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Course description and objectives

Although many of us might instinctively think of current artists such as Katy Perry or Lady Gaga upon hearing the label “pop music,” the broader meanings and materials of pop stretch across histories and cultures. There was popular music in, say, 12th-century France: it was music that came into vogue, netted eager fans, and served recreational purposes. **What, then, might have been an equivalent of “Gangnam Style” in Renaissance Europe?** **What was the “Single Ladies” in 1920s (“Roaring Twenties”) New York City?** **What songs in 19th-century Parisian salons were lovingly mocked with as much glee as Rebecca Black’s “Friday”?** **And was Joseph Haydn the grandfather of the rickroll?**



Our course explores these playful yet critical questions in comparative, analytical, and creative perspectives. Investigations lead us not just through the glamorous landscape of contemporary American pop, but also through the daunting terrain of historical and cultural artifacts, activities, and organizations that constitute the so-called *popular*. Our goal is to understand how even the small tunes and lyrics of pop culture can inspire big debates over complex issues of taste, labor, accessibility, leisure, protest, spreadability, historicism, presentism, appropriation, globalization, identity, and innovation.