

MUSICAL HYBRIDS, MUSICAL SIGNS

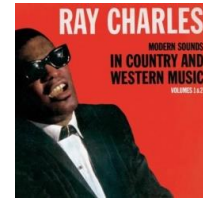
Ray Charles and Country Music?

1. Introduction: This series of assignments asks you to go online to watch a couple of videos and read a couple of articles, then take a quiz, write some short answers, then do research as a group and compile a group paper with links.



The assignment focuses on an American music icon, Ray Charles. By 1960 he was the preeminent black singer in America, famous for a revolutionary blend of blues, gospel and rock and roll, especially in one of his #1 hits, the seminal “What’d I Say,” released in 1959. Charles was in the very first class of inductees into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

Then in 1962 he stunned the music world by releasing an album of...country music. His record company was totally against it, but *Modern Sounds in Country and Western Music* dominated the albums and singles charts for months and months. Of this album, the great music and cultural critic Greil Marcus wrote my favorite passage that’s ever been written about a piece of music: “The preeminent black singer in America, Charles had always loved Hank Williams, but here went beyond him. Williams sang of a home in the sky. Charles sang as one you had been there and now suffered exile.” In this album Charles joined white country music to blues, gospel, and rock, creating one of the most innovative musical hybrids in history.



2. Watching, Listening, Reading:

A) Me & Brother Ray – Part 4. Part of a series of lectures by me on Charles. In this part I talk not only about his 1962 masterpiece but also about the secret meanings beneath this and other black music.

<http://richardrguzman.com/me-brother-ray-part-4-signifying/>

B) “A Song for You” – Leon Russell, Willie Nelson, Ray Charles. A performance at Willie Nelson’s 70th Birthday Celebration. Watching Ray’s joy and passion, Willie—who has one of the most expressive faces in America—almost loses it.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2UW4ELmVD9M>

C) “Ray Charles Takes Country Music to the Top of the Pop Charts.” A short article giving some backstory to Charles’ *Modern Sounds in Country and Western Music*. Note what Willie Nelson says.

<http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/ray-charles-takes-country-music-to-the-top-of-the-pop-charts>

3. Responding: Quiz, Short Writings

A) Please go here, take the quiz, and hit the Submit button when you’re done. DUE____*

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1D0or7TxHBMJzn9OKL6FOy8I4iSv0ELtOvunVIgbZl8/viewform?usp=send_form

B) Write short answers (around 100 words) to the following questions. **NOTE: You’ll be posting your answers to a MiniGroup site. See #4 below.**

1. “A Song for You.” What’s your reaction?
2. Signifying. Your reaction to hearing music this way *and* to *any* example given in the “Me & Brother Ray” video?

4: Collaborating

I've divided the class into online work and discussion groups of 4 to 5 students, using MiniGroups as our platform. Go [HERE](#) ** to sign in to the MiniGroup you've been invited to: either "Music Group 1", 2, 3, 4, or 5. You'll see the groups listed on the left hand side of the MiniGroup page. Once there and in your group go to the appropriate topic and begin your work.

There are **three** discussion topics in this lesson.

A) Write short answers to the two questions above in 3B. You'll notice the first **two** discussion topics are exactly those two questions above:

- "A Song for You." What's your reaction?
- "Signifying." Your reaction to hearing music this way and to any example of this given in the "Me & Brother Ray" video?

*Besides posting your own response, please respond to **at least one** posting by a member of your group.*

B) "Musical Hybrids." Your favorites?

This discussion should result in a one-page compilation of favorite musical hybrids, one from each member of your group. The videos and article in the second section of this assignment above ("2. Watching, Listening, Reading") focused on Ray Charles' hybrid of traditionally white country music with the blues, gospel, and rock and roll he was famous for. But music is famous for all kinds of hybrids: the art *encourages* it. The Clash combine reggae and punk, for example. The Kronos Quartet—a "classical" string quartet—plays Jimi Hendrix. Etc.

1. In short posts, identify your favorite musical hybrid, or ask each other questions about the concept itself, or ask each other "have-you-heard-this" questions.
2. Then each of you should write a short description of your "favorite" hybrid, either one you've liked for a long time, found through discussions with your group on this topic, or researched because of this assignment. Tell us when you found this hybrid, why you like it, and then provide a link to a sample of it, *plus* a link to some article about it.
3. One of you volunteer, or all of you agree, on one person to combine these descriptions and links into a short "paper" and send it to me via my North Central College email (rrguzman@noctrl.edu). This is basically a copy-and-paste job, but someone has to do it. Preface this compilation of your descriptions with a very short paragraph identifying your group name, the names of its individual members, and any special feature of the following descriptions, or any special experience you encountered in your group research. For example: "The following descriptions come from Music Group 1, whose members are: _____, _____, _____, _____. We all found that we liked hybrids of reggae and punk and were surprised to find a couple of us had been listening to this kind of music, even the same bands, for many years."

NOTES:

* Each activity will include DUE DATES when they are actually used.

** Because this is a sample online project, I didn't actually set up the MiniGroup. The HERE link above takes you to the MiniGroup site where you can get demos about how it works. I chose MiniGroup for its ease of use, ease of being able to take down discussion topics, and privacy. In these aspects it seems better to me than Facebook and much more user-friendly than Blackboard, not to mention much cheaper. North Central College has Blackboard, but *not* Blackboard Collaborate, which may cost an *extra* \$40,000 per year. It costs \$5/month for 3 minigroups and 3G data, and \$9/month for 10 groups/10G. Google Hangout is another possibility.