

Dr. Owen Cantrell  
English 1101: Composition  
Rock N Roll Composition  
Spring 2015  
TR 9:30-10:45; TR 11:00-12:15

## Cultural Criticism Essay

### Purpose

This assignment asks you to analyze a specific song, musician, or musical movement in its cultural context. The goal of this assignment is for you to do research in order to fully understand what popular music might be telling us about the larger cultural, social, or political world.

### From *How to Write About Music: Cultural Criticism*

“Choose a song by any artist that you’d like to write about in its cultural context. . . . You should choose a song that’s rich enough to sustain writing a number of good pages about its significance beyond the immediate musical context though the song itself need not be directly political or offer a self-conscious statement of cultural importance. In fact, writing about music that doesn’t have any particular ambition beyond being a good song often works best. The essay you write will be an exploration of the cultural context of the song you choose.

Research widely and eccentrically about the time and place from which the song comes and make a list of ten facts, events, and phenomenon of that moment and locale that do not have anything directly to do with the song the artist, or music in general. See what’s happening in areas as distinct as philosophy, fashion, medicine, politics, and law—anything can prove a trigger.

Begin to write freely using the song and your list of facts as a starting point. You can conjure with the song’s lyrics, imagery, instrumentation, arrangement, production values, and sound as you consider the aspects of the time and place you’ve come up with. What connects the song to the culture of which it’s a part?”

### From *How to Write About Music: Music Scenes*

“Start with a band or musician you like and find out about the place where they made (most of their) music.

Become familiar with other bands and artists who were active in the same place and at the same time.

Learn about what define this locale outside of music during this time (local papers are a helpful source).

Interview artists or fans who lived there at the time if possible or read accounts of their experiences on the scene if you can find them. Published interviews with musicians can be useful here as well.”

### Objectives

- Analyze a specific song, musician, or musical movement in its cultural context
- Use appropriate scholarly and secondary sources to relate your chosen song, musician, or musical movement to larger cultural, social, or political issues.

### **Assignment Requirements**

- 3-3.5 full pages in length

### **Sources**

- Cite any songs you reference in your essay in proper MLA format
- Cite any articles, books, or other sources you use in your essay in proper MLA format

### **MLA Format**

- 1" margins on top, bottom, left and right; left justified
- Name block includes your name, instructor's name, the class (ENGL 1101), and the date
- Header should be 1/2" from the top right margin and include your last name and page number
- The entire document should be double-spaced and in 12-point font

### **Assessment**

The assignment will be assessed based on the overall:

- Analysis of song, musician, or musical movement
- Use of appropriate scholarly and secondary sources to relate your chosen song, musician, or musical movement to larger cultural, social, or political issues.
- Clear, concise argument about what your chosen song, musician, or musical movement is saying about the larger culture

**DUE: Two copies of the draft are due at the beginning of class on Tuesday, April 5th. The final is due to Lore by 11:59pm on Thursday, April 14<sup>th</sup>.**

## Cultural Criticism Essay

Name \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Formal Requirements</b> (meets page requirement, correct MLA citation, appropriate utilization of academic sources)	<b>Organization</b> (Clear coherent sentences; sound thesis; evident development of ideas)	<b>Clarity</b> (Clear and selective examples; use of transitions; awareness of audience)	<b>Mechanics</b> (complete sentences; correct use of sentence-level grammar; clear use of clauses and phrases)
/25	/30	/25	/15

**Total Grade:            /100**