This course approaches the culture and politics of postwar America through a study of key films starring Frank Sinatra. Yet while the course will focus most on cinema and the meanings of performance within that medium, we will also pay extensive attention to Sinatra’s efforts in other media, such as radio and recording where we will devote much time to the analysis of pop music as American expressive art. (It has been argued that the album covers, too, which Sinatra had input into the design of, also merit study as veritable mini-narratives often around seeming loss and uncertainty.) In the case of Sinatra, close analysis of select ballads (which Sinatra himself preferred to term “saloon songs,” emphasizing the end-of-night self-interrogation in many of them) will develop how pop became tied to notions of identity and expression: for instance, piano and understated strings are often employed for the first inklings of budding romance or, more often and more tellingly, for laments of life and love gone astray, while brassy wind instruments convey impressions of swagger and brash confidence. We will look in this respect at the ways in which Sinatra’s songs present an image of soulful, sometimes even tortured, masculinity trying to reassert itself in the postwar context in a manner much different from the lighter crooner tradition that preceded him. The goal overall is to use Sinatra as a case study for means by which, contrary to stereotypes of postwar conformity and suburban middle-classness, popular American culture in the period could serve in the expression of non-conformity, new projections of masculinity (not necessarily progressive ones; far from it in the case of Sinatra and allied playboy cultures), liberal examination of ethnic identity (liberal until, that is, Sinatra’s notorious turn to the right), and so on.
Although he is obviously best known within realms of American popular culture as a singer, Frank Sinatra had of course a very important and extensive career in Hollywood cinema (along with other media such as radio and television). While a number of the films serve certainly as little more than star vehicles (whether conceived of as such by the major studios during the decades of the 1940s and 1950s when the classic studio system was still in place or orchestrated by Sinatra himself from the late 1950s on, when the break-up of the studio system encouraged creative personnel to go independent and develop projects of their own), it is striking how often Sinatra worked with directors that film study has come to think of as auteurs – creators of a cinema of exploration and inventive style often revealing of a personal directorial vision in both theme and visual design. Many of these stand-out films use Sinatra’s connotations as a performer from an ethnic and working-class background to investigate – and sometimes interrogate – postwar class structures and strictures, especially around projections of masculinity.

In this manner, Sinatra's music and movies and efforts across other media will reveal themselves as culturally expressive forms whose specific aesthetic resources (from instrumentation and voice and arrangement in the case of music to framing and movement and acting style and editing in the case of films) will be studied in detail.

In keeping with the Core Curriculum guidelines for an education that provides students with an understanding of the Foundations of Contemporary Culture, this course is driven by several goals:

(1) to introduce students to a wide range of creative work in one medium (cinema, in this case) but focus as well on other expressive forms (sound recording, television and radio, live performance, etc.). Here, the course will introduce the students to notions of genre as both thematic and stylistic mode;

(2) to provide students with formal approaches to the study and appreciation of works of cinema and popular music, along with allied media. Students will read texts that concentrate on the formal resources of film and music and that show these at work in the concrete operations of specific films and songs and albums. There will be a recurrent emphasis in the course – through readings, through lectures, through the work of teaching assistants in section – to examine the possibilities of close stylistic reading of film and popular song. Students will engage in exercises that break down film sequences and song structures into their expressive components;
(3) through the focus on one key performer in his times, to push students to understand how stylistic analysis and close reading, and the interpretations that derive therefrom, need to be grounded in historical and social context;

(4) to develop students' critical judgment and powers of interpretation through such mechanisms as weekly comments, close analysis of films, songs, and albums of their choice, small-group discussion and so on;

(5) to stimulate students to pursue ongoing engagement with the arts by, among other things, constant reference in course lecture to the legacy of studio-era Hollywood cinema and mid-century popular music for more recent developments in the arts;

(6) to encourage students to use such resources of New York City as the Performing Arts Library of Lincoln Center, the Paley Center (Museum of Television and Broadcasting), the rich networks of art cinema, film festivals, and so on.

Your health and safety are a priority at NYU. If you experience any health or mental health issues during this course, we encourage you to utilize the support services of the 24/7 NYU Wellness Exchange 212-443-9999. Also, all students who may require an academic accommodation due to a qualified disability, physical or mental, please register with the Moses Center 212-998-4980. Please let your instructor know if you need help connecting to these resources.

Requirements:

There are a set of requirements for this course (see syllabus for due dates):

(1) an in-class mid-term on October 23 - 10% of grade.
(2) a final exam on exam day (December 18, subject to confirmation) - 20% of grade.
(3) a first five-page paper - 10% of grade. DUE ON 9 OCTOBER
   (For this paper, you will choose a song we are not analyzing in class and do a close reading of it. We will ask you to deal with such questions as: How does Sinatra perform it? How does he relate to the arrangement? How does he use the lyrics to communicate the song's story?)
(4) a second five-page paper - 10% of grade, DUE ON 13 NOVEMBER. (For this paper, you will choose an entire album we've not analyzed in class and offer an analysis of it. We will ask you to deal with such questions as: How does the album
cover help convey the themes of the album and what meanings does it ascribe to Sinatra himself? How do the songs interrelate and do they tell us a story? How does the album work as a totality?)

(5) a ten-page paper - 15% of grade. DUE ON DECEMBER 13
(For this paper, we will ask you to pick a Sinatra feature film not screened in its entirety in class [one that we showed clips from is okay] and analyze it. We will ask you to address such questions as: how are the meanings associated with Sinatra used in this film? what does he bring to the film in terms of typical Sinatra themes and style and value?)

(6) a one page paper, DUE ON OCTOBER 30 and based on your full reading of Charles Granata's Sessions with Sinatra for his visit to our class, that raises a question based on your reading that could lead to interesting discussion. Explain why you are raising this question and why you think it is worthy of discussion. 5% of Grade.

(7) a two-page paper on our 4 December visit to the Paley Center DUE IN SECTION, 5% of grade. (For this paper, you will comment on Sinatra as a television personality. We will ask you such questions as: how well does he take to the medium of television? Does he bring to it the same style and meaning he has in his songs and in film?)

(8) regular participation in section. This includes bringing in, every week, a one paragraph reflection on some aspect of the film screened the previous course session with Professor Polan. 25% of grade. (Note: for the one paragraph reflection, we are not looking for a mere evaluation (I liked it; I hated it!) but an observation that could provoke discussion.)

NOTE: Failure in any one requirement can mean failure for the course. In other words, you must complete all assignments with a passing grade in each.

NOTE: using electronic devices to text, play games, OR surf the web will not be permitted in class and will be an occasion for failure in the course. Your laptops are not permitted in the classroom so please leave them home.

There are 4 required books for this course, plus a readings available on-line. Items on-line are indicated on the syllabus with an *:
Readings:
Pete Hamill, Why Sinatra Matters
Charles Granata, Sessions with Sinatra: Frank Sinatra and the Art of Recording
David Lehman, Sinatra's Century
Timothy Corrigan, Short Guide to Writing about Film

Leonard Mustazza's invaluable reference work, Ol' Blue Eyes: A Frank Sinatra Encyclopedia, is on two-hour reserve at Bobst Library.

Schedule (subject to change):

4 September: Introduction
screening: High Society (Charles Walters, 1956)
in-class song analysis:
  "I've got the world on a string"
  "I've got you under my skin"
  "Send in the clowns"
  "One for my baby (and one more for the road)"
  "Come Fly with Me"

11 September: Early career
screening: Anchors Aweigh (George Sidney, 1945)
reading: "Lover's Lane" comics*
  Robin Douglas-Home, Sinatra *
  "Frank Sinatra's Dwindling Tourist Turf in Hoboken"*
  "In Frank's Footsteps: The Sinatra Walking Tour"*
in-class song analysis:
  "All or Nothing at All"*
  "Homesick, that's all"*
for section: Timothy Corrigan, Short Guide, pp. 1-17

18 September: Postwar Dynamics
screening: On the Town (Stanley Donen, 1949)
reading: Pete Hamill, Why Sinatra Matters
  Bruce Bliven, "The Voice and the Kids"*
  Gerald Meyer, "When Frank Sinatra Came to Italian Harlem"*
  Jon Wiener, "When Old Blue Eyes Was Red"*
in-class song analysis: "Lean Baby"*

25 September: The Fall and the Come-back
screening: *From Here to Eternity* (Fred Zinnemann, 1953)
reading: from John Rockwell, *Sinatra: An American Classic* *
  Steven Petkov, "Ol' Blue Eyes and the Golden Age of the American
  Song: The Capitol Years"*

**FOR SECTION, PLEASE BRING IN ONE PARAGRAPH ON A SONG
PERFORMANCE BY SINATRA THAT YOU'D LIKE TO WRITE
ABOUT FOR 9 OCTOBER.**

2 October: The Comeback, continued
screening: *Suddenly!* (Lewis Allen, 1954)
in-class analysis: "Old MacDonald"*
  Songs for Swinging Lovers album
  tracks:
  You Make Me Feel So Young
  It Happened in Monterey
  You're Getting to be Habit with Me
  You Brought a New Kind of Love to Me
  Too Marvelous for Words
  Old Devil Moon
  Pennies from Heaven
  Our Love is Here to Stay
  I've Got You Under My Skin
  I thought about you
  We'll be together again
  Makin' Whoopee
  Swingin' down the Lane
  Anything Goes
  How About You?

9 October: Middlebrow Adult Culture of the 1950s
screening: *The Man with the Golden Arm* (Otto Preminger, 1955)
in-class song analysis: "You Make Me Feel So Young"*
for section: Timothy Corrigan, *Short Guide*, pp. 38-84

**FIRST FIVE PAGE PAPER DUE (analysis of a song)**
16 October: "Suicide Songs"
screening: *Young at Heart* (Gordon Douglas, 1954)

23 October: **IN-CLASS MID-TERM**
for section: Timothy Corrigan, *Short Guide*, pp. 112-129

30 October: Guest Visit by Charles Granata
screening: *The Tender Trap* (Charles Walters, 1955)
reading: Granata, *Sessions with Sinatra*
special guest: Charles Granata
in-class song analysis:
- "In the Wee Small Hours"*
- "Old Man River" (1963 version)*
- "It was a very good year"*

**ONE-PAGE PAPER DUE IN CLASS**

*FOR SECTION, PLEASE BRING IN A PARAGRAPH ON A SINATRA ALBUM YOU'D LIKE TO WRITE ABOUT FOR 13 NOVEMBER*

6 November: Playboy Culture
screening: *Pal Joey* (George Sidney, 1957)
reading: Will Friedwald, from Liner Notes for 1959 Sinatra concert in Australia*
in-class song analysis: "Night and Day" (Australia concert)*
- "The Lady is a Tramp"*
- "Bewitched"*
for section: Timothy Corrigan, *Short Guide*, pp. 131-159

13 November: The Tortured Artist
screening: *Some Came Running*, (Vincente Minnelli, 1959)
**SECOND 5 PAGE PAPER DUE (analysis of an album)**

20 November: Sinatra and Politics
screening: *The Manchurian Candidate* (John Frankenheimer, 1962)
*FOR SECTION, PLEASE BRING IN A PARAGRAPH ON A SINATRA FILM YOU'D LIKE TO WRITE ABOUT.*

27 November: NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING BREAK
4 December: class trip to the Paley Center for Media (Museum of Television and Broadcasting), 25 W 52nd St, New York, NY 10019
reading: Ron Simon, "Sinatra Meets Television: A Search for Identity in Fifties America"*

2-PAGE PAPER ON SINATRA AND TELEVISION DUE IN SECTION

11 December: Resonances and Afterlives of Sinatra
reading: "Sinatra Song Often Strikes Deadly Cord"*
reading: Lehman, *Sinatra's Century*

10 PAGE PAPER DUE (analysis of a film)