

Humboldt State University
Department of Social Work

Social Justice Through Folk Song

SW 494 (MUS 485)

Spring, 2003
Fridays
12:00pm - 1:50pm
Siemens Hall 117

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Office Hours:
Tuesdays, 12:00pm-2:00pm

"A pamphlet, no matter how good, is never read more than once, but a song is learned by heart and repeated over and over."

--Joe Hill, November 29, 1914, in a letter written from the Salt Lake City jail.

Course Description This course will explore stories of injustice, social action, and social change through the lens of folk song. Different songwriters, performers, and songs will serve as the launching ground for discussions and performances in each class on historical and contemporary social justice issues and events. *The course will culminate with a campus presentation on socially just folk songs and the stories of their context.*

Course Materials

*The material we will be exploring each week is **only** available online on Blackboard (blackboard.humboldt.edu) except for the items noted below.*

1. Guthrie, Woody, and Lomax, Alan. (1964). *Library of Congress Recordings, Volumes 1-3*. Rounder Records. [**Available at The Metro, in downtown Arcata**]
2. Blood, Peter (ed.). (1992). *Rise Up Singing*. Sing Out! Publications. [**Available at the HSU Bookstore**]

Assignments

Your grade for the course will be based on three assignments and class participation that total 100 “units”.

Assignment #1: After listening to each week’s songs, post some thoughts on the Blackboard Discussion Board that reflect on explicit and implicit topics contextualizing the songs. **25 units.**

Assignment #2: There are many historical and contemporary events/topics that relate to songs we will be listening to. On the first day of class I will hand out a list of events/topics. You will circle a few you are interesting in learning more about. I’ll then pick one from the list and give it back to you the following class. Your assignment is to learn more about the event/topic and teach what you’ve learned to the rest of the class (you’ll get 10-15 minutes) on the week that it is relevant. You’ll also need to write-up what you’ve discovered in a 3-4 page paper. If there is a song you know that you’d like to share with the class (recorded or performed), feel free to bring it along. **25 units.**

Assignment #3: Some members of the class will sing socially just folk songs for our campus presentation; other members of the class will tell the stories that contextualize the songs; while other members of the class will help with the set-up, take-down, and advertising for the campus presentation. **May 2. 25 units.**

Class Participation: Staying current with the material demonstrates class participation, as does sharing your thoughts, ideas, feelings, questions, and concerns in class. **25 units.**

Grades

I am interested in co-creating a course with you that allows us to explore learning without being limited by social constructions around grades. If you’d prefer that I evaluate your assignments and assign a grade, I will. However, I invite you to evaluate yourself in this regard. For each assignment you may turn in a “Grade Self-Assessment” document (which you can access under “Course Information” in Blackboard) within which you can reflect on your experience of the assignment and your assessment of the number of “units” you deserve.

- I will let you know whether I agree with you or if I have a different perspective. I might ask you to explore some areas further, revise your grade, or come have a conversation with me.
- Final grades for the course will be determined by the total number of “units” according to the following table:

96 – 100	=A	66 – 70	=C
91 – 95	=A-	61 – 65	=C-
86 – 90	=B+	56 – 60	=D+
81 – 85	=B	51 – 55	=D
76 – 80	=B-	≤ 50	=F
71 – 75	=C+		

I prefer to have all turned-in written assignments be *single-spaced*, with standard 12 point Times New Roman font, and standard margins (1” top and bottom, 1¼” left and right). This format saves paper and is easy for me to read. If you can do this, great. If not, so be it, but *account for this* when you write your paper. In the end, please concern yourself more with content than length...a little bit shorter or a little bit longer is just fine if that’s what it takes to convey your thoughts. Written assignments can be emailed to me at rjs19@humboldt.edu if you’d like.

Classes

January 24 - Introduction

Today we will introduce ourselves to each other, become acquainted with purposes and commitments in relation to the course, explore a particular way of understanding people's lives and relationships, and step into conversation around the meaning of "folk songs."

January 31 - Folk Song History

As this course will largely focus on American (North, South, and Native) songs of social justice it will be helpful to get a sense for the development of folk music on this continent and who has supported the expansion of folk music into socially just topics. We will watch parts of two documentaries and talk a bit about Woody Guthrie and Bob Dylan.

Songs:

- Listen to the *Woody Guthrie Library of Congress Recordings* and read the liner notes.
- Browse "Bound For Glory: The Life and Times of Woody Guthrie," The Museum of Musical Instruments' virtual documentary exhibition devoted to Woody Guthrie. themomi.org/museum/Guthrie/index2.html

February 7 - Oppression, Discrimination, and Resistance: Race and Ethnicity

For many people, it is hard to think of the Civil Rights Movement separate from its songs. Undoubtedly, an entire course could be devoted to these songs. Today we will listen to songs that have supported and continue to support equality and justice for people of color around the world; we will watch a video on the song "We Shall Overcome," a song that has been shared in voice by countless people struggling to resist the marginalizing effects of racism; and we will talk about some of the events leading up to social protest and coming out of social action

Songs:

Amazing Grace, John Newton
Pick A Bale of Cotton, traditional
The Sweet Sunny South, traditional
Follow The Drinking Gourd, traditional
No More Auction Block for Me, traditional
Slipknot/Hangknot, Woody Guthrie
Strange Fruit, Billie Holiday and Lewis Allen
Keep Your Eyes On The Prize, traditional
We Shall Overcome, traditional
We Shall Not Be Moved, traditional
The Death of Emmett Till, Bob Dylan
Only A Pawn In Their Game, Bob Dylan
My Country 'Tis of Thee, Samuel Francis Smith

Freedom, Richie Havens
Across The Lines, Tracy Chapman
Stop That Train, Peter Tosh
Land of the Navajo, Peter Rowan
Now That The Buffalo's Gone, Buffy Sainte-Marie
Custer Died For Your Sins, Floyd Westerman
Missionaries, Floyd Westerman
A Postcolonial Tale, Joy Harjo and John Williams
Si Somos Americanos, Rolando Alarcón

February 14, 21 - Settlers, Migrant Workers, Farmers, and Union Labor

The lyrical phrasings, chord progressions, and rhythms of many folk songs (those that are related to social justice and those that are not) owe a great deal of gratitude to the pioneers, cowboys, servants, adventurers, rambler, outlaws, and workers that opened up the Western United States for colonization and exploitation. Over the next few weeks we will listen to some of these songs and find out about the stories they tell. We will also discover the connections some of these songs have with events unfolding today, such as issues facing farmers, farm laborers, and unions.

February 14

Songs:

The Days of 49/Tom Moore, traditional
Diamond Joe, traditional
Buffalo Skinners, traditional
Dust Bowl Refugee, Woody Guthrie
Talkin' Dust Bowl, Woody Guthrie
Pastures of Plenty, Woody Guthrie
Deportee (Plane Wreck Over Los Gatos), Woody Guthrie

February 21

Songs:

Farmer-Labor Train, Woody Guthrie
Highway Patrolman, Bruce Springsteen
Heartland, Willie Nelson and Bob Dylan
1913 Massacre, Woody Guthrie
Joe Hill, Alfred Hayes and Earl Robinson
Talking Miner, Woody Guthrie
Vigilante Man, Woody Guthrie
Tom Joad, Woody Guthrie
Ludlow Massacre, Woody Guthrie
The Internationale, Eugène Pottier and Pierre Chrétien Degeyter
Dark As A Dungeon, Merle Travis
We Shall Not Be Moved, traditional
La Plegaria a un Labrador, Victor Jara

February 28 - Poor and Working Folks

Outrage in relation to the extraordinary gap between those who are financially poor and those who are financially wealthy has been around for a long time. In addition to listening to some songs that voice this injustice, we will learn about immediately pressing issues such as “welfare reform,” the United States healthcare crisis, reduction and elimination of human services in California, and George W. Bush’s “economic stimulus” effort.

Songs:

Picture From Life’s Other Side, Charles E. Baer
Worried Man Blues, Woody Guthrie
Jesus Christ, Woody Guthrie
Man On The Street, Bob Dylan
Ballad of Hollis Brown, Bob Dylan
Working Class Hero, John Lennon
Used Cars, Bruce Springsteen
The Hobo, Hugh Shacklett
Talkin’ Bout A Revolution, Tracy Chapman

March 7, 14, 28 – War and Peace

There are, perhaps, more folk songs written in support of, and in opposition to, military violence than any other topic (except, maybe, love). We will listen to some of the better and lesser known ones. We will watch a documentary about people who refused to fight in World War II. Mostly, we will learn from class members about United States involvement in *many* not-so-widely-known military campaigns.

Songs (pace yourself over the next few weeks listening to these songs):

Two Soldiers, traditional
John Brown’s Body, traditional
Ranger’s Command, Woody Guthrie
The Biggest Thing Man Has Ever Done, Woody Guthrie
Soldier’s Last Letter, Ernest Tubb
The Ballad of Ira Hayes, Peter LaFarge
Train For Auschwitz, Tom Paxton
Eli Eli, Hannah Senesh
Morning Dew, Bonnie Dobson
Last Night I Had The Strangest Dream, Ed McCurdy
Where Have All The Flowers Gone, Pete Seeger
John Brown, Bob Dylan
Blowin’ In The Wind, Bob Dylan
Masters of War, Bob Dylan
Universal Soldier, Buffy Sainte-Marie
With God On Our Side, Bob Dylan
I Ain’t Marching Anymore, Phil Ochs
Alice’s Restaurant, Arlo Guthrie

Waist Deep In The Big Muddy, Pete Seeger
Happiness Is A Warm Gun, John Lennon and Paul McCartney
Revolution 1, John Lennon and Paul McCartney
Sam Stone, by John Prine
Agent Orange, Muriel Hogan
Viet Nam, Jimmy Cliff
Imagine, John Lennon
What's Going On, Al Cleveland, Marvin Gaye, Renaldo Benson
War, Bob Marley
Sólo Le Pido A Dios, León Gieco
Nicaragua, Bruce Cockburn
If I Had A Rocket Launcher, Bruce Cockburn
Bombs Over Baghdad, John Trudell
If It Were Up To Me, Cheryl Wheeler
To The Teeth, Ani DiFranco

April 4 - Oppression, Discrimination, and Resistance: **Gender, Sex, and Sexuality**

Social change following the Civil Rights Movement allowed other groups of people who experience marginalization at the hands of dominant power structures to stand up, call for action, and facilitate change with respect to the treatment of women, as well as people who identify with gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender culture. Today we will talk about *continued* inequities between men and women in the workplace and watch a locally produced video about domestic violence. We will also begin planning for the campus presentation.

Songs:

The Handsome Cabin Boy, traditional
Man Smart (Women Smarter), Harry Belafonte
I'm Gonna Be An Engineer, Peggy Seeger
Behind The Wall, Tracy Chapman
When I Was A Boy, Dar Williams
Lesbians Who Went To The Prom, Ron Romanovsky and Paul Phillips
Positive, Michael Franti and Charlie Hunter
Little Plastic Castle, Ani DiFranco

April 11 - Crime and Punishment

Today we will be joined for the first half of class by Maia Cheli-Colando, Director of the Humboldt Folklife Society. She will talk with us about the organization and her particular interests in relation to folk music. After listening to some songs about law enforcement and going over some criminal justice statistics, the rest of class will feature class members teaching us about historical and present day criminal justice activities.

Songs:

Stagger Lee/Stack-A-Lee, traditional

Pretty Boy Floyd, traditional

Seven Curses, Bob Dylan

Walls of Red Wing, Bob Dylan

The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll, Bob Dylan

Ohio, Neil Young

Preguntas por Puerto Montt, Victor Jara

Wounded Knee, Floyd Westerman.

For Anna Mae Pictou Aquash, Whose Spirit Is Present Here and In The Dappled Stars (For We Remember The Story and Must Tell It Again So We May All Live), Joy Harjo,

Susan Williams, John Williams

Hurricane, Bob Dylan

Black Boys on Mopeds, Sinead O'Connor

April 18 - Consumerism and Globalization

Some time ago a North American cultural belief was, "What's good for General Motors is good for America." In what ways is this notion still being enacted, how has it changed to encompass a global perspective, and what are some of the implications for people's lives and relationships when this idea influences public policy? These questions will allow us to critically evaluate legal constructions around "corporate personhood," as well as cultural emphasis on accumulation of material goods as indicative of growth and success. Today's class will include class members teaching us about international organizations and agreements that weigh heavily on issues of social justice.

Songs:

Do Re Mi, Woody Guthrie

John Henry, traditional

Little Boxes, Malvina Reynolds

It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding), Bob Dylan

Mercedes Benz, Janis Joplin

Throwing Stones, Bob Weir and John Barlow

Call It Democracy, Bruce Cockburn

Mountain O' Things, Tracy Chapman

Poet Game, Greg Brown

Boomtown, Greg Brown

Blow 'Em Away, Chuck Brodsky

Slow Food, Greg Brown

Our Town, Iris DeMent
This Is Your Country, Luka Bloom
East Asheville Hardware, David Wilcox
WTO, Dana Lyons
Hang A Flag In The Window, David Rovics

April 25 - The Environment

Since Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring* and subsequent federal legislation that created the Environmental Protection Agency (1970) and the Endangered Species Act (1973), songs about the degradation and protection of our environment have steadily grown in popularity. Today we will listen to some of these. We also hear from class members what they've discovered in relation to environmental policy that is immediately pressing.

Songs:

The Great Dust Storm (Dust Storm Disaster), Woody Guthrie
Talkin' Columbia, Woody Guthrie
Grand Coulee Dam, Woody Guthrie
Paradise, John Prine
If A Tree Falls, Bruce Cockburn
The Tree, Dana Lyons
Cows With Guns, Dana Lyons
Barry the Bobcat, Bill Aubrecht
25 Miles Away, Bill Aubrecht
Crazy Horse, John Trudell
They Didn't Listen, Floyd Westerman

Assignment #1 (reflections on songs) "Grade Self-Assessment" due [optional]

May 2 - Campus Performance

Today is the big day...or a big day. We will take over the Quad from 12:00pm-1:00pm. We will sing our songs and tell our stories. We will engage in action and protest. We will arouse concern and support resistance in our listening audience. We will let people know about important issues of social justice that affect all our lives. Hopefully, we will be joined in our efforts by community organizations engaged in similar work who will offer information at tables surrounding the Quad. Then we will clean the place up.

May 9 – Looking Back and Looking Forward

What happens next? What came out of this course experience? What went well? What could go better? How will class members "keep on keeping on" with the issues that are important to them? We'll figure it out today.

Assignment #3 (campus presentation) "Grade Self-Assessment" due [optional]