THE SOCIOLOGY OF AMERICAN POPULAR MUSIC (SOAP)

UNIT 4 NOTES

Country Music & the Urban Folk Revival
COUNTRY MUSIC - has its roots in the folk music traditions brought to the U.S. by European immigrants - in the 1700s, the folk music of the British immigrants dominated, because it was immigrants from these areas who constituted the majority of people who came and settled the "New England" colonies - as industrialism in the 1800s helped move the U.S. from a primarily rural nation to an urban one, traditional folk music was retained in the backwoods sections of the Southeast - in an area ranging from as far north as the Ohio River and as far west as Texas, but especially in the Appalachian mountains of Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, and North Carolina, the old music traditions were preserved - in these remote and generally impoverished areas, people continued to live without electricity, indoor plumbing, or the conveniences of the "modern" world - despite their poverty, their lives were rich with music, as each successive generation passed down the songs and instrumental music that they had learned from the previous generation - music was used to accompany work, worship, social gatherings, celebrations, and simply to "while away the hours" with family members and neighbors on the porch at the end of a hot summer day - because of their simple country ways, these poor white folks were derisively called "hillbillies" when they came into town to look for work or buy supplies ("billy" is a name for a male goat, and "hill" reflected these people's homes in the more remote areas of the mountains) - "Hillbilly" was also the the term that was used to describe this old-time mountain music - it's from this music that "country" emerged as a music industry genre in the 1920s - over the years, country music evolved into different styles and enjoyed various levels of popularity
Country Music in a Historical and Social Context

The Carter Family and Jimmie Rodgers - when the stock market crash of 1929 brought the "Roaring Twenties" to an end and issues in the Great Depression, the simplicity and sincerity of "hillbilly" music continued to attract large audiences - recordings of the Carter Family and Jimmie Rodgers were broadcast over the radio in towns across the country, forming the source from which the several later forms of folk and country music flow
- the Carter Family's traditional, conservative music became great inspirations to younger generations of "folk" musicians (a Carter Family melody became the melody to Woody Guthrie's famous "This Land Is Your Land")
- Jimmie Rodgers' eclectic style was inspiration for a whole range of country music genres such as cowboy, honky tonk, and outlaw country
- although the Carter Family went on to become primarily an important influence on the urban folk revival, Jimmie Rodgers is credited with launching the "commercial school" of country music

The 1930s and the Emergence of "Country Western" - in 1930, Gene Autry launched a new kind of country performing act called the "singing cowboy" - he sang songs about the prairie, the range, and the "Wild, Wild West" - he quickly became a national sensation, building on the general interest in cowboys created by the Hollywood "Westerns" - Autry and other "cowboy singers" (Roy Rogers, Tex Ritter, Monty Hale) sang songs that were professionally composed for commercial profit to enhance movie westerns, TV shows, and the careers of singers themselves - female stars also began to emerge in the 1930s (Dale Evans, wife of Roy Rogers, and Patsy Montana) - the terms "country" and "western" were put together to replace the less flattering descriptor "hillbilly" music
"Western Swing" - 1930s - led by fiddle player Bob Wills and his group The Texas Playboys. Western Swing blended elements of blues, jazz, and mainstream popular music and instrumentation (notably saxophones and drums) with the traditional fiddle-based string bands to create a fast-paced dance-style music.

**Honky Tonk** - 1940s - "honky tonks" were cheap taverns/dance halls in the South, many of which were so rough they were called "blood buckets" - honky tonk musicians celebrated in their music the rough, shady, seedy side of life that was the reality for many of the people who drank at the honky tonks - the songs sung in Nashville had spoken of loyal sweethearts, good mothers, home, and the challenges of the workingman - honky tonk songs sang about "cheatin', lyin', thievin', and fightin'" and the lyrics engaged a different and rougher audience.

- Hank Williams (1923-1953)- one of honky tonk's most famous heroes - made his debut at the Grand Ole Opry (country music's most famous concert hall in Nashville) in 1949 - within a year of this performance, he was country music's biggest star, even going to Germany to entertain U.S. troops that remained there after WWII - among his hits were "Your Cheatin' Heart" and "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry" - with Jimmie Rodgers, he was one of the first three people to be inducted into Country's Hall of Fame.

**Bluegrass** - Bill Monroe - mandolinist who's credited with founding bluegrass - the fiddle players he hired helped establish the bluegrass fiddle sound, which was jazzier and faster than traditional old-time dance fiddling - by 1943, his band The Blue Grass Boys was popular enough to have its own touring system and records.
- 1945 - Monroe added virtuosic banjo-picker Earl Scruggs, who had the technical ability to hold his own against the high-speed mandolin, guitar, and fiddle playing of the rest of the Blue Grass Boys musicians - this style spawned a new genre

**The Impact of Rock 'n' Roll and the "Nashville Sound"** - the success of early rock 'n' roll musicians such as Elvis Presley, combined with the success of new "urban" folksingers such as the *Kingston Trio*, put pressure on country musicians to update their sound - the resulting changes were know as the "Nashville Sound" - led by guitarist/record producer Chet Atkins and his colleague, producer Owen Bradley, the "Nashville Sound" focused on solo singers such as Jim Reeves, Patsy Cline, and Conway Twitty - thick, complex arrangements of background vocals with classical-style string sections combined with steel guitars were created to accompany the singers - these arrangements paved the way for the country/pop "superstars" of the 1960s

**The Impact of Television on Country Music**
- as television became an important new broadcast medium, several new "country" programs such as ABC's *The Johnny Cash Show* and CBS' *Hee Haw* brought the Nashville Sound to mainstream audiences in the 1960s and 1970s - a new generation of "Country Pop Superstars" was born, which included artists such as Johnny Cash, Kenny Rogers, Glen Campbell, Roy Clark, Buck Owens, Loretta Lynn, and Tammy Wynette
- stars of "crossover country" (a style that appealed to country and pop audiences alike) included John Denver, Dolly Parton, Barbara Mandrell, and Crystal Gayle

**The Texas Sound** - the heavily commercialized "Nashville Sound" alienated younger talents who wished to return to country's simpler and less formulaic roots
- these new talents avoided Nashville and went to other recording areas, noticeably Austin, Texas, to cultivate a new, less commercialized sound - such artists included Willie Nelson, Leon Russell, Kris Kristofferson, and Waylon Jennings - they became known as the "outlaws" because of their contempt for Nashville commercialism - these artists eliminated the large instrumental arrangements typical of the Nashville sound - they also simplified their performance style, and refused to wear costumes or surround themselves with elaborate stage productions

**1980s-Present** - in the 1980s/1990s, musicians such as Randy Travis, Garth Brooks, Emmylou Harris, Reba McEntire, and The Judds initiated a return to the simpler values of early country - they infused their music with a youthful spirit and irreverence that helped label the music "Young Country" or "New Country" - modern-day artists who have been successful in this sub-genre include Shania Twain, Kenny Chesney, Faith Hill, Tim McGraw, Zac Brown Band, Lady Antebellum, and Taylor Swift (many of these artists have fused country with rock and pop music)
THE URBAN FOLK REVIVAL profoundly affected the evolution of American popular music - contemporary musicians such as John Mayer, Jack Johnson, Ben Harper, Tori Amos, and Norah Jones are direct musical descendants of the innovations in songwriting made by musicians who participated in the Urban Folk Revival - "folk music" is broadly defined as music that is composed and performed by amateurs and passed down in an oral tradition to successive generations of musicians who have not had formal musical training - in the 20th century, the definition was used almost solely to refer to the British folk traditions that had been maintained in backwoods rural communities - from this wellspring of "hillbilly" music, two main rivers eventually flowed: 1) the 1st developed into "country" music 2) the 2nd moved from the country into the city and also eventually included a shift from preexisting traditional songs to newly composed "folk songs" - this 2nd stream is now referred to as the "Urban Folk Revival"

The Urban Folk Revival In A Social and Historical Context - 1900-1940 - in the 1st decades of the century, the renewed interest in folk music was reflected in the publications of anthologies of folk songs by collections such as John Lomax, Cecil Sharp, and Carl Sandburg - radio programs were established that broadcast live performances of folk music across the country - one of the major performing groups to be broadcast over the radio was the Carter Family who sang traditional folk songs and wrote their own songs in the same folk style

Woody Guthrie (1912-1967) - learned many of his folk songs by copying recordings of the Carter Family songs he heard over the radio - his family was marked by tragedy, and because of problems at home, he was adopted by different families until finally these conditions, combined with his own restless spirit, prompted him to drop out of school at 16 and begin traveling
- over the years, he rambled through nearly every state, laboring and singing with coal miners, loggers, migratory workers, farmers, longshoremen, ranch hands, factory workers, and union members - he chronicled much of his life, writing down his observations of the Depression, the Dust Bowl, refugees, union organizing, and his love for his country - over the years his fame increased and he was given the opportunity to share his thoughts and his music through recordings, co-hosting a radio program, maintaining his own newspaper column, and performing for both public and private audiences - he wrote almost 1,000 songs, many of which have become part of the standard folk song repertoire ("This Land Is Your Land")

**Pete Seeger** (1919- ) - perhaps the most important and quintessential urban folk singer of the 20th century - 1st met Woody Guthrie at a New York concert in 1940 - Seeger was impressed with Guthrie, and two months later they traveled together on a cross-country trip to explore the U.S. - later that year, Seeger and singer Lee Hays formed a folk music group called the Almanac Singers - they began to tour the country, and by 1941 they started to earn support for their leftist social and political views - FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover kept members of the Almanacs under surveillance because of their peace songs and connections with the Communist Party - blacklisted by the music industry, their performance and recording opportunities dissolved and the group disbanded

- **People's Songs, Inc.** - 1946 - Seeger & Hays founded this songwriters' union established to provide an alternative to the existing music industry for aspiring or blacklisted musicians ("blacklisted" means prevented from recording/performing because of their ties to socialist/communist organizations)
- 1949 - Seeger & Hays formed a new group called The Weavers who sang a variety of folk songs and the members continued to be involved in radical causes
1950s - HUAC's Impact on Folk Music - in the late 1940s/early 1950s, anti-communist sentiment grew in the U.S. - Pete Seeger, Paul Robeson and other folk musicians were called to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) - both singers were found guilty of being communists and were subsequently blacklisted - The Weavers disbanded in 1952 - this dichotomy between the popularity of folk music and folk music's association with the very unpopular communism strongly influenced folk music in the 1950s

Mid-1950s Interest in Folk Music - 1955 - The Weavers abandoned their socialist orientation and staged a successful comeback - popularity of folk music on college campuses soared - reasons: 1) it was participatory - with minimal music skills, a student could learn to play a few guitar chords, and if he/she had a decent singing voice, he/she could organize and/or lead a folk music group 2) it didn't require much $ - one didn't need to take lessons, buy sheet music, or purchase expensive instruments or equipment 3) it provided a more intellectually satisfying alternative to the current "pop" and lightweight rock 'n' roll

The Kingston Trio - enormously successful folk music group that formed in 1957 - their 1958 hit single "Tom Dooley" sold over 3 1/2 million copies - their commercial and polished style, wholesome image, and apolitical songs made the Kingston Trio appealing to a wide audience and help ensure their success, which pave the way for other respectable collegiate-looking groups such as the Brothers Four, the Chad Mitchell Trio, the Highwaymen, and The Limelights

Joan Baez - the "Queen of Folk" - made her professional debut at the 1st Newport Folk Festival in 1959 - she became a lead performer in the urban folk movement - as she became more involved in folk music, Baez adopted a more purist stance, critical of the "bastardized and unholy" commercial style of musicians such as the Kingston Trio - she supported the Civil Rights movement and criticized the Vietnam War
Bob Dylan - the "Crown-Prince of Folk Music" - 1960 - dropped out of the Univ. of Minnesota and traveled to New York to meet folk singers, including Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger - he began to play at local coffeehouses and soon received rave reviews by music critics - 1961 - became one of the 1st young folksingers to be signed to a major label (Columbia Records) - many of Dylan's early songs retained the political orientation of his idols in the earlier Urban Folk tradition: "The Ballad of Hollis Brown" (an impoverished farmer who, in desperation, kills himself and his family), "The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll" (the murder of a black domestic by her white employer), "With God On Our Side" (a bitter chronicling of U.S. wars), and "Only a Pawn in Their Game" (about the murder of the black civil rights leader Medgar Evers) - Joan Baez gave Dylan's career a boost by singing several of his songs at her concerts and inviting him to participate with her at her performances - Dylan would be the main attraction at the 1963 Newport Folk Festival

Folksingers and the Civil Rights Movement - the movement, which had begun with the 1954 court decision to desegregate public schools (Brown v. Board of Education), peaked during the spring of 1963 when Federal troops were sent to Birmingham, AL, to quell racial violence - Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, and several other prominent folk artists showed their commitment to social and political activism by participating in various civil rights rallies - on Aug. 28, 1963, Dylan, Baez, Peter, Paul, and Mary, Harry Belafonte, Mahalia Jackson, Odetta, and others performed at the March on Washington rally at which Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" speech
The "British Invasion" and Folk Rock - 1963 was the high-water mark for the folk music revival - Bob Dylan was the undisputed leader of folk music, contributing his powerful personality and musical style to galvanize the urban folk music movement - soon he helped bring it to an end
- the "British Invasion" - on his 1964 tour of Great Britain, Dylan met members of The Beatles and The Rolling Stones - folk rock was becoming popular in 1964
- that year, The Animals (a "British Invasion" band) released an electric version of an old folk song called "The House of the Rising Sun" - 1965 - The Byrds recorded an electric version of Dylan's "Mr. Tambourine Man"
- that same year, Dylan performed with an electric guitar at the Newport Folk Festival - many in the audience booed him for "going electric" - this signaled his movement from folk to rock
The Folk Revival Ends - 1967 - Monterey Pop Festival - 1st festival of its kind
- acts included The Who, Janis Joplin, Jefferson Airplane, and Jimi Hendrix
- soon after, 30 major rock festivals were held across the country, attracting an audience of over 2.5 million people - Woodstock - 1969 - largest festival of the time with over 400,000 people - featured performers included Joan Baez, Arlo Guthrie (Woody's son), Jimi Hendrix, Jefferson Airplane, and Santana - although several prominent musicians such as Judy Collins, Joni Mitchell, Simon & Garfunkel, and James Taylor maintained for many years styles strongly influenced by folk music, the folk music revival had come to an end