

HIS 350R: US Media, Commerce and Culture

Fall 2012

Dr. Karl Hagstrom Miller
Unique #39455
Room: GAR 0.132
Time: W 3:00-6:00

Email: karlmiller@mail.utexas.edu
Office Hours: T 2-4
or by appointment
Office: Garrison 3.312

This upper-division undergraduate seminar is a writing- and reading-intensive course centered around the question “How do people shape themselves through popular media?”

This semester we will be researching the current crisis in the US record industry. Filesharing is rampant. Record stores have closed. Musicians are searching for new ways to make ends meet. Students have been sued. At the same time, listeners have more music available to them than ever before. Music remains wildly popular, an essential part of how people feel pleasure, find meaning in their lives, build friendships with others, and express who they are to themselves and to the wider world. Pop music media still matters even as everyone scurries to find out how the business, the technology, and the music itself is changing.

How did we get here? What were the major events and decisions that led us to where we are? What exactly is new about the current state of pop music? And what aspects of the current scene display continuity with the past?

We are about to launch into a collaborative research project examining the historical roots of the current pop music conundrum. Over the next few weeks, we will read in common some books and articles to get us up to speed on the contemporary music industry and how to think about it historically.

Then things will get interesting.

Together we will decide upon the aspects of the current situation we consider to be the most important to understand. We will then divide the class into different Subject Research Groups to investigate each of these issues. Every week, each Subject Research Group, together and in collaboration with the class as a whole, will develop a specific set of research questions that it will strive to answer before the following class session. We will work together to develop the syllabus for each student week by week. Before each class session, you will post your findings to this blog. Everyone will benefit from your insights into your particular part of the larger puzzle. And you will be able to pull on every other student’s insights to help you in your own research.

We will divide each weekly class session into three parts. First comes the Check In. Each student or group will report their findings to the class. What are your answers to the research questions? What were you able to find out? What aspects of the answer remained elusive and why? Together we will celebrate the victories and troubleshoot the failures.

Second, I will lead a Skills Development Workshop. Each week we will focus on a different aspect of researching and writing history. The workshops will be designed to address the group and individual challenges that we have discussed during the Check In.

Finally, each class will conclude with the class creating research assignments for the following week. Now that we have answered the research questions, what's next?

At the end of the semester, we will have accomplished two things. Each student will have developed the skills to identify an important question, execute a research plan, and write up the results. We will also have created a blog brimming with information and analysis about the current music industry and its history. Pitchfork hasn't done that!

Let's get started.

Course Blog: <http://mediaculturecommerce.wordpress.com/>

Required Book: Available at the Co-op
Steve Knopper, *Appetite for Self-Destruction: The Spectacular Crash of the Record Industry in the Digital Age* (2009).

The rest of the common reading is available online. See the weekly schedule below. Some of the readings will be found through direct webpage links. Others are available the JSTOR database through UT library databases (requiring a UT EID).

1. Go to: <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/indexes/index.php>.
2. Find the name of the database in the alphabetical listing.
3. Sign in with your UT EID.
4. Enter the author and article title in the search field.
5. Click on the proper entry.
6. Either read the article online or download the PDF for off-line reading or printing.

Assignments:

Class participation: 25%

Attendance is mandatory. Class time will be devoted to deep discussions of the assigned readings. Complete your work before class. If you do not, you will fail to adequately participate in discussion.

Weekly posts to the course blog: 35%

Blog posts should be between 300 and 500 words. Check the Weekly schedule for dates and topics of the required blog posts.

Peer comments on course blog posts: 10%

Students can comment on any post and any time. Students will register to provide comments on all the student posts for two different weeks during the semester.

Research Progress Self-Assessment (3 pages): 10%

DUE OCTOBER 31

Final Essay (8-10 pages): 20%

DUE DECEMBER 5

This course is graded on the +/- scale. Please familiarize yourself with UT policies about academic integrity and plagiarism. Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, 471-6259.

Weekly Schedule:

SECTION I: BUILDING A TOOL KIT

August 29: Introduction

September 5: Thinking About Reading and Writing History

Reading:

William Cronon, "Why the Past Matters," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* (Autumn 2000), pp. 2-13. JSTOR.

Peter Sterns, "Why Study History?"

<http://www.historians.org/pubs/free/WhyStudyHistory.htm>

Peter Novick, "Nailing Jelly to a Wall," in *That Noble Dream: The 'Objectivity Question' and the American Historical Profession* (1988), pp. 1-17. BLACKBOARD.

Elsa Barkley Brown, "Polyrhythms and Improvisation: Lessons for Women's History," *History Workshop* (Spring 1991), pp. 85-90. JSTOR

Writing: Blog about your interpretation of this week's readings and the meaning of studying history.

Workshop: The Past, History, and Historiography

September 12: Thinking about Music, Money and Meaning

Reading:

John Seabrook, "The Money Note: Can the Record Business Survive?" *New Yorker* (July 7, 2003), pp. 42-55.

<http://www.booknoise.net/johnseabrook/stories/culture/flom/> or
http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2003/07/07/030707fa_fact_seabrook

Steve Albini, "The Problem with Music," *Maximumrocknroll* #133 (1993).

http://www.negative.com/news/?page_id=17

Gayle Wald, "I Want It That Way": Teenybopper Music and the Girling of Boy Bands," *Genders* 35 (2002).

http://www.genders.org/g35/g35_wald.html

Lavinia Greenlaw, "On Punk Rock and Not Being a Girl," in Weisbard (ed.), *Listen Again: A Momentary History of Pop Music* (Duke: 2007), pp. 210-218. BLACKBOARD

Writing: Post your personal music autobiography on the blog.

Workshop: Talking About Popular Culture

September 19: What Ails the Music Business?

Reading: Knopper, *Appetite for Self-Destruction*

Writing: Blog about what you consider to be the top five issues or subjects of concern in Knopper's book.

Workshop: Designing and assigning Subject Research Groups

SECTION II: RESEARCHING THE PAST

September 26

Reading: Group/Self directed.

Writing: Blog post

Workshop: Narrating Networks: the Tangle of Causes and Effects

October 3

Reading: Group/Self directed.

Writing: Blog

Workshop: Finding and Assessing Sources

October 10

Reading: Group/Self directed.

Writing: Blog

Workshop: Writing Stories

October 17

Reading: Group/Self directed.

Writing: Blog

Workshop: Writing Stories in Context

October 24

Reading: Group/Self directed.

Writing: Blog

Workshop: Subject Group Issue Workshop

October 31

Reading: Group/Self directed.

Writing: Blog and Research Progress Self-Assessment

Workshop: Subject Group Issue Workshop

November 7

Reading: Group/Self directed.

Writing: Blog

Workshop: Subject Group Issue Workshop

SECTION III: PRESENTING THE PAST

November 14: Individual Meetings about Final Essay

November 21: NO CLASS

November 28: Peer Directed Writing Workshop
Writing: Bring sample paragraph to class.

December 5: FINAL PRESENTATIONS
*****DUE: FINAL ESSAY**