

SUMMER 2026 - MUS242L721

Popular Music in America

Welcome to Pop Music in America! My name is Mike Napolitano, and I'll be your instructor this Summer. I'm the Interim Director of the Music Program, where I work with our ensembles, music curriculum, and student arts initiatives. My background is in music and communications, and much of my work focuses on how music tells the story of American culture, identity, and social change — which makes this course one of my favorite classes to teach.

Over the next four weeks, we are going to move through more than 100 years of American popular music history, exploring not only how the music sounds, but why it mattered. From the musical landscape surrounding the Civil War through the development of jazz, blues, rock, hip-hop, and contemporary popular music, we'll look at how music reflects the people, movements, struggles, and celebrations that shaped the American experience.

A few important course details before we begin:

- This course is fully asynchronous, meaning there are no scheduled class meeting times. You will be able to complete coursework on your own schedule each week, but it is very important that you stay organized and keep up with assignment deadlines.
- Course materials, lectures, listening examples, discussion prompts, and assignment information will all be posted in Brightspace under the Content section.
- Because this is a condensed Summer course, the pace moves quickly. Staying engaged each week — especially with the listening assignments and discussions — will make the course much more enjoyable and manageable.
- Music history is really one long connected story. Each unit builds on the last, so try not to fall behind. The sounds, artists, and cultural movements we discuss are all connected in fascinating ways.
- Most importantly: come into this course curious. You do not need to be a musician or music expert to succeed here. Some of the best conversations in this class come from students making connections between the music we study and the music they already love.

Between now and the start of the session, I encourage you to do one thing: listen to music intentionally. Pick an album, artist, or playlist you enjoy and think about why it resonates with you. Once the course begins, we'll start tracing how American music evolved into the soundtrack of modern culture.

I'm excited to get started and look forward to working with all of you this Summer. If you have any questions before the course begins, please don't hesitate to reach out.



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