Fiction and Culture of the Americas: Sounding American COM LIT 156AC

Course Description

What is meant when we say someone or something “sounds American”? Can a person sound like a certain gender, social class, sexuality, or race? How would we possibly define that sound? And what might it mean to think of a culture by the ways it sounds and listens, instead of how it looks or sees? This course will explore these questions and others by studying podcasts, poems, songs, novels, and the changing forms of sonic technologies like microphones, radios, mp3s, turntables, and more. We will examine the social politics of “vocal fry,” the creation of sonic warfare, the techno-sonic inventions of hip hop, punk rock, and EDM, the secrets of Siri and Alexa, and literature’s role in helping us learn to listen. Authors and songwriters will include Gloria Anzaldúa, Lady Gaga and Beyoncé, Black Flag, Claudia Rankine, Bob Dylan, Eudora Welty, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, David Sedaris, and others.

Given that this course is integrative and comparative and addresses theoretical and analytical issues relevant to understanding race, culture, and ethnicity in American history and society, it does fulfill the American Cultures requirement.

Prerequisites

There are no prior course requirements.

Course Goals

After successfully completing this course, you will be able to:

- Explain how the way we listen plays into histories of community, prejudice, and personal identity.
- Identify public norms that have operated to police sound in the United States.
- Evaluate how women are changing the norms of “professional” and “presidential” speech.
- Compare the ways in which poets draw attention to the microaggressions of daily speech at the intersection of gender and race.
- Analyze Eric Lott’s concept of “love and theft.”
- Explain the debates between Zora Neale Hurston and Richard Wright about the use of dialect in literature and identify the songs from a variety of musicians that wrestle with and thematize how music can challenge any unitary identity.
• Seriously consider disability first as a consequence of colonialism and war, and second as the engine for our contemporary technology.
• Understand the fundamental role of hard-of-hearing engineers, test subjects, and theorists in defining how the telephone became a medium, how compression was invented, and how sign-language in indigenous communities helped lay the groundwork at an intercultural and colonial level for a later intersectional politics of disability and otherness.

Instructor Information, Contact, Office Hours, & Communication

Course Instructor
TBD

Graduate Student Instructors (GSIs)
• TBD

While the instructor will interact with the whole class and will oversee all activities and grading, as well as being available to resolve any issues that may arise, the GSIs will be your main point of contact. Your GSIs are responsible for assisting you directly with your questions about assignments and course requirements, as outlined in the Assignments and Calendar. The GSIs will also facilitate ongoing discussion and interaction with you on major topics in each module.

Office Hours

The course instructor and GSIs will offer virtual office hours, when students can communicate real time (synchronously) using Zoom. While these chats are optional they can be valuable for discussion, answering questions, and reviewing for exams. Zoom office hours are optional; no points are awarded for participation.

Day & Time: TBD

The session will be for one hour. However, if no one shows up (via Zoom) in the first 15 minutes, then that office hour will be cancelled.

Course Mail
Make sure to check the Course Mail for messages from the instructor. You can access course email within bCourses by clicking on the Inbox link or choose to have your course mail forwarded to your personal email account or your phone.

We will try our best to reply to your messages within 24 hours. Please refrain from last-minute emails, as we cannot guarantee an immediate response. Do not expect an email response over the weekend. Please only write emails of a professional nature, and limit them to shorter questions which may be answered in a sentence or two. Broad questions should be reserved for office hours—and we encourage you to visit our virtual office hours via Zoom.

Course Materials and Technical Requirements

Required Materials

- All course readings and required materials will be provided within the bCourses platform.

Technical Requirements

This course is built on a Learning Management system (LMS) called Canvas and you will need to meet these [computer specifications to participate within this online platform](#).

Optional

Canvas allows you to record audio or video files of yourself and upload them in the course. Although doing so is not required for any of the activities, using these features will enhance your engagement in the course. If you would like to use these features, you will need to have a webcam and a microphone installed on your computer.

Technical Support

If you are having technical difficulties please alert one of the GSIs immediately. However, understand that neither the GSIs, nor the professor can assist you with technical problems. You must call or email tech support and make sure you resolve any issues immediately.

*In your course, click on the "Help" button on the bottom left of the global navigation menu*. Be sure to document (save emails and transaction numbers) for all interactions with tech support. *Extensions and late submissions will not be accepted due to “technical difficulties.”*

Learning Activities
VERY IMPORTANT

You won't be able to access your course material until you read and make your pledge to Academic Integrity.

You are expected to fully participate in all the course activities described here.

- Read all assigned readings
- Watch and listen to the lecture presentations
- Read web-based announcements and postings assigned during the course
- Compose and post assigned responses to lectures and readings
- Complete all module assignments
- Complete the final exam

Modules

A module is a grouping of topics related to one area of study, typically with readings, lectures and various kinds of assignments. Each module contains a list of Learning Outcomes for the module. Your assignments reflect the learning activities to perform to reach those outcomes. For an at-a-glance view of due dates and projects, refer to the course Calendar within bCourses.

Reading Assignments

Each module includes assigned readings relevant to each topic covered in that module.

Multimedia Lectures

Recorded lectures support your readings and assignments but also contain additional material that may be included in the exams. Each module has been broken into sections. You are expected to take notes while viewing, reading, and listening to the lectures as you would in a regular classroom. For podcasts, you may also choose to print the transcripts.

Discussion Forums

Each module contains a group discussion in which we ask you to write reflectively and critically about the discussion topic. Your posts and responses are considered your class participation and represent a unique opportunity for you to exchange views with your group-mates, share experiences and resources, and ensure your understanding of the course material.

Discussion groups have been pre-assigned and include other members of your GSI’s section. When you navigate to a discussion forum, you will automatically be taken to
your group's instance of that discussion and to your group's space within the course. When finished with the discussion, you will need to navigate from your group space back to the main course space in order to continue participating in other aspects of the course.

While the Discussion Forum assignments are asynchronous (not real time), you will be expected to make an initial posting by 11:55pm Wednesday (PDT) and to respond to at least two or more other students' postings by 11:55 pm Friday; continued participation throughout the remainder of the week is highly encouraged. See the instructions within each discussion forum for further guidelines.

**Close Readings**

Each week, we will collaboratively annotate one passage selected from that week's readings. You will access passages through the “Collaborations” link on bCourses, then contribute your notes and ideas by posting them as marginal comments in a shared Google Doc. This activity is designed to encourage us to pay close attention to the texts we read, build conversations around the nuances of our course materials, and practice our analysis skills. GSIs will be able to answer questions about the close-reading format.

**Additional Weekly Assignments**

**Sonic Walking Tour**

Emily Thompson’s website “The Roaring Twenties” is an extraordinary attempt to help us experience the soundscape of the past, in this case, New York City in the 1920s.

In this assignment, you will begin by reading Thompson’s “Intro” to the website. You can then proceed to the sections on “Sound,” “Space,” and “Time.” Citing at least four documents and / or video or sound clips from the website, write a 500-word post about how sound helped create the spatial divisions, communities, and social hierarchies of New York City in the 1920s.

You might enrich your writing in this post by borrowing from some of the vocabulary you've learned in this module (“noise,” “sonic color line,” “the listening ear”) to describe how sound and listening, whether from everyday citizens or government officials, can organize social space. You could also compare how you hear the sounds with the description of those sounds by their contemporary complainants.

**Archive Remix**

Studs Terkel was one of the most wonderful sound historians of the 20th century. Fortunately for us, an extraordinary website has been set up to archive his sounds and to allow us to work directly with them. For this assignment you will head over to the
WFMT Studs Terkel Radio Archive and experiment with the “Remix” function on the site under the “Interact” tab. There you can search previous programs and then highlight and drag the transcriptions from one box to another in order to create your own sound pieces. You can find inspiration from the “Reuse” section of the site. Compose a one-minute sound collage that creates a new, but thematically coherent work. You could put the voices of people who never spoke into a single dialogue, repeat a word or phrase multiple times to draw attention to it, create a chorus of different people saying the same thing, or any of a number of creative remixes to make this archive tell a new story. This work will serve as preparation, a space of experimentation, for your longer audio essay later in the course.

**Hit Record**

Compose a brief (30 seconds to one minute) analysis of “vocal fry.” While you do not need to include a sonic citation from Fresh Air, you should comment on what you think about this sound, if your opinion changed or not after listening to the Fresh Air commentators, and how you would describe the sound and explain its meaning to a friend or family member.

Record your commentary using your cellphone or computer and the free software Audacity, and upload it to bCourses as a .mp3 file.

**Audio Essay**

What does it mean to listen, rather than to read? How does hearing differ from seeing? Can sound carry the same burden of meaning as a written text? While not necessarily aiming to answer all of these questions (or even to pose them), part of your task in this assignment will be an investigation into the aesthetics, politics, and sociality of sound that will help you question the medium you will use to think. In short, the podcast provides an opportunity for you to apply the sonic practices of interpretation we have developed in this class for the production of a sound essay. Your topics can range from the interrogation of a specific theoretical point (Which aural cues establish the difference between irony and sincerity? How do writers convey tone on the page, and how do they read it aloud? What are the social uses of vocal fry, and where do you encounter it? What is the border between speech and music?), to a critical interpretation of one of the poems, articles, stories, audio recordings, songs, or books we’ve encountered on the syllabus. Although you may use more than one object in your analysis, and while you can include material from outside the class, your materials must support a clear central argument whose main argument addresses the materials and theme of the class. Specific instructions are available in the bCourse site.

**Five-Page Paper**
In this essay you will use the “close reading” skills you’ve developed earlier in this course to analyze any material from the first five modules, except for Danez Smith’s “not an elegy for Mike Brown” and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s *Dictee*, both of which you have already written about in close reading assignments. Your paper should engage in a detailed and creative analysis of an object (text, radio documentary, map, etc.), and this analysis should demonstrate how the textual evidence (quotations, formal structure) supports an original claim. The paper should be without grammatical flaws that impede understanding, and should follow all formatting guidelines (see below). The introductory paragraph should conclude with the paper’s main argument or “thesis statement.” Each paragraph should include an argumentative topic sentence that develops the paper’s thesis statement, as well as an observation about the text, a citation from the text, and an analysis of that citation (or “textual evidence”) that helps prove and develop the hypothesis made in the paragraph’s topic sentence. Paragraphs may require more than one citation to support that paragraph’s argument. The paper’s title should also advance an argumentative claim and alert the reader to the paper’s topic and approach.

**Formatting:** The essay should include your full name and page numbers, and should be written in 12 point Times New Roman font. Your paper should be double spaced. You should use 1” margins. However, when citing any passage longer than three-typewritten lines, you should indent an additional .5” on either side of the quotation. Your initial quotation should include the author or artist’s name and a page number in a parenthesis after the quotation. For example: (McEnaney, 11). If you are quoting from a poem, you should include the line number(s) instead of the page number(s). After this first quotation, you do not need to list the author’s name, unless you are citing various authors throughout the essay.

There are three main ways to cite textual works.

1) Introduce a complete sentence quotation after your own complete sentence and a colon. In this case, you need to write a complete sentence, followed by a colon (:), which would be followed by a complete sentence or sentences from the passage you are quoting. For example: Anzaldúa argues that she speaks for a people who refuse to accept a monolithic idea of language: “We speak a patois, a forked tongue, a variation of two languages” (77).

2) Introduce a complete sentence quotation with a phrase like s/he or they “writes, says, argues, states, proposes” etc. For example: Anzaldúa writes, “We needed a language with which we could communicate with ourselves, a secret language” (77).

3) Integrate a quotation into your own writing without breaking the grammatical sense of either. For example: In Anzaldúa’s chapter, we counter the idea that “language is a homeland,” and she develops this idea in connection with various histories of migration” (77). Or: While she writes
that “Chicanas use nosotros whether we’re male or female” (76), contemporary critics prefer the term “chicanx.” Or: This argument relies on the difference between a “standard (formal, Castillian) Spanish” and a different notion of language, what she describes as “a forked tongue” (77).

If you are citing a podcast or a film, you should include the author or director’s name, or that of the program, followed by the time marker (the minute and seconds) in the piece: (Fresh Air, 12:25).

*For additional advice on citational guidelines please visit the Purdue Owl website

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_general_format.html

Final Exam

You will take a 3-hour, closed-book proctored final exam. There will be no make-up exam. Students must take the final examination in person or arrange to have the examination proctored if you cannot come to campus. Review the Proctor Info on the left navigation menu. Off-site proctor applications must be submitted prior to July 12th.

This year's final exam will be held on TBD over bCourses. *If you miss taking the final or try to take it in a manner for which you have not received permission, you will fail this class automatically.*

Reminder: Your Course End Date

Your course will end on August 13th. As you work through the course, please keep the end date in mind, and if you want to save any commentary or assignments for future reference, please make sure to print or copy/paste those materials before your access ends.

Grading and Course Policies

Your final course grade will be calculated as follows:

**Table 1: Final Grade Percentages**

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<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage of Grade</th>
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Discussion Assignments | 10%
---|---
Close Reading Assignments / Virtual Sonic Walking Tour, Hit Record, and Archive Remix | 15%
Weekly Quizzes | 10%
5-page Essay | 20%
Audio Essay | 20%
Final Exam | 25%

You **must pass** the final exam to pass the course.

It is important to note that not all components are graded online and included in the online course grade book. Because of this, the online course grade book will not display your overall course grade at any given time or your final grade. It should simply be used to assess your performance on the components that are included within it. Your final letter grade will be mailed to you by the registrar's office.

**Late Work Policy**

Late work will lose a third of a letter grade every day past the deadline (i.e. from a B- to C+). After three days, late work will no longer be accepted.

**Course Policies**

**Promptness**

Homework assignments and discussion forum postings all have specific final due dates and times. You will not receive full credit if assignments are submitted after the indicated due date.

Further, each online activity must be submitted through the course website by the due date. Fax or mail submission will not be accepted. Students who wait until the final hours prior to a submission deadline risk having problems with their ISP, hardware, software, or various other site access difficulties. Therefore, it is advisable to submit assignments and tests through the course website early. The multiple days allowed for submission are to accommodate the busy schedules of working professionals, not to accommodate procrastination. Students should plan accordingly and get into the habit of checking the course website several times each week, and submitting and posting early.
Honor Code

The student community at UC Berkeley has adopted the following Honor Code: "As a member of the UC Berkeley community, I act with honesty, integrity, and respect for others." The expectation is that you will adhere to this code.

Collaboration and Independence

Reviewing lecture and reading materials and studying for exams can be enjoyable and enriching things to do with fellow students. This is recommended. However, unless otherwise instructed, homework assignments and the online exam are to be completed independently and materials submitted as homework should be the result of one’s own independent work.

Collegiality

During our discussions, challenges must be posed professionally and respectfully. Discriminatory, intimidating, and otherwise intolerant language will not be permitted and will be addressed immediately.

Cheating

A good lifetime strategy is always to act in such a way that no one would ever imagine that you would even consider cheating. Anyone caught cheating on a quiz or exam in this course will receive a failing grade in the course and will also be reported to the University Center for Student Conduct. The expectation is that you will be honest in the taking of exams.

Plagiarism

All written work submitted in this course, except for acknowledged quotations, is to be expressed in your own words. It should also be constructed upon a plan of your own devising. The Berkeley Campus Code of Student Conduct defines plagiarism as “the use of intellectual material produced by another person without acknowledging its source” and stipulates that plagiarism includes:

1. Copying from the writings or works of others into one’s academic assignment without attribution, or submitting such work as if it were one’s own;
2. Using the views, opinions, or insights of another without acknowledgment; or
3. Paraphrasing the characteristic or original phraseology, metaphor, or other literary device of another without proper attribution.
Unacknowledged use of the words or ideas of others from any medium (print, digital, or otherwise) is plagiarism. The submission of plagiarized work will, under University rules, render the offending student subject to an F grade for the work in question or for the whole course, and will also make him/her liable for referral to the Student Judicial Affairs Office for further disciplinary action. Educate yourself about the campus code of conduct in relation to plagiarism. Ignorance is not an excuse. If you feel overwhelmed about an assignment, speak to the professor or your GSI. DO NOT PLAGIARIZE!

**Academic Integrity and Ethics**

Cheating on exams and plagiarism are two common examples of dishonest, unethical behavior. Honesty and integrity are of great importance in all facets of life. They help to build a sense of self-confidence, and are key to building trust within relationships, whether personal or professional. There is no tolerance for dishonesty in the academic world, for it undermines what we are dedicated to doing - furthering knowledge for the benefit of humanity.

**Incomplete Course Grade**

Students who have substantially completed the course but for serious extenuating circumstances, are unable to complete the final exam, may request an Incomplete grade. This request must be submitted in writing or by email to the GSI and course instructor. You must provide verifiable documentation for the seriousness of the extenuating circumstances. According to the policy of the college, Incomplete grades must be made up within the first three weeks of the next semester.

**Students with Disabilities**

If you are requiring course accommodations due to a physical, emotional, or learning disability contact the UC Berkeley’s Disabled Students’ Program (DSP).

Notify the instructor and GSI through course email and inform them which accommodations you would like to use.

UC Berkeley is committed to providing robust educational experiences for all learners. With this goal in mind, we have activated the ALLY tool for this course. You will now be able to download content in a format that best fits your learning preference. PDF, HTML, EPUB and MP3 are now available for most content items. For more information visit the alternative formats link or watch the video entitled, "Ally First Steps Guide."

**End of Course Evaluation**
Before your course end date, please take a few minutes to participate in our Course Evaluation to share your opinions about this course. You will be able to access the evaluation on the left-side navigation link. The evaluation does not request any personal information, and your responses will remain strictly confidential. You may only take the evaluation once.

*Subject to Change

Course Outline

Week 1: White Noise

Lectures
- White Noise
- A reading of Danez Smith’s “not an elegy for Mike Brown”
- Border Sounds
- From the War of the Worlds to Black Power

Readings + Audio/Visual Resources
- Smith, "not an Elegy for Mike Brown"
- Anzaldúa, “How to Tame a Wilde Tongue”
- Sterne, "Enemy Voice"
- Inés Casillas, "Listening to a Modern Family's Accent"
- Fallows, "That Weirdo Announcer-Voice Accent: Where It Came From and Why It Went Away"

Week 2: The Sonic Color Line

Lectures
- The Sonic Color Line
- Off the Reservation
- Shipyards and Sounds

Readings + Audio/Visual Resources
- Stoever, "Splicing the Sonic Color Line"
- McNickle, "The Surrounded" (excerpt)
- Boas, "On Alternating Sounds"
- Jelly-Schapiro, "High Tide, Low Ebb"
- Tony Schwartz, “Nueva York” (radio documentary)
- Rebecca Solnit, “Shipyards and Sounds” (map)
• Emily Thompson, “The Roaring Twenties” (interactive website)

**Week 3: Working Voices**

Lectures

• The Sound of Working
• Speech Music
• Autotune: The Mathematics of Hip Hop

Readings + Audio/Visual Resources

• Terkel, Working (excerpt); Listen to audio excerpts from Working
• Pitchfork," How Auto-Tune Revolutionized the Sounds of Popular Music"
• Steve Reich, Different Trains (sound recording)
• Harry Partch, from US Highball (sound recording)
• Radiolab, “Behaves So Strangely” (podcast)

**Week 4: The Case of *Dictee* and the “Phonosonic Nexus”**

Lectures

• Finding Language
• The Word Made Flesh
• The Phonosonic Nexus

Readings + Audio/Visual Resources

• Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, *Dictee*
• Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, “Mouth to Mouth” (within Lecture)
• Harkness, "Introduction" to *The Songs of Seoul*

**Week 5: The Gendered Soundscape**

Lectures

• The Gendered Soundscape
• What Does it Mean to “Sound Gay”?
• How Do You Hear Fry?
• The Politics of Microaggressions

Readings + Audio/Visual Resources

• Sedaris, "Go Carolina
• Rankine, Citizen (excerpt)
• Ginsberg, "America"
• Hess, "Why Old Men Find Young Women’s Voices So Annoying"
• Lexicon Valley, “Vocal Fry or Creaky Voice in Young American Women”
• “The Science Behind Hating Hilary Clinton’s Voice”
• Ehrick, Radio and the Gendered Soundscape (excerpt)
• David Thorpe, Do I Sound Gay? (film)
• Fresh Air, “From Upspeak to Vocal Fry: Are We ‘Policing’ Young Women’s Voices?”

Week 6: Problems of Authenticity: Dialect, Song, and Identity

Lectures

• A Voice Across History
• Translating Race
• Dialect and Authenticity

Readings + Audio/Visual Resources

• Welty, "Where is the Voice Coming From?"
• Hughes, “The Weary Blues”
• Guillén poems translated by Hughes in Cuba Libre
• So, "Pentatonic Democracy"
• Robeson, “Chee-Lai” (sound recording)
• Hurston, "Stories in Conflict"
• Write, "Between Laughter and Tears"
• Wright, "Long Black Song"

Week 7: Musical Masks: From Protest Songs to Riot GRRL

Lectures

• Dylan’s Love and Theft – Interview with Timothy Hampton
• Remix Culture
• Punk and Identity

Readings + Audio/Visual Resources

• Hampton, "Dylan, Rimbaud, and Visionary Song"
• Rings, "A Foreign Sound to Your Ear"
• Blind Lemon Jefferson, “See That My Grave Is Kept Clean” (song)
• Blind Willie Johnson, “Jesus Make Up My Dying Bed” (song)
• Bukka White, “Fixin’ To Die Blues” (song)

- Patti Smith, “Land” (song)
- New York Dolls, “Personality Crisis” (song)
- Black Flag, “White Minority” (song)
- Bad Brains, “I Against I” (song)
- Fugazi, “Suggestion” (song)
- Wugazi, “Nowhere to Wait” (song)
- Bikini Kill, “Rah! Rah! Replica” (song)
- Against Me, “Transgender Dysphoria Blues” (song)
- Danger Mouse, *The Grey Album*
- Girl Talk, “In Step” (song)
- The Clash, “Straight to Hell” (song)
- MIA, “Paper Planes” (song)

**Week 8: Sonic Disability: How Deafness Defined the MP3**

**Lectures**

- Disability and the War Machine
- Seeing Sound
- Deafness, the Telephone, and Compression

**Readings + Audio/Visual Resources**

- Schwartz, "Vocal Ability and Musical Performances of Nuclear Damages in the Marshall Islands"
- Nasser, "Helen Keller and the Glove that Couldn't Hear"
- Hochman, "Representing Plains Indian Sign Language"
- Fisher & Ganz, "How Well Can You Hear Audio Quality?"
- Lady Gaga feat. Beyoncé, “Telephone”
- Sterne, "Perceptual Technics"