

Sociology 163: **POP/MUSIC**

**CLASS HOURS** Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays 11am-12pm

**LOCATION** 159 Mulford

**INSTRUCTOR** Joseph Klett

**EMAIL** [jklett@berkeley.edu](mailto:jklett@berkeley.edu)

- Read [THIS](#);
- Always include "SOC163" in subject line;
- DO NOT contact me through bCourses -- I won't see it.

**OFFICE HOURS** Tuesdays 10am-12pm (over [Zoom](#))

Wednesdays 1:30pm-3:30pm (in Social Sciences Building 484 or [Zoom](#))

- Please make office hours appointments [HERE](#)

**READERS** Isabella Arnold, [bellaarnold@berkeley.edu](mailto:bellaarnold@berkeley.edu)

Erin Matsubara, [erinmatsubara@berkeley.edu](mailto:erinmatsubara@berkeley.edu)

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this course we venture into social and cultural research on popular music. And what is popular music? Depending on who you ask, popular music refers to two different things: one group (let's call them the "pop" people) say popular music is defined by the way it is mass-produced and mass-consumed; another group (we'll call them the "music" people) tell us to focus on the styles, subcultures, and politics that give music its meaning.

Beginning with research into just what qualifies certain music as popular, we will look at economic, legal, and industrial practices that affect the quantity—and quality—of popular music. From this "production" perspective, we will learn to recognize the powers of capitalism in the modern industrial practices that shape artistic output. Consider, for example, how only a small selection of singers become pop stars. The hype says it's because they have the most exceptional voices; the raw talent; maybe, dare we say it, authentic genius? But what is genius? What is authentic? And why does this matter in order for us to like a piece of music? More to the point: Pop people say genius is mostly a myth used to sell musicians by obscuring all the many people and things that allow that "genius" to exist and operate. Here, we look to the producers and consumers of popular music to better understand how these groups influence the churn of pop music production, what it is worth, and how it is used to gain status in society.

Following this look at the social production of music, we then turn to the music itself. We will consider the symbolic qualities of music, and how symbolism helps fans construct and maintain an identity. Scholars argue that symbolism serves both the powerful interests of the major labels and the local interests of the independent, do-it-yourself community. By employing symbols in artistic confrontation, musicians are often found "doing politics by other means:" specifically, these artists buck gender norms, revive suppressed traditions, and reconstruct the aesthetics of popular music; sometimes they do the opposite. And it is not always the majors who do the latter. As we will see, the work of representing an identity is dangerous: artists navigate storms of critical appraisal, rivalrous competition, and even their own fans as they try to maintain control over their identities and artistic license. But people are not their only issue. The technology of music production has designs of its own, and these designs always impress themselves on the products of music. The traces of technology in pop music also include abstract, legal instruments like intellectual property laws which greatly contour the flow of music in the digital age.

To conclude we will consider the formation of a specific field called "music sociology" which treats music as an independent variable in the story of social life. What does it mean for sociological research to put music first, before worrying about how it is made or what it means? How does this new research reflect changes in the production and consumption of popular music? And what does it do to the very meaning of popular music?

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**COURSE REQUIREMENTS** (% of final grade; all work submitted after the deadline will receive a 5% deduction per 24 hours unless excused)

- A. **Liner Notes** (30%): You will complete weekly assignments related to a pop music genre of your choice. *Liner Notes* are assigned Weeks 2-4, 6-7, 9-10, and 12-14.
- B. **Mixtape Side A** (20%): You will make a six-song mixtape that summarizes Weeks 2-7.
- C. **Mixtape Side B** (20%): You will make a six-song mixtape that summarizes Weeks 9-14.
- D. **A&R Pitch** (15%): You will take the role of an artists and repertoire (A&R) representative to write a publicity piece for an up-and-coming artist from the past year.
- E. **Six Degrees** (15%): You will tell the story of six pieces of music through their shared history.

NOTE: Students enrolled for 3 credits must complete A-C *only*. The values are then 40%/30%/30%.

### ACADEMIC HONESTY

You are expected to follow the [University guidelines for academic honesty](#). Violations include cheating and plagiarism, as well as self-plagiarism (submitting your own work from a different assignment). Any assignment content composed by a resource other than you, whether human or digital, must be attributed using proper citation. If you have any doubts, please speak to me or your Reader *before* your work is due.

Artificial intelligence (AI) language models, such as ChatGPT, may be used to summarize or contextualize source materials with appropriate citation and thorough editing. Unattributed use of online platforms is considered academic dishonesty and will be treated as such.

### SPECIAL NEEDS AND ACCOMMODATIONS

All students should be able to participate in this course. Please address any special needs you may have with me at the beginning of the semester, or when a challenge arises. If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit your accommodation plan from the Disabled Students' Program (DSP) to me by email, preferably within the first two weeks of the semester. Contact the DSP by phone (510) 642-0518 or by email to [dsp@berkeley.edu](mailto:dsp@berkeley.edu).

**COURSE OUTLINE**

All readings can be found on bCourses under '[Files](#)' unless hyperlinked below.

**WEEK 1      Wednesday 1/17 & Friday 1/19: Genre**

1. Chuck Klosterman. 2016. "[Which Rock Star Will Historians of the Future Remember?](#)"
2. *99pi*. 2020. "[Whomst Among Us Let the Dogs Out.](#)"

**WEEK 2      Monday 1/22, Wednesday 1/24 & Friday 1/26: Poptimism**

*Liner notes:* Identify a pop music genre that you will investigate this semester.

1. Theodor Adorno. 1941. "On Popular Music."
2. Jacques Attali. 1985. "Listening."
3. Kelefa Sanneh. 2004. "[The Rap Against Rockism.](#)"
4. Jody Rosen. 2006. "[The Perils of Poptimism.](#)"

b/w:

- Mark Dery. 2010. "Aladdin Sane Called."
- Conrad Amenta. 2014. "[A Few Thoughts on Nirvana's Induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.](#)"
- Taffy Brodesser-Akner. 2023. "[My Delirious Trip to the Heart of Swiftiedom.](#)"
- Maria Sherman and David Bauder. 2023. "[Largest US newspaper chain is hiring Taylor Swift and Beyoncé reporters.](#)"

**WEEK 3      Monday 1/29, Wednesday 1/31 & Friday 2/2: The Music Industry**

*Liner notes:* Identify three major labels that produce your genre.

1. Richard Peterson. 1997. "Creating Country Music" and "Authenticity."
2. Nathaniel Rich. 2015. "Hit Charade."

b/w:

- Maria Sherman. 2020. "[The Future According To NSYNC.](#)"
- *Reply All*. 2020. "[The Case of the Missing Hit.](#)"

**WEEK 4      Monday 2/5, Wednesday 2/7 & Friday 2/9: The Majors**

*Liner notes:* Write a biography of a major label artist typical of your genre.

1. Reebee Garofalo. 1999. "From Music Publishing to MP3."
2. Daniel Silver et al. 2022. "Balancing Categorical Conventionality in Music."

b/w:

- Steve Albini. 1993. "The Problem with Music."
- Michael Azerrad. 2001. "Our Band Could Be Your Life: Black Flag."

**WEEK 5      Monday 2/12, Wednesday 2/14 & Friday 2/16: The Producers**

*No Liner notes this week.*

1. Keith Negus. 2002. "The Work of Cultural Intermediaries."
2. Antoine Hennion. 1989. "An Intermediary between Production and Consumption."
3. Kim de Laat. 2015. "Write a Word, get a Third."
4. Rachel Skaggs. 2019. "Harmonizing Small-Group Cohesion and Status in Creative Collaborations."

b/w:

- Andrew Matson. 2013. "This Beat's for You."
- Stephen Kearse. 2018. "[The Erasure of Paper Boi is Atlanta's Sharpest Joke.](#)"
- *Song Exploder*. 2015. "[Ghostface Killah.](#)"
- Jon Caramanica. 2016. "Kanye West is Fixing His Album in Public."
- Joe Coscarelli and Noah Throop. 2023. "[No Pen, No Pad.](#)"

**Sunday 2/18: *A&R PITCH DUE***

**Monday 2/19: *NO CLASS***

**WEEK 6      Wednesday 2/21 & Friday 2/23: Art Worlds**

*Liner notes:* Create a style guide for fans of your genre.

1. Howard Becker. 1982. "Art Worlds and Collective Activity" and "Conventions."
2. Kembrew McLeod. 2001. "One and a Half Stars."

b/w:

- Joe Coscarelli. 2020. [“How Pop Music Fandom Became Sports Politics Religion and All-Out War.”](#)

**WEEK 7**      **Monday 2/26, Wednesday 2/28 & Friday 3/1: The Audience**

*Liner notes:* Classify three artists for your genre based on prestige.

1. Pierre Bourdieu. 1984. “Introduction” from *Distinction*.
2. Bethany Bryson. 1996. “Music and Symbolic Exclusion.”
3. Richard Peterson. 1997. “Taste as Distinction.”

b/w:

- Tom Vanderbilt. 2016. “The Psychology of Genre.”
- Isabella Gomez Sarmiento. 2020. [“Shakira Taught Me to See Myself.”](#)

**WEEK 8**      **Monday 3/4: Mixtape review I (in class)**

**Wednesday 3/6: Mixtape review II ([ZOOM](#))**

**Sunday 3/10: *MIXTAPE SIDE A DUE***

**WEEK 9**      **Monday 3/11, Wednesday 3/13 & Friday 3/15: Symbols**

*Liner notes:* Write a symbolic analysis of a well-known album cover from your genre.

1. Dick Hebdige. 1979. “Style as Intentional Communication.”
2. Mavis Bayton. 1997. “Women and the Electric Guitar.”

b/w:

- Tristan Bridges and CJ Pascoe. 2014. “BroPorn.”
- John Lie. 2015. *K-pop*.
- Matthew Worley. 2017. “Teenage Warning.”

**WEEK 10**      **Monday 3/18, Wednesday 3/20 & Friday 3/22: Politics**

*Liner notes:* Compare the political expressions of two artists from your genre.

1. Greil Marcus. 1975. "Sly Stone: The Myth of Stagolee."
2. Tricia Rose. 1994. "Soul Sonic Forces."
3. Alex Venrooij et al. 2022. "Race and Genre Ambiguity in the Critical Reception of Pop Music."

b/w:

- Ricky Vincent. 2008. "James Brown: Icon of Black Power."
- Brendan O'Connor. 2015. ["Why are Rap Lyrics being used as Evidence in Court?"](#)
- James C. McKinley Jr. 2016. ["Rappers Based Lyrics on Their Credit Card Fraud."](#)
- Ed Clowes. 2021. ["For British Drill Stars, the Police Are Listening Closely."](#)

**Monday 3/25, Wednesday 3/27 & Friday 3/29: NO CLASS**

**WEEK 11      Monday 4/1, Wednesday 4/3 & Friday 4/5: Representations**

*No Liner notes this week.*

1. George Lipsitz. 1996. "Strategic Anti-Essentialism in Popular Music."
2. John Covach. 2003. "Pangs of History in Late 1970s New-Wave Rock."
3. Kim de Laat and Alanna Stuart. 2023. "Valuations of Diversity."

b/w:

- Aaron Fox. 2004. "White Trash Alchemies of the Abject Sublime."
- Christopher Weingarten. 2010. "Worst Songs of 2010."
- Roshanak Kheshti. 2011. "Touching Listening."
- VICE. 2018. ["The World's Most Controversial K-Pop Group."](#)

**Sunday 4/7: SIX DEGREES DUE**

**WEEK 12      Monday 4/8, Wednesday 4/10, & Friday 4/12: Technics**

*Liner notes:* Identify an album from a major label catalog that cannot currently be legally downloaded.

1. Jonathan Sterne. 2006. "The MP3 as Cultural Artifact."
2. Michael Siciliano. 2023. "Intermediaries in the Age of Platformized Gatekeeping."

b/w:

- Rob Walker. 2009. "The Song Decoders."
- David Lowery. 2012. "Meet the New Boss, Worse than the Old Boss?"
- Ben Sisario. 2015. "David Lowery Sues Spotify for Copyright Infringement."
- Ben Sisario. 2016. "'We Shall Overcome' Copyright May Be Overcome One Day."
- Jonathan Taplin. 2016. "Do You Love Music? Silicon Valley Doesn't."
- Patrick Clarke. 2020. "[82 per cent of musicians earn less than £200 a year from streaming.](#)"
- *99pi*. 2017. "[Ways of Hearing.](#)"

**WEEK 13      Monday 4/15, Wednesday 4/17 & Friday 4/19: Ownership**

*Liner notes:* Find a song that samples a song that samples another song.

1. Kembrew McLeod. 2005. "Confessions of an Intellectual (Property)."
2. Jayson Greene. 2023. "[Everything is Interpolated.](#)" [[PODCAST](#) ft. the author]

b/w:

- Landon Proctor. 2006. [The Amen Break.](#)
- *Today Explained*. 2023. "[Ed Sheeran and the 'Blurred Lines' Effect.](#)"
- Matt O'Brien. 2023. "[Please Regulate AI.](#)"
- Freddie DeBoer. 2023. "[The Hubris of AI Hype.](#)"

**WEEK 14      Monday 4/22, Wednesday 4/24 & Friday 4/26: Music Sociology**

*Liner notes:* Write a brief story about an emotional experience you had while listening to music.

1. Tia DeNora. 1999. "Music as a Technology of the Self."
2. Jennifer Lena. 2012. "Music Genres."
3. Claire Lobenfeld. 2016. "[Poptimism isn't the Problem.](#)"

b/w:

- Richard Dyer. 1979. "In Defence of Disco."
- Tim Lawrence. 2006. "In Defence of Disco (Again)."
- *Phantom Power*. 2019. "[Soar and Chill.](#)"

**WEEK 15      Monday 4/29: Mixtape review I (in class)**



Wednesday 5/1: Mixtape review II ([ZOOM](#))

Wednesday 5/8: **MIXTAPE SIDE B DUE**