

"THIS MACHINE KILLS FASCISTS!"

Protest Music & Social Change in the American Experience

FYS 143-2 — GETTYSBURG COLLEGE — FALL 2019

MW, 11:00—12:15, Science Center 348; R, 11:30—12:30, Breidenbaugh 403

Prof. Dave Powell, Ph.D.

Chair of Interdisciplinary Studies & Associate Professor of Education

111 Weidensall Hall—tel.: 337.6552

djpowell@gettysburg.edu

Office hours: TR, 10:00a—12:00p and by appointment anytime

To schedule an appointment: <https://calendly.com/profpow>

'Burg Program Partner

Joe Lynch, Executive Director of Alumni Relations

jlynch@gettysburg.edu

Epigraph

"It is only in his music, which Americans can admire because a protective sentimentality prevents their understanding of it, that the Negro in America can tell his story. It is a story that has yet to be told and no American wants to hear."

James Baldwin, "Many Thousands Gone"

"A folk song is what's wrong and how to fix it, or it could be whose hungry and where their mouth is, or whose out of work and where the job is or whose broke and where the money is or whose carrying a gun and where the peace is—that's folk lore and folks made it up because they seen that the politicians couldn't find nothing to fix or nobody to feed or give a job of work."

Woody Guthrie, in a letter to Alan Lomax (1940)

"I hate a song that makes you think that you are not any good. I hate a song that makes you think that you are just born to lose, bound to lose, no good to nobody. No good for nothing because you are too old or too young or too fat or too slim. Too ugly or too this or too that. Songs that run you down or make fun at you on account of you've had too much hard traveling. I am out to fight those songs to my very last breath of air and my last drop of blood. I am out to sing songs that will prove to you that this is your world, and that if it has hit you pretty hard and knocked you for a dozen loops, no matter what color, what size you are, how you are built, I'm out to sing the songs that make you take pride in yourself and in your work."

Woody Guthrie

CATALOG DESCRIPTION

The famous inscription Woody Guthrie placed on his guitar in 1943 says something profound about how many artists and musicians view their work: while art entertains us, it also can enlighten and liberate us as well. Unfortunately, the history of America often taught in schools focuses largely on names, dates, and other facts pieced together in an effort to tell a particular kind of story about America—one that does little to help us appreciate the struggle that runs like a swift current just beneath the surface of daily life. In this seminar we will revisit some of that history, focusing on the way musicians—from 19th century slaves to 20th century bluesmen, from

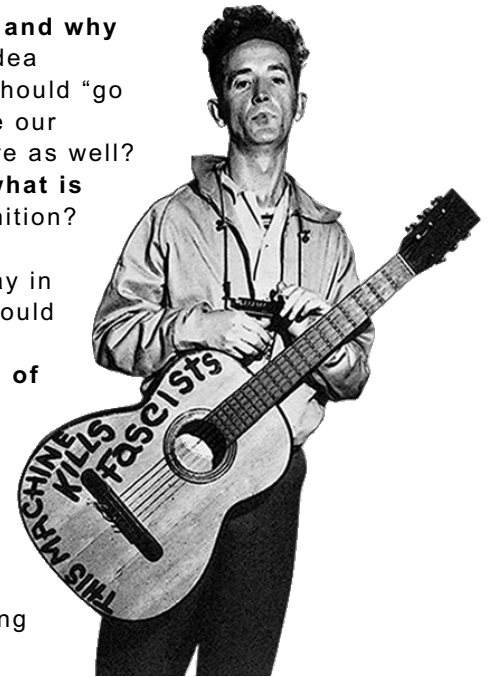
turn-of-the-century labor activists to Depression-era balladeers to Civil Rights marchers, and from war protesters of forty years ago to war protesters today—have attempted to right wrongs, educate sensibilities, and awaken the consciences of people in an effort to make America a place that lives up to its promise.

COURSE GOALS

Themes

FYS 143-2 is organized around a set of important themes. Each of these themes will be addressed early in the semester, and we will return to each one throughout the semester to “check in” on what we’re learning. Here they are:

- (1) **HISTORY: What is history, where does it come from, and why does it matter?** What is it good for? Is there any truth to the idea advanced by historian and activist Howard Zinn that students should “go into history in order to come out of it”? How does history shape our understanding not only of the past, but of the present and future as well?
- (2) **DEMOCRACY: What is the promise of America, and what is the “American Dream”?** Is economic security part of this definition? Personal freedom? What is the relationship between economic security and personal liberty? What role should government play in ensuring that everyone has access to the American Dream? Should everyone have access to it?
- (3) **COMMUNICATION: Is protest music an effective form of political communication?** How does music shape our values and political sensibilities? In what ways does music entertain us? Is musical expression that intended to achieve political goals somehow more effective when it is more than entertaining, or should political expression be confined to other means?



As we explore these themes we’ll ask, and try to answer, some enduring questions as well. What does it mean to live a meaningful life? What things in this life are worth committing to, and what are the limits of those commitments? What are our responsibilities to ourselves and to each other? We’ll try to hear the voices of people who have struggled to answer these questions, and will try to find within ourselves the ability to answer them as well.

Learning Goals

Reframed as learning objectives, we might describe the themes of the course, and their expected impact on your learning in this way: our job, together, is to change the way you think about some of the most enduring, and seemingly immutable, features of our society and shared culture. With this end in mind, FYS 143-2 is designed to:

- (1) Increase your familiarity with various forms of folk music created and performed through the 19th and 20th centuries right up to today

- (2) Trace a narrative about the experiences of individuals and social groups in American history who have struggled to overcome economic and social challenges in their attempts to fulfill the “American Dream,” and discuss the implications of this narrative for shaping how we understand both the past and present, as well as how we envision the future;
- (3) Help you prepare for the academic and social challenges of college life; and
- (4) Provide you with an opportunity to demonstrate your ability to successfully synthesize the key themes of the course in a way that demonstrates what you have learned throughout the semester.



FYS 143-2 satisfies the **MULTIPLE INQUIRIES—HUMANITIES** requirement of the Gettysburg Curriculum. As you satisfy this goal you will be introduced to multiple frameworks of analysis to help you increase your proficiency in reading texts that span the breadth of human expression. Our work in this course will draw on the perspectives and modes of inquiry employed in several fields, focusing most substantially on the discipline of history. You should emerge from the course with a stronger sense of what it means to be human, and with a better sense of how we express our humanity through music.

TEXTS & OTHER RESOURCES

Required Reading. Both the Petrus and Wolff texts are available in the College Bookstore; you’ll need to head online to find a copy of the Hayes book, but it can be had for a little less than Woody Guthrie himself probably paid for a full tank of gas when he drove to Oregon in 1941 to spend a month writing songs for \$266.66. I mean, you might have single textbooks in other classes that cost as much as he got paid for that. Let that blow your mind for a minute—then go buy the Hayes text—which is great, by the way—with the change you found in your pocket this morning.

Hayes, Nick. *Woody Guthrie and the Dust Bowl Ballads*. New York: Abrams, 2016.

Petrus, Stephen & Ronald D. Cohen. *Folk City: New York and the American Folk Music Revival*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Wolff, Daniel. *Grown Up Anger: The Connected Mysteries of Bob Dylan, Woody Guthrie, and the Calumet Massacre of 1913*. New York: HarperCollins, 2017.

Watching & Listening. Additional reading assignments, films, and other materials will be made available online in a password-protected course management space or via online collections made available by Musselman Library. You will also need to purchase (or continue) a subscription to **Apple Music** to access course playlists. Why Apple Music? Because it offers the best balance of artist royalties, social sharing, and a comprehensive catalogue of available music—and because all the playlists are already there. I’ll provide more details in class.

GENERAL EXPECTATIONS

Our work in the course will be carried out as disciplined inquiry involving *careful reading*, *analytic writing*, and *focused, philosophical discussion*.

Careful reading is crucial; you should do your best to complete all assigned readings promptly and diligently, giving careful consideration to questions of perspective and to arguments made in the text. You will be expected to complete every reading assignment *before* the class meeting in which it is due. The quality of our discussions will depend heavily on your careful reading of assigned work, so please do not take this responsibility lightly. You are also required to write something about everything you read for this class. More on that will be shared below.

Analytic writing: Your written work should give me a sense of how the ideas we read about and discuss in class are shaping the way you think about the history we are studying and the role music has played in shaping the political consciousness of the people who made that history—not to mention how it is shaping yours. Reading your written work provides me with important opportunities to appraise your engagement with and understanding of course materials and to start a meaningful one-on-one dialogue with you about your work in the course. Whether you think of yourself as a good writer or as a writer who needs improvement, you should feel free to explore new ideas through your writing and work through those ideas as you write. The best written work will make sophisticated arguments articulated well and with simplicity, will provide opinions that are convincingly supported, and will tie things together with a powerful and authentic voice—just like the best protest songs do. You are strongly encouraged to utilize the resources offered at the Writing Center in Breidenbaugh Hall throughout the semester as you work on translating your thoughts into writing.



Focused, philosophical discussion: This is a course centered on political questions and on big ideas, and, as such, your engagement with the ideas presented in course materials—and your responses to questions and ideas raised by others—will play a crucial role in determining the quality of our experience this semester. You are expected to participate actively in every class meeting. Though Mark Twain once suggested that it's better to remain silent and thought a fool than open your mouth and remove all doubt, we'll mostly ignore that advice here; silence may be golden, and, indeed, we will have many thoughtfully silent moments in class this semester, but silence will be broken by invitations to participate when appropriate. Expect to challenge ideas in class, and expect to be challenged on your thoughts, ideas, and values as well. Above all, expect to be challenged to share. Do not be shy about sharing your thoughts with your classmates, and do not be shy about disagreeing—respectfully—with others. Including me.

ASSIGNMENTS

Your assignments for this course are broken into two categories: common and self-selected. The common assignments are required for everyone; everyone will complete these and be graded on them, and they can't be skipped. Self-selected assignments are just what they sound like: they offer opportunities for you to select how you would like to show what you have learned in the course. The idea simply is to let you choose assignments that interest you and speak to your

strengths that you can add to the common assignments to arrive at a grade that reflects both your hard work and your mastery of course material. A breakdown of everything is included below. (NOTE: point totals listed indicate total possible points that can be earned on each assignment, depending on the quality of work presented.)

Common Assignments (60% of final grade)

In this first category are the assignments everyone will do. They include:

- **Daily Assignments** (15 points possible): Occasionally I'll give writing assignments or other assignments in class that will be graded and accumulated as daily assignments, totaling up to 15% of your final grade.
- **Midterm Assessments** (20 points possible—10 points each): Twice you'll have written assessments to complete to demonstrate your progress in the course. More details will be shared in class.
- **Final Assessment** (20 points possible): We'll finish the course with a final assessment. This will take one of three forms: a written exam taken in class; an oral exam taken in my office; or a self-designed project approved due at the conclusion of the course but approved in advance by me by no later than November 1.
- **Final Self-Assessment** (5 points possible): I'll ask everyone, when the course is over, to offer a frank self-assessment of their participation in the course.

Self-Selected Assignments

Your self-selected assignments are designed to be added to the common assignments to demonstrate what you have learned. Note that you will need to do *some* self-selected assignments to pass the class; how many you choose is up to you. To keep this syllabus from metastasizing I'll share those with you in another document.

A word about attendance...

Your attendance is expected at every class meeting and event, without exception. While emergencies do arise occasionally, and while I make every effort to be flexible and to be sensitive to your individual needs, the class simply will not function effectively—and you will not learn as much—if you or any of your classmates are not in class when we meet. Let me know immediately if you cannot be in class for some reason.

Final Evaluation

At the conclusion of the course the total number of points you have earned will be tallied and converted to a letter grade, which will then be reported to the Registrar. The low-point threshold of each letter grade is indicated on the chart below.

	93 A	90 A-
87 B+	83 B	80 B-
77 C+	73 C	70 C-
67 D+	63 D	60 D-

Final scores of 59 or below will result in a grade of F and no course credit will be awarded.

Please note that your final point total is not necessarily your final grade. I reserve the right to assign final grades that, in my view, reflect your total effort in the class, what you have learned, and what you have contributed to our class discussions and other activities.

Here's an additional consideration: I only give As to students who impress me—with uncommon insight, exceptional hard work, or both. I reserve the grades at the lower end of the scale for students who impress me too—but in a different way. The bottom line is that you'll have to work hard to make an A in this class, but you'd have to work hard to fail it too. Generally speaking, students who complete their work on time, and with care, can be assured that a grade in the B range is very much a possibility, but stepping into the highest grade category requires something more. While it's difficult to define exactly what "something more" means (partly because it is impossible to predict and can change from semester to semester based on the quality of work students produce and the nature of the course itself), most students have little trouble figuring it out: when you think you've done enough, do a little bit more. Push yourself to read with a little more care. Search out another article or song mentioned in the assigned reading. Participate more fully in class conversations and engage more fully with your classmates. Challenge us to see things from a different perspective. Prioritize this class over other things that compete for your attention, but do it responsibly. Earn that A, if you want it.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Academic Honesty at Gettysburg College

Gettysburg College seeks to promote and ensure academic honesty and personal integrity among students and other members of the College community, and does so through enforcement of the Gettysburg College Pledge. Any student who produces work within the context of an honor system like ours at Gettysburg should be aware that the onus for demonstrating fidelity to the code lies with the student alone. Teacher education and teaching itself are uniquely and fundamentally collaborative enterprises. As such, there may be times where you are unsure about how your work may relate to the stipulations of the Honor Code. If you ever have any questions about the Honor Code you should feel free to discuss them with me or visit the Provost's website:

http://www.gettysburg.edu/about/offices/provost/advising/honor_code/index.dot

Adjustments for Students with Special Educational Needs

Students with special needs who require accommodations to participate in class activities or meet course requirements should contact me as soon as possible. I'm here to help! All disability information will remain confidential.