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DESCRIPTION

This class has two goals. We will study Bob Dylan's extensive body of songs, both as recorded music and as literature. At the same time, we'll discuss and explore the context of that work – the life and times of Dylan, as well as the cultural and musical traditions he taps and reinvents. There are no prerequisites—the class is designed to interest and provoke those who have no prior knowledge of Bob Dylan's life or work as well as those who already know and care a lot.

The class will be structured around a weekly presentation on some aspect of Dylan's work or career, followed by a group discussion of the week's material. Some classes will also involve films about Dylan. A course website will host the weekly reading/listening/viewing assignments.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Interviews, chapters from books, lyrics, and other written material will be aggregated on the course website (copyright/fair use permitting.) Links will be provided to the viewing and listening assignments.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

All students will be expected to attend class weekly and participate in class discussions. Every other week, you'll turn in a short answer (1-2 pages) to an assigned question, and the culminating project will be a 4-to-6-page essay on any Dylan-related topic of your choosing.

GRADING

Weekly class participation & attendance will be worth 40% of the final grade, writing assignments every two weeks will be worth 35%, and the final essay will be worth 25%. There will be no exams or quizzes.

Week 1 – Jan. 20: Who is this guy, and why should we care? What will we talk about?

No writing assignment due today.

For next time: listen to *Highway 61 Revisited*, *Blonde on Blonde*; read selections from Mark Polizzotti, *Highway 61 Revisited*, and Greil Marcus, *Like A Rolling Stone: Bob Dylan at the Crossroads*.

Week 2 – Jan. 27: Essentials: “Like a Rolling Stone,” *Highway 61*, and the rebirth of rock & roll in 1965.

No writing assignment due today.

For next time: watch Newport videos; read selections from Bob Dylan, *Chronicles, Vol. 1*, and Greil Marcus, “Hibbing High School.”

Week 3 – Feb. 3: Origins: The “North Country,” “New York Town,” and the folk revival.

Due today: What is your favorite, or least favorite, track from *Highway 61 Revisited* or *Blonde on Blonde*, and why?

For next time: listen to *The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan* and *The Times They Are A-Changin’*.

Week 4 – Feb. 10: Voice of a Generation: The early 1960s.

No writing assignment due today.

For next time: listen to “American History” playlist; read selections from Clinton Heylin, *Revolution in the Air*, and Sean Wilentz, *Bob Dylan in America*.

Week 5 – Feb. 17: Dylan’s American History

Due today: Pick a “political” song you like. How does its literary/lyrical structure help or hurt the transmission of the message? (For example, what makes “Blowin’ in the Wind” weaker or stronger than “Hattie Carroll”?)

For next time: Listen to “Orpheus in Love” playlist; read selection from Andy Gill & Kevin Odegard, *A Simple Twist of Fate*.

Week 6 – Feb. 24: Orpheus in Love.

No writing assignment due today.

For next time: read selected interviews, watch “TIME Magazine interview” from *DONT LOOK BACK*.

Week 7 – Mar. 3: “You ask the Beatles that?” Interviewing Bob Dylan.

Optional, extra-credit writing assignment due today: watch a documentary about Dylan & write a brief review of it.

For next time: Listen to “Saved!” playlist; read selection from Stephen Webb, Dylan Redeemed.

Week 8 – Mar. 10: Gonna Change My Way of Thinkin’ (What happened in the 1980s?)

Due today: Creative writing time. Invent your own Dylan interview, in which he answers 6+ questions either from you or from a celebrity questioner.

For next time: listen to selections from *The Basement Tapes*; read selection from Greil Marcus, The Old, Weird, America.

Week 9 – Mar. 17: *The Basement Tapes* and the tangled roots of an old, weird America.

No writing assignment due today.

For next time: read selection from Sean Wilentz, Bob Dylan in America; listen to “Collaborations” playlist.

Week 10 – Mar. 24: Spring break!

Week 11 – Mar. 31: Orpheus in the Pantheon: collaborations and covers.

Due today: Take a song from *The Basement Tapes*, and pick it apart. What makes it work, or not work? Pay attention to musical as well as literary qualities.

For next time: listen to “Madness” and “California” episodes of Theme Time Radio Hour; read *Vanity Fair*, “Inside Dylan’s Brain,” and Mick Cochrane, “Bob Dylan’s Lives of the Poets.”

Week 12 – Apr. 7: It’s Theme Time Radio Hour with your host, Bob Dylan.

No writing assignment due today.

For next time: watch “Must Be Santa” music video, Victoria’s Secret and Cadillac commercials; read Greil Marcus’s *Rolling Stone* review of Self Portrait.

Week 13 – Apr. 14: “What is this sh*t?” Making (some) sense of the non-sequiturs.

Due today: What is your favorite Dylan cover or collaboration? Make the case for it. As always, be specific about your reasons.

For next time: read *Modern Times* and *Together Through Life* interviews, listen to *Modern Times*.

Week 14 – Apr. 21: Orpheus Looks Back: *Time Out of Mind, Love and Theft, Modern Times*.

No writing assignment due today.

For next time: read selections from Christopher Ricks, Dylan's Visions of Sin.

Week 15 – Apr. 28: *I'm Not There*, parting shots.

Due today: the final essay—4 to 6 pages on a topic of your choice.