

Rock 'n' Roll and American Society

MMC3702

3 credits

[Spring 2026]

Rock 'n roll? "It's restless and rude. It's defiant and daring. It's a fist shaken at age. It's a voice that often screams out questions because the answers are always changing."

Nora Roberts

"Public Secrets"

Class Meetings: This is an online class. Lectures may be viewed at your convenience, but it is expected that you complete the modules that are assigned every week.

Instructor: David E. Carlson
Professor Emeritus
College of Journalism and Communications
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Office Hours: *Zoom office time is available from 3-5 p.m. Wednesdays. Other times can be arranged by appointment. Don't hesitate to contact me if you have questions or just want to chat. See below.*

Course TA or Coordinator: None

Course Communications: *Messages will be sent to the class via Canvas Announcements. Individual students may be contacted via email. Students are encouraged to contact me via email to dcarlson@jou.ufl.edu. I will receive your message there much faster than on Canvas mail.*

Required Text: "[*What's That Sound? An Introduction to Rock and Its History*](#)" [Links to an external site.](#) (Sixth Edition) by John Covach and Andrew Flory (W.W. Norton, 2022). ISBN: **0393872459**

There also are about 30 short articles that will be posted in Canvas. These are important and entertaining readings so don't miss them.

Course Description: *(From the UF catalog) Studies the role of popular music in American culture. It is not a music course but a look at the effects of recorded sound on popular culture. The course emphasizes rock 'n' roll and its impact from 1954-1970.*

Prerequisite Knowledge and Skills: *! **Prior familiarity with music (rock or otherwise) is not necessary or assumed.** All I ask is that you have an open mind and be ready and able to suspend whatever pre-conceived notions you may have regarding "rock 'n' roll," "rock music" or "popular music" in general.*

Purpose of Course: *This communication course explores **the history of rock (and pop) music**—its significant performers, producers, recordings, performances, and cultural identity, with the focus on the decades of the 1950s and 1960s.*

*It's NOT a music course, per se, but we will be listening to a lot of music as we consider the effects of recorded sound on popular culture. Thus, this is a quintessential "**communication and culture**" course. We will study the origin and growth of the recording industry and music business, consider the impact politics and new technology had (and continues to have) on the development of popular music, and examine the mutual influences of rock 'n' roll music and other mass media (film, television, journalism, advertising, etc.).*

*We will attempt to **integrate into this story the general social and intellectual history of the United States.** Our emphasis is on rock 'n' roll and its impact from around 1954 to 1970, which happens to closely parallel the Civil Rights movement, and, in the '60s, the Vietnam War.*

We will examine some of the different musical influences that came together to create rock 'n' roll, beginning as far back as the turn of the century, then building through the first half of the last century. Following a loose chronology, we will trace the evolution of specific musical styles and investigate issues related to culture, performance, technology, and reception. Reading assignments will introduce the distinct musical styles, performers, and works that comprise each genre and time period.

Course Goals and Objectives: By the end of this course, students will:

Be able to broadly describe the history and development of rock 'n' roll music, its technological, regional and cultural influences, and articulate how all of that has influenced the cultural history of the United States. Students also will be able to recognize different styles of music such as blues, bluegrass, country, gospel, jazz and various genres of rock 'n' roll.

Additional goals are to improve critical thinking skills, ability to discern important information and note-taking skills, all of which are useful in a broad range of disciplines.

Instructional Methods: *This is a large class conducted entirely online. Lectures include a great deal of multimedia, especially music and videos of musical performances. You will need a reasonably fast internet connection as offered by ethernet, DSL or cable modem. Do not attempt to take the exams on a smartphone while in a moving car!*

Students are encouraged to discuss the material within the e-learning system, and the instructor will weigh in as appropriate.

Course Policies:

HOW TO DO WELL: *This class is a whole lot of fun. We listen to great music during every lecture. We watch videos and movie trailers. But “fun” does not mean “easy.” This is an upper division course at the 3000 level so you should expect n some rigor. Plato spend at least 5 hours per week in this course as we cover a lot of material, about 70 years of music and social history. If it were a face-to-face class, you would expect to spend 3 hours a week in lecture and more hours reading and studying the material. You should expect to spend that much time on this online class. It will be hard to catch up if you fall behind. To do well, the following will make a big difference:*

1. **Watch every lecture on time, and do not fall behind.** Take good notes on the lectures and study them every day. You will not have time to go back through every lecture when exam time rolls around.
2. **Read the text and all assigned materials** before you watch the lectures. The book and other readings have been carefully chosen to maximize the experience and potential for intellectual growth. Keeping up with the readings will make a big difference in how much you enjoy the journey we will take this semester.
3. **Be open-minded and fully engage yourself.** Please leave your preconceptions about what music sucks and what doesn't at the virtual classroom door. The development of rock 'n' roll has been mostly linear, and learning what came before will help you appreciate the music of today. My goal is to make you a better-educated listener, exposing you to many artists, genres and songs that may be new

to you. It's also to help you understand what a powerful force this music has been in American culture. Please leave behind your subjective opinion of rock 'n' roll. Be open-minded and don't discriminate against music of any kind based on your previous experience.

4. **Complete four exams.** Tests will include a minimum of 50 questions and may be a combination of multiple-choice, true-false, audio and matching. Questions are taken from lectures and reading assignments. Many, if not most, exam questions will come from lectures so enjoy the music, do the "bar-stool boogie," but stay alert and take good notes.
5. **Do a semester project: Build an interactive timeline** that illustrates how music, technology and history correspond during the time period. Your timeline must include entries I will assign as well as entries you choose that help synthesize events. This will help you see and understand the overall picture. For this project we will utilize an easy-to-use and free website that makes creating the timeline itself simple. The less simple part is deciding what to put on your timeline. This project accounts for almost 30 percent of your semester grade, therefore it is a lot of work. It's not a big hassle if you work on it as we go. *It's a killer if you wait to the last minute.*
6. **Participate in peer review** of your classmates' timelines. Each of you will be assigned four classmates' timelines to evaluate. This lets you see how your fellow students did the same assignment. The instructor then will compile the scores and investigate any scores that seem "out of whack." I will look at every timeline and at least make brief comments explaining how I arrived at your score.

Attendance Policy: *Attendance is virtual, but you are expected to work along with the class in a timely fashion, viewing a module's lectures per week and completing the assigned readings. If you fall behind, it will be very difficult to catch up.*

Exam Policy: *Exams will be offered online in a timed, proctored environment. You must complete the exam on the assigned date and within the allotted time. Do not try to take an exam on a cell phone, while in a moving car, or while parked in a rest area along some interstate highway. You will not get any sympathy when it doesn't work out. Exams are non-comprehensive. Each one covers the lectures and readings assigned since the previous exam. Therefore, there is no "final exam." All testing dates are clearly stated on the course home page. Failure to complete the test within the stated time-frame will result in a grade of zero.*

Make-up Policy: *In general, there will be no makeup exams. You will have 24 hours in which to take each exam, it is therefore, expected that makeup exams will not be necessary. If you become ill or aware of a serious problem or an extraordinary circumstance that will prevent you from taking an exam on the assigned day, you must*

inform me **before** the exam to work out a compromise, **not after**. You still will need to provide documentation to prove your need for a makeup test.

COVID 19: If you are experiencing COVID 19 symptoms or have been exposed to the virus, please use the [UF Health screening systemLinks to an external site.](#) and follow CDC guidance on what to do for your safety and the safety of others. In accordance with university policy, you will be given a reasonable amount of time to make up work with an excused absence. Find more information in [university attendance policiesLinks to an external site.](#)

ACADEMIC HONESTY: It is expected that you will exhibit ethical behavior in this class. Students are expected to do their own work, use their own words in papers, and to reference outside sources appropriately.

Students are further expected to observe intellectual property rights and to comply with copyright laws. **The music included in the lectures for this class is the property of the respective copyright holders. It does not belong to you, and you are not free to copy it or distribute it to others.** The same goes for the lectures themselves as well as images and videos included in the lectures and printed materials.

Academic honesty also means you will not plagiarize the words, designs, concepts or ideas of others, including those of artificial intelligence engines or chatbots. Plagiarism is defined as "...taking someone's words or ideas as if they were your own."

Source: [Dictionary.comLinks to an external site.](#)

Plagiarism is a form of cheating, and students who cheat will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of university rules. You will automatically receive a failing grade in this class if you engage in any form of academic dishonesty.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: Use of Chat GPT or any other form of artificial intelligence is plagiarism and will be prosecuted as such.

EXTRA CREDIT: There will be no papers or projects offered for extra credit, but there will be extra credit questions on each exam worth an additional 8 to 10 points (which is what a paper or project would be worth anyway). No individual extra-credit opportunities will be offered; everyone in class is treated the same way. Please remember that the grading scale (see below) is hard and fast. A point total of 799, for example, will not be rounded up to 800.

Course Technology: This is an online course being taught in Canvas. You will need a computer, Internet access and a GatorLink ID to gain access to the course and materials via the World Wide Web.

UF Policies:

University Policy on Accommodating Students with Disabilities: Students requesting accommodation for disabilities must first register with the Dean of Students Office). The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the instructor when requesting accommodation. *You must submit this documentation prior to submitting assignments or taking **any** quizzes or exams.* Accommodations are not retroactive, therefore, students should contact the office as soon as possible in the term for which they are seeking accommodations.

Instructor's note: *Students whose hearing is severely impaired may have difficulty as we play and discuss a lot of music.*

University Policy on Academic Misconduct: Academic honesty and integrity are fundamental values of the University community. Students should be sure that they understand the UF Student Honor Code.

Netiquette: Communication Courtesy: All members of the class are expected to follow rules of common courtesy in all email messages, threaded discussions and chats. Students who “flame” others will be warned once and then locked out of the class’s online communications

Getting Help:

For issues with technical difficulties for E-learning in Canvas, please contact the UF Help Desk at:

- Learning-support@ufl.edu
- (352) 392-HELP - select option 3

** Any requests for make-ups due to technical issues MUST be accompanied by the ticket number received from the proctor when the problem was reported to them. The ticket number will document the time and date of the problem. You MUST e-mail your instructor within 24 hours of the technical difficulty if you wish to request a make-up.

Other resources are available:
Counseling and Wellness resources

- Disability resources
- Resources for handling student concerns and complaints
- Library Help Desk support

Should you have any complaints with your experience in this course please visit <http://www.distance.ufl.edu/student-complaints>Links to an external site. to submit a complaint.

Grading Policies:

Your grade for the course will be based on a 1,000-point scale.

Assignment Points or percentage

Exams (4) 150 points each (600 points total)

Timeline 300 points

Peer review 100 points

Grading Scale:

A = 950-1,000

A- = 910-949

B+ = 880-909

B = 850-879

B- = 820-849

C+ = 790-819

C = 751-789

C- = 720-750

D+ = 690-719

D = 651-689

D- = 610-650

E = 609 and under

Course Schedule:

Due dates for exams and assignments are shown in detail on the home page of the course site on Canvas. Listed below is a general synopsis of the material that will be covered and when.

Lesson	Topic	Readings	Assignments
1	What to expect: Course introduction and welcome		Get the book

2	Video: What Rocks? Musicians talk about rock 'n' roll	The syllabus – all of it	Take syllabus quiz
3	Labor Pains: The Origins of Rock 'n' Roll	Canvas: "The Origin of Rock 'n' Roll" (Canvas readings are linked in each module.)	
4	Labor Pains (continued)	Covach: Chapter 1	
5	Mississippi Ghosts: Robert Johnson and the Roots of Rock	Canvas: : "Land Where the Blues Began" and "King of the Delta Blues"	
6	A Tale of Three Cities: New Orleans	Canvas: "Fats"	
7	A Tale of Three Cities: Chicago	Covach: See module for pages Canvas: "From the Delta to Chicago"	
8	A Tale of Three Cities: Memphis, Sun and the rise of Elvis	Covach: See module for pages Canvas: "706 Union Avenue" and "Elvis Scotty and Bill"	
9	Memphis Continued: Who made the first rock 'n' roll record?		
10	Elvis Presley: The return of the king	Canvas: "The Return of the King" and "Where Were You When Elvis Died"	EXAM 1 (complete before class 11)
11	Chuck Berry and the "Deluge"	Covach: See module for pages Canvas: "Got to Be Rock and Roll Music," and "The Immortals - Bo Diddley"	

12	The Class of '55:	Canvas: "The Immortals - Perkins, Cash, Lewis, and Orbison," "Up Against the Wall," and "Jerry Lee Sees the Bright Light of Dallas"	
13	Buddy Holly	Covach: See module for pages Canvas: "The Immortals - Buddy Holly"	
14	The Day the Music Died	Canvas: "The Day the Music Died"	
15	The Five Styles of Rock 'n' Roll	Canvas: "The Five Styles of Rock and Roll"	
16	Five Styles (continued)	Canvas: "Doo Wop"	
17	Rock 'n Roll, Inc.	Covach: See module for pages Canvas: "Save the Last Dance for Me"	
18	Songwriters and Teen Idols	Covach: See module for pages Canvas: "The Immortals - Ricky Nelson"	
19	Misfortune strikes: Radio and the Payola Scandal	Covach: See module for pages Canvas: "Testimony in the Payola Hearings"	
20	The "Wall of Sound"	Canvas: "Behind the Glass," "Inflatable Phil," and "The Immortals - Phil Spector"	
21	"Wall of Sound" (continued)	Canvas: "The Top 10 Weirdest Phil Spector Moments"	EXAM 2 (complete before class 22)
22	Sweet Soul Music: Motown	Covach: See module for pages Canvas: "Girl Groups" and "Motown Finishing School"	

23	Stax, Atlantic and Southern Soul	Covach: See module for pages Canvas: "Dan and Spooner" and "Otis Redding: King of Them All"	
26	Sweet Soul Music: James Brown	Covach: See module for pages Canvas: "The Godfather of Soul" and "The Immortals – James Brown"	
27	Surf's Up: The Beach Boys, Dick Dale, Jan & Dean	Covach,: See module for pages Canvas: "The Immortals - The Beach Boys"	
28	Surf's Up (continued)	Canvas: "A Teenage Hymn to God"	
29	Bob Dylan: The Folk Years	Canvas: "The Immortals - Bob Dylan" and "How Does it Feel"	
30	Blasphemy: Dylan Goes Electric	Canvas: "The Making of Blonde on Blonde"	
31	Dylan: The Troubadour		EXAM 3 (Complete before class 32)
32	The Beatles (1958-64)	Covach: See module for pages Canvas: "The Immortals - The Beatles" and "A Good Stomping Band"	
33	The Beatles (1965-67)	Canvas: "Words to the Wild" and "More Popular than Jesus"	
34	The Beatles (1968-70)	Canvas: "The Ballad of John and Yoko" and "Video Pioneer"	
36	The British Invasion	Covach: See module for pages Canvas: "The Immortals - The	Complete your timeline

		Kinks,” “The Immortals – The Rolling Stones” and “Altamont”	
37	Holy Trinity of British Rock	Canvas: “The Immortals -- The Yardbirds” and “The Immortals – The Who”	Complete peer evaluation
38	America Responds	Covach: See module for pages	
39	Psychedelia: Drugs and the Quest for Higher Consciousness	Covach: See module for pages Canvas: “Next Year in San Francisco” and “These are the Good Old Days”	
40	Guitar Heroes: Beck, Clapton, Hendrix, Townshend and Page	Canvas: “A Life at the Crossroads,” and “Meaty, Beaty, Big and Bouncy”	
41	Guitar Heroes (continued)	Canvas: “Hendrix in Black and White”	Fill out course evaluation
42	Bringing It All Back Home		EXAM 4

Disclaimer: This syllabus represents my current plans and objectives. As we go through the semester, those plans may need to change to enhance the class learning opportunity. Such changes, communicated clearly, are not unusual and should be expected.