4:15-6:45	Final exam	

Required Texts

Heyward, Dubose, *Porgy*. University Press of Mississippi, 2001.

Twain, Mark. *Huckleberry Finn*. Penguin Classics Deluxe Edition, 2009.

Other required readings will be in the relevant Content folders in Blackboard.

Musical selections and links to online resources will also be in the relevant Content folders in Blackboard.