Michael J. Kramer  
HISTORY 300-0-22  
U.S. Popular Music History  
Day/Time: MW 12:30-1:50  
Office Address: Harris Hall Room 212  
Office Phone: (847) 467-3879  
Email Address: mjk@northwestern.edu  
Maximum Enrollment: 45  

COURSE DESCRIPTION: This course examines the historical significance of popular music in the United States from the mid-nineteenth century to the present. No musical training is necessary to enroll in the course, however we will think about how to analyze musical sound as historical “text.” We will also focus on the cultural, social, political, and economic dimensions (the “context”) of genres ranging from Tin Pan Alley to blues, jazz, rhythm and blues, country, folk, soul, rock, disco, hip-hop, and classical. We will explore popular music as an art form, a business, an activity of identity-making, a phenomenon encompassing both conflict and consensus, and a key area in the life of Americans. Students are expected to attend lectures and discussion sections, as well as complete all reading, listening, and viewing assignments. Writing effectively about popular music history is a key aspect of the class: there will be three essays that ask students to analyze how popular music has shaped the broader cultural history of the US.  

AREA OF CONCENTRATION: Americas  

TEACHING METHOD: Lectures and discussion sections  

EVALUATION METHOD: Three five to seven page essays, additional short assignments and quizzes, participation  

GRADING BASIS: Student option  

TENTATIVE READING LIST:  
Additional readings, listening mixes, and films online.  

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OR PERSONAL STATEMENT: Michael J. Kramer works at the interdisciplinary intersection of historical scholarship, the arts, and cultural criticism. He is the author of The Republic of Rock: Music and Citizenship in the Sixties Counterculture (Oxford University Press, 2013; paperback, 2017). His new historical research explores the relationship between technology and tradition in the US folk music revival from the early twentieth century to the present. He teaches at Northwestern University, where he co-directs NUDHL, the Northwestern University Digital Humanities Laboratory. He also works as a dramaturg and editor. He writes about history, the arts, politics, digital humanities, and other topics for numerous publications and blogs at michaeljkramer.net.