Introduction to Rock Music

Blues & Country Music:
Mass Media and the Construction of Race
What do we think of as being “country” and what do we think of as being “blues”? Describe the sound that you would describe as “country” or “blues.”

“The folk music of the South was a blending of cultural strains, British at its core, but overlain and intermingled with the musical contributions of other ethnic and racial groups.”

What is the difference between ethnicity and race?
## Oral Tradition Music

### The Blues and Country

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Blues (“Race”)</th>
<th>Country (“Hillbilly”)</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Typically associated with Black America</td>
<td>- Traditionally associated with rural, southern White America</td>
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Both:
- Developed outside the realm of Tin Pan Alley
- Melding of African and European Traditions
- Not originally a term that was used to signify race, but mood or emotion

- Developed out of field hollers and work songs (later, spirituals) from times of slavery
- No formality in structure, a cappella
- Later accompaniment was added
- Because of the need to separate races, these styles have long been listed as different when they are in fact very similar.
Instruments and Style Generalities

- Country and Blues
  - Fiddle (European), Banjo (African?)
  - Borrowed a great deal from jazz and blues
  - Improvisation (especially the fiddle)
  - Guitar (originally a classical instrument)
  - Steel Guitar and Mandolin (Hawaii)
  - Vocal Styles: Yodeling
  - Subject matter: Same, with many British Folk Tale influences

- Cultural Melding and Crossover
  - Immigration, travel, commercialism (Sears)
  - Artists were listed in the incorrect “racial” category in record company catalogues as a result of this integration
“Race” Music
The Blues

City Blues (classic, blues, urban blues, vaudeville blues)
- Entertainment
- Lyrics and harmonic patterns similar to country blues, but singing style and rhythm was very different.
- Many (not all) followed a 12-bar blues pattern based on the scale (1\textsuperscript{st}, 4\textsuperscript{th}, and 5\textsuperscript{th}) with an AAB Rhyme scheme.
- Call and response
- Boogie Woogie (piano style)
- After WWI, market appealed highly to African Americans with recordings by black artists (previously most recordings were done by whites that were “specialists in Negro dialect material.”)
- Allowed for more Female artists (especially African American)
  - Mamie Smith “Crazy Blues”
“Race” Music
The Blues (cont’d)

Country Blues (down home, rural, Delta Blues)

- Folklore, personal, highly improvised, irregular in form
  - Single Male vocalist and a single instrument
    - Blind Lemon Jefferson
    - Muddy Waters
    - BB King
- Large market after WWI for Southern Blacks
- Field Recording

Both Country Blues and City Blues artists have been admitted to the Rock ‘n’ Roll Hall of Fame.
Hillbilly Music  
The White Working Class

By product of the quest for Black Talent that dominated field recordings.

- Hillbilly used to refer to “southern, backwoods culture.” A catch-all.
  - Fiddlin’ John Carson: sales prompted more recording and promotion of “Hillbilly” music
- Far less of the “tales” were of British origin. More traditional, anonymous folk tunes.
- Most were not “career” musicians with some exceptions. “Hillbilly” musicians were working men and their styles were very “regional.”
  - Charlie Poole & the North Carolina Ramblers
  - Jimmie Rodgers (Ramblin’ Man), the Carter Family (Family Stability)
    - Vaudeville, and others in light opera (Vernon Dalhart)
More Separate Than Equal

- Film was an unintentional champion of the blues until the Great Depression.
- The Blues were rarely heard on the radio. When they were, usually late at night and were not aimed at Black audiences.

- Country music was given considerable attention by film and radio throughout the Great Depression.
  - **Film: Gene Autry**
  - **Grand Ole Opry (Nashville, TN)**
    - Heavily emphasized instrumental music early on and later would grow to include more vocal music
    - Roy Acuff
  - Would also eventually become more “Western” associated with the “Cowboy” image
Considering these musical styles…

- What can we also understand about American Culture in the early 20th Century based upon the music of our society at that time?