

Music and Social Change in America

We will examine American music -- the artists and their songs -- that relate to social issues, notably politics and ethnicity, with an emphasis on the message, not the style. How have songwriters used their words to influence social and political change?

Moderator:	Robert Dorin
Date and Time:	Monday 10:00 AM - Noon 10 weeks, starting February 19, 2018
Format:	Seminar
Location:	Smith College, Lilly Hall Room 308

Description: The seminar will, hopefully, encompass a variety of musical genres — folk music, of course, but also blues, hip-hop, and, perhaps, punk — and span a wide range of topics — the plight of African-Americans, women’s lives, protest songs, and songs of immigrants. Participants will be asked to make the case that music has had a significant effect on our emotions and opinions regarding class, labor, war, and race. And, while we are familiar with the folk minstrels of our youth — Guthrie, Dylan, Baez, Seeger, Peter, Paul, and Mary, et al — participants are encouraged to recognize not only liberal and anti-war messages, but other viewpoints as well. Remember the hawkish “Ballad of the Green Berets” or George M. Cohan’s “Over There”? Humorists (e.g., Tom Lehrer) had an impact as well. Feel free to share your own memories and life experiences (festivals?), and present audio and video clips. The seminar should be lively and fun, but also poignant and perhaps controversial.

Role of participants: Each participant will do a presentation of approximately 30 minutes and lead a short discussion on a particular songwriter, genre, or even a single song — or, possibly, a social category or movement. The expectation is that a case can be made that music did, in fact, have a social impact.

Resources: The Internet is an obvious resource. In addition, a few books I found useful as I prepared this proposal are:

- *Talkin’ Bout a Revolution*, Dick Weissman
- *Ready for a Brand New Beat: How "Dancing in the Street" Became the Anthem for a Changing America*, Mark Kurlansky
- *Woody Guthrie: A Life*, Joe Klein.

There are countless other books on the subject.

About the Moderator: Robert retired from the computer tech industry, and moved from greater Boston to the Happy Valley in 2015. He has taken 5 LIR seminars, reflecting his wide range of interests (e.g., science, pop culture, economics). This will be his first experience as a moderator.

Maximum number of participants: 18

Emeriti accepted: no

Course # 18SMS