Starting with his first solo vocal album in 1968 and continuing through his most recent release in 2011 (as well as many of his very popular film soundtracks), Randy Newman has populated his music with a series of characters that reflect the complexities and contradictions of the late-20th- and early 21st-century United States. Often misunderstood because of his preference for dramatic monologues (as opposed to the more personal/confessional approach of the folk/rock/pop singer-songwriter), Newman—who is steeped in our national, musical and cinematic history—offers his audience unflinching portraits of an array of outcasts, patriots, bigots, dreamers, simpletons, loners, and lovers struggling to understand our world—even as its very foundation seems to be shifting beneath them.

By the end of Eng 213: Randy Newman’s American Voice(s), students should be able to:

- **Recognize** the chronology of the major songs, albums, and soundtracks of singer-songwriter/composer Randy Newman.
- **Explain** some of the specific influences (literary, musical, and historical) on his songs;
- **Discuss** the literary techniques characteristic of the writer’s lyrics; and
- **Write coherent and cogent analyses**, using textual support and appropriate academic conventions and language, about the writer’s songs and albums.

Pre-requisite: Successful completion or transfer equivalent of ENG 105 or ENG 110.

**JANUARY**

**M 12**  
Introduction to Course: Syllabus, Assignments, and Expectations  
Alan Price Set, “Tickle Me” (1967)  
Jon Ronson, “I Am, Unfortunately, Randy Newman” BBC 4, 2003 (YouTube)

**W 14**  
Randy Newman, “Golden Gridiron Boy” (1962)  
Scott Walker, “I Don’t Want to Hear It Anymore” (1965)  
Harpers Bizarre, “The Biggest Night of Her Life” (1967)  
Liza Minnelli, “The Debutantes’ Ball” (1968)  
Courrier, 1-4

**M 19**  
**Martin Luther King Day: No class**

**W 21**  
Carl Sandburg, “Chicago” (1914)  
The Everly Brothers, “Illinois” (1968)  
Andrew Marvell, “To His Coy Mistress” (~1660)  
Courrier, 40-69
JANUARY (continued)

M 26 Johnny Shepard, “Twenty Acres of Land” (1966)
    Eric Burden and the Animals, “Mama Told Me Not to Come” (1967)

Directed Writing #1 Due

FEBRUARY

W 28  *Randy Newman Creates Something New Under the Sun* (1968)
      Courrier, 80-94

      Courrier, 98-112; 126

W 4  *Sail Away* (1972)

M 9   *Sail Away*
      Courrier, 127-147

W 11  *Good Old Boys* (1974)

M 16  Presidents’ Day: No class

W 18  *Good Old Boys*
      Courrier, 149-174

M 23  *Good Old Boys*  
      Directed Writing #2 due

W 25  *Little Criminals* (1977)

MARCH

M 2   *Little Criminals*
      Courrier, 175-187

W 4   *Born Again* (1979)
      Courrier, 187-195

M 9   *Trouble in Paradise* (1983)
      Courrier, 243-256

W 11  *Trouble in Paradise*  
      Paper #1 due
MARCH (continued)

M  16  
W  18  

M  23  Movie Music I:
The Uncles – Alfred, Lionel, and Emil Newman
Music Industry Profile: Randy Newman (YouTube)
Courrier, 197-242

W  25  Movie Music II:
Cold Turkey (1971)
Ragtime (1981)
The Natural (1984)
Parenthood (1989)

M  30  Movie Music III:
Avalon (1990)
Cats Don’t Dance (1997)
Pleasantville (1998)
Meet the Parents (2000)

APRIL

W  1  Movie Music IV:
Toy Story I (1995), II (1999), and III (2005)
Directed Writing #3 due

M  6  Land of Dreams (1988)

W  8  Land of Dreams
Courrier, 256-286

Courrier, 268-285

W  15  Directed Writing #4 due

M  20  Bad Love (1999)
Courrier, 285-300


M  27  Project Presentations
APRIL (continued)

W 29  Project Presentations

MAY

W 6  Paper #2 due (by 1:00 PM)

Required Text:


Assignments:

Directed Writings (~250 words)  
Four (4) responses to a specific question about the assigned selections for that class.

Writings about the Songs/Readings (unannounced)  10%

*For each class*, students will pick a brief excerpt from a song or Courrier’s book that they consider interesting (from as little as a line of a song or a sentence to as much as a verse or a paragraph) and **write a coherent and cohesive paragraph** explaining the reason for their interest. Fairly regularly (but unannounced), these will be collected and graded. Since the main point of the unannounced nature of these assignments is to reward those students who regularly come prepared, **make-ups will not be allowed. Since two classes can be missed without penalty, at least two of the grades will be dropped.**

Paper I (2–3 pages)  20%

An analysis of the success (or failure) of one of the following songs as an example of the dramatic monologue genre:

“So Long, Dad” from *Randy Newman Creates Something New Under the Sun* (1968)
“Suzanne” from *12 Songs* (1970)
“Old Man” from *Sail Away* (1972)
“A Wedding from Cherokee County” from *Good Old Boys* (1974)
“Kathleen (Catholicism Made Easier)” from *Little Criminals* (1977)
“Pants” from *Born Again* (1979)
“Mikey’s” from *Trouble in Paradise* (1983)
(or another Randy Newman song with prior approval from the professor)

or

A comparison of one of Randy Newman’s songs as recorded by the songwriter himself and some other artist/group

Students should incorporate information and ideas about the songs, if any, from the course textbook, Kevin Courrier’s *Randy Newman’s American Dreams*, in their papers.
Paper II (3-5 pages) 20%
An analysis of an individual song – or track from a film score – in relation to and in the context of the album/film as a whole from which it comes.

or

A “Courrier--esque” analysis of a track from Harps and Angels, an album released after Randy Newman’s American Dreams was published. In other words, based on what he writes about Newman in his book, what would the critic say about the chosen song?

or

A topic of specific interest to the student, with prior approval by the professor.

Students should incorporate information and ideas about the songs, if any, from the course textbook, Kevin Courrier’s Randy Newman’s American Dreams, in their papers

Project 20%
Each student, either alone or in a self-selected group, must create and present a project that examines some aspect of one of the songs discussed during the semester. The form of the project (poster, performance, powerpoint/prezi, video, performance, painting, etc…) is completely up to the discretion of the student(s). Students are encouraged, but not required, to examine their chosen text through the lens of their academic major or personal interests and talents. Students will be evaluated on Content (30%), Creativity (30%), Clarity (20%), and Speaking Skills (20%). The projects must be presented during the last two class meetings of the semester (4/27 or 4/29).

Attendance and participation 10%
Each student may miss up to two classes during the semester with no penalty. These absences may be related to illness, a “better offer,” family responsibilities, a court date, or even sloth. If students miss more than two, however, their grades may well be affected negatively (regardless of legitimacy of the excuse). Consistent tardiness or early departure may impact the grade negatively, as well.

The other half of this grade is participation (i.e., what students do after showing up for class: demonstrating their preparation by asking pertinent questions, answering questions, respectfully challenging the professor’s and fellow students’ interpretations, volunteering to read aloud, etc.).
Contact Information

Gilbert L. Gigliotti  
Professor  
CCSU Department of English  
Emma Hart Willard Hall 329  
860/832-2759  
Gigliotti@ccsu.edu

Office hours:  
Monday and Wednesday 1:30-3:00  
Tuesday, 10:30-12:00  
(or by appointment)

Blog: www.connecticuthalfwit.blogspot.com

Weekly radio show:  
“Frank, Gil, and Friends,”  
Tuesdays 8-10 AM  
On-air: WFCS 107.7 FM  

Course materials on two-hour closed reserve in Burritt Library:

Courrier, Kevin. Randy Newman’s American Dreams. ECW Press, 2005. (Two copies.)


THE DIEDERICH SCALE

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<th>5 – Excellent</th>
<th>4 – Good</th>
<th>3 – Average</th>
<th>2 – Weak</th>
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Subtotal x 5 = _________

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Subtotal x 3 = _________

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<td>Conventions, form, and legibility</td>
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Subtotal x 1 = _________

A = 100-90
B = 89-75
C = 74-60
D = 59-40
F = below 40

Paper Grade = _________

Override factor: If there are more than 15 different errors in punctuation, spelling, grammar, usage, and/or sentence sense, the paper must be rewritten or will receive a grade of “F.”