

Instructor: Peter Richardson
Time: Tuesdays, June 4-25, 1-3 pm.
Place: Golden Bear Center, Suite 202/204, 1995 University Ave., Berkeley
Email: peterrichardson805@gmail.com

Brand New Beat: *Rolling Stone* Magazine and the San Francisco Counterculture, 1967-77

Course Description: As unlikely as it seemed in 1967, *Rolling Stone* has been called “the journalistic voice of its generation.” How did an undercapitalized West Coast rock publication, edited by a 21-year-old college dropout, become one of the most important magazines of its era? The obvious answer isn’t wrong. From its inception, *Rolling Stone* served up a generous portion of sex, drugs, and rock-and-roll to one of the fattest demographics in recent American history. But the magazine had no monopoly on those topics, and they don’t explain its extraordinary success. What else distinguished the San Francisco upstart from its competitors in a crowded media marketplace?

This course will explore that question by probing *Rolling Stone’s* origins, tracking its turbulent development, and mapping its immense influence on American popular culture and journalism. In particular, we will consider the magazine’s major figures and influences, its tangled relationship with the counterculture, its conception of rock music’s significance, and the nature of its political coverage.

We will receive help from at least two experts: Ben Fong-Torres, who handled the magazine’s music coverage for most of this decade, and David Weir, who co-wrote a blockbuster story on Patty Hearst’s time as a fugitive. With any luck, we will also hear from Greil Marcus, who was the magazine’s first record review editor.

Syllabus

June 4: Overview. Although the first issue of *Rolling Stone* appeared in November 1967, its story began years before that. We will discuss the magazine’s cofounders, Ralph J. Gleason and Jann Wenner, and how they decided to create *Rolling Stone*. We will also trace the magazine’s major influences: the San Francisco counterculture, the Free Speech Movement in Berkeley, and *Ramparts* magazine, the legendary San Francisco muckraker that employed Gleason and Wenner until 1967. Finally, we will consider the contemporary media coverage

of the San Francisco counterculture, especially the so-called Summer of Love, prior to the creation of *Rolling Stone*.

June 11: Music. *Rolling Stone* quickly found a large audience, most of them young rock fans. In addition to covering the Beatles and other icons, the magazine lifted the profile of the Bay Area music scene by championing Jefferson Airplane, the Grateful Dead, Big Brother and the Holding Company, Sly and the Family Stone, Creedence Clearwater Revival, and other local favorites. Along the way, it hired a group of talented writers, editors, and photographers to shape its coverage. They include Jon Landau, John Burks, Ben Fong-Torres, Greil Marcus, Baron Wolman, and Annie Leibovitz. Ben Fong-Torres will help us understand how *Rolling Stone* became the nation's most prominent rock magazine.

June 18: Politics and Current Affairs. *Rolling Stone* was always more than a rock magazine. From the outset, it covered the counterculture as well as its music. Its articles on the disastrous Altamont rock concert and Manson Family murders earned *Rolling Stone* its first National Magazine Award in 1970. That same year, it ran its first piece by Hunter S. Thompson, who quickly became the magazine's most popular figure and a cultural icon. Even so, it took years for the magazine to find its political voice, and internal disagreement over that issue sent many of its most talented editors and writers packing. We will survey that history with the help of David Weir, who co-authored one of the magazine's most important investigative pieces during this period.

June 25: Achievement and Legacy. *Rolling Stone* was widely hailed as the nation's top rock magazine, but as the 1970s wore on, many of its original convictions were in tatters. We will discuss the magazine's response to shifting social, political, and media trends as well as Wenner's decision to relocate the magazine's offices to New York in 1977. We will also consider the influence *Rolling Stone* exerted on a generation of young journalists as well as the culture at large. I've invited Greil Marcus to help us with that and will confirm with him asap.

Recommended readings, films, programs, etc: There are several book-length histories of *Rolling Stone*, biographies of its founders, and memoirs galore. Several documentary films have also covered this territory. Let's talk about this in class or via email. Once I have a feeling for the overall level of interest, I will be happy to make specific recommendations.