

YOU SHOOK ME

All Campaign Long



**Music in
the 2016
Presidential
Election and
Beyond**



Edited by
Eric T. Kasper
and
Benjamin Schoening

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Eric T. Kasper
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Denton, Texas

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Printed in Canada

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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University of North Texas Press

1155 Union Circle #311336

Denton, TX 76203-5017

The paper used in this book meets the minimum requirements of the American National Standard for Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, z39.48.1984. Binding materials have been chosen for durability.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Kasper, Eric T., author, editor, writer of introduction.

| Schoening, Benjamin S., 1978- editor, writer of introduction.

Title: You shook me all campaign long : music in the 2016 presidential election and beyond / edited by Eric T. Kasper and Benjamin S. Schoening.

Description: Denton, Texas : University of North Texas Press, [2018] |

Includes index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2018030231 | ISBN 9781574417340

(cloth : alk. paper) | ISBN 9781574417456 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Music--Political aspects--United States--History--21st

century. | Presidents--United States--Election--2016. | Campaign

songs--United States--21st century--History and criticism.

Classification: LCC ML3917.U6 Y68 2018 | DDC 781.5/990973090512--dc23 LC record available at <https://na01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Flocn.loc.gov%2F2018030231&data=01%7C01%7Ckaren.devinney%40unt.edu%7Cbc7ee94d4ce24da8c61108d5fd2b629f%7C70de199207c6480fa318a1afcba03983%7C0&data=RCKaP2yvvh4Uwe1bo7RklObBDeb%2FvX3n35WV8ddVCfo%3D&reserved=0>

%7C70de199207c6480fa318a1afcba03983%7C0&data=RCKaP2yvvh4Uwe1bo7RklObBDeb

%2FvX3n35WV8ddVCfo%3D&reserved=0

The electronic edition of this book was made possible by the support of the Vick Family Foundation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----|
| Introduction: Tippecanoe and Trump Too <i>Eric T. Kasper (University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire)</i> <i>Benjamin S. Schoening (University of North Georgia)</i> | 1 |
| Chapter One: This Is What Democracy Sounds Like <i>Justin Patch (Vassar College)</i> | 19 |
| Chapter Two: “Not My President” <i>Lars J. Kristiansen (James Madison University)</i> | 51 |
| Chapter Three: Rapping for a Revolution <i>Eunice Rojas (Furman University)</i> | 89 |
| Chapter Four: Political Music, Media Spectacle, and Organizational Communication Competence <i>Nancy A. Wiencek (Rider University) Jonathan Millen (Rider University) David R. Dewberry (Rider University)</i> | 119 |
| Chapter Five: We the People Sing <i>Eric T. Kasper (University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire)</i> | 153 |
| Chapter Six: Amerititude <i>Quentin Vieregge (University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire —Barron County)</i> | 185 |
| Chapter Seven: This Is Our Fight Song <i>Kate Zittlow Rogness (Hamline University)</i> | 215 |
| Chapter Eight: “Weapons of Mass Distraction” <i>Lily E. Hirsch (California State University, Bakersfield)</i> | 239 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Chapter Nine: Trump the Musical Prophet <i>Daniel Oore (University of Toronto)</i> | 263 |
| Chapter Ten: “Pub Fight” Politics <i>David Wilson (Stanford University)</i> | 317 |
| Contributors’ Bios | 347 |
| Index | 351 |

YOU SHOOK ME ALL
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INTRODUCTION

TIPPECANOE AND TRUMP TOO

A BRIEF HISTORY OF WHY MUSIC MATTERS IN PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGNS

Eric T. Kasper (University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire)
Benjamin S. Schoening (University of North Georgia)

Music has played a role in American presidential campaigns since some of our first elections. Though not as prominent at the time, parodied songs were repurposed as early as the reelection of George Washington in 1792 in an attempt to sway the electorate, and they started to become standard practice in the 1796 contest between John Adams and Thomas Jefferson.¹ Music usage has not been static though; rather, the way in which music has played a part in presidential elections has changed dramatically over time, moving from parody to original composition to pre-existing songs. New technologies—including advancements in movable type lithography, radio, television, and the Internet—have also influenced the relationships among candidates, music, and the electorate.

Regardless of these technological changes, it is ultimately communication and emotion that make music so important in the framework of presidential campaigns. Music has long been a vehicle by which campaigns

could relay important messages about their candidates or disparage their opposition. Early on, this was primarily accomplished through parody, or changing the lyrics of a popular song, in whole or part, to produce new meaning. This also made songs very effective in conveying campaign messages. People would attend rallies and hear these new words sung to familiar tunes and, through music, spread the word about a particular candidate. In modern elections, candidates have primarily expressed themselves musically through “canned” songs: pre-existing popular tunes that are appropriated by campaigns without changing musical notes or lyrics. Given the wide range of the contemporary pop music catalogue, a well-chosen song can say something effective about a candidate, and, if the association is strong enough between a song and a candidate, may even offer another means of advertising for a candidate through play on the radio or other mediums.²

Tapping into the emotion of the electorate is just as important for presidential candidates. Many books have been written about the power of music and its connection with the brain and human emotion.³ Music has the power to heighten an existing mood or change our overall disposition.⁴ It has the capability to bond groups of people together.⁵ It is this emotional power that campaigns also work to exploit within the electorate; they attempt to form bonds in voters’ minds between candidates (including their ideas) and the music that is played at campaign stops, rallies, conventions, and in television advertisements. Regardless of the way in which campaigns choose to use music, its enduring power in presidential campaigns is indisputable.

The first watershed moment in the use of campaign music occurred in the election of 1840, which featured William Harrison against incumbent President Martin Van Buren. While numerous songs were written or parodied for the election, it was “Tippecanoe and Tyler Too,” set to the famous tune of “Three Little Pigs,” that demonstrated the growing dominance of songs in elections.⁶ This was the first moment where the power of music to affect the electorate in a presidential election

was significantly documented. In fact, the song was so popular that Helen Johnson wrote in *The North American Review* that the song “sang Harrison into the presidency.”⁷ An anonymous Democrat of the day followed up that sentiment by noting that “[w]e have been sung down, lied down [and] drunk down.”⁸ As was observed by journalist Irwin Silber, the song “firmly established the power of singing as a campaign device,”⁹ thus beginning the singing campaigns of the 1800s.

Several factors explain why this song was so effective. First, the Jacksonian reforms of the 1820s and 1830s greatly expanded the electorate by eliminating property qualifications for voting rights, and this larger electorate included more people without formal education;¹⁰ thus, a need emerged to communicate campaign messages in new, non-written ways, including through the singing of song. Furthermore, by the 1830s, candidates for the presidency were no longer selected by the congressional King Caucus system, but were instead nominated by national conventions, giving the parties and the public more say over who those candidates would be,¹¹ resulting in candidates needing to connect with voters on a more emotional level, such as through music. Finally, improvements in printing press technology made it significantly easier and cheaper by 1840 to mass produce typed materials,¹² including songbooks, thus allowing for tunes like “Tippecanoe and Tyler Too” to be widely distributed in print form. All of these factors combined to lead campaigns to reach the people more effectively via song.

The 1860 election was a four-way contest featuring Republican Abraham Lincoln, Democrat Stephen Douglas, Constitutional Union Party candidate John Bell, and Southern Democrat John C. Breckenridge. This election had one of the most recognizable campaign songs supporting Lincoln, titled “Lincoln and Liberty, Too,” which was set to the tune of the well-liked “Rosin the Beau.”¹³ This election and song are notable for a second reason as well. The text of “Lincoln and Liberty, Too” was written by Jesse Hutchinson, one of the members of the Hutchinson Family Singers, who were quite popular by 1860.¹⁴ This was possibly

the first celebrity endorsement of a presidential candidate by a singer lending both their skill and the value of their name to a campaign; it is an early precursor to a trend that caught on in the twentieth century and has been a stalwart in modern campaigns.

Around the turn of the twentieth century, there was a new development in campaign music with candidates, in part, moving away from some of the singing traditions and the use of parodied song by incorporating popular music styles and compositions in campaigns. It was at this time that Ragtime music was starting to show its popularity and could be identified as one of the first truly American musical genres.¹⁵ It was also during this era that the composers and song writers of Tin Pan Alley were establishing themselves as the center of popular music publication.¹⁶ As these genres became trendy, candidates began to see the benefit of incorporating original songs into their campaigns, written in these popular styles: "A familiar tune can assist with the memorization of a song, but having a new composition in the style of the latest and greatest [musical] craze can effectively establish one's position as a candidate who is with the times and aware of the issues that are important to the electorate."¹⁷ This new trend toward the use of popular music and popular musicians, while not at this juncture fully embracing the world of canned songs, foreshadows the ways in which campaigns would tend to choose to use music in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Nevertheless, the singing campaigns and their accompanied parodied songs still ruled the campaign trail at this time.

It was not long after this first use of current popular genres was introduced into presidential politics that another development changed the course of campaigns in a dramatic way. The advent of the radio in the early twentieth century sent campaign music on a new path, putting a swift end to the power and popularity of the singing campaigns that had dominated since 1840. Yet, as Irwin Silber recognized, the radio did not completely eradicate the old traditions. Professionals and amateurs continued to write parodies and publish sheet music for campaigns. On

occasion, a song of this nature even proved to become popular to some extent. In general, though, radio made these endeavors less effective, which led to parodied music that was often uninspired and not very popular, thus making these traditions from the older singing campaigns a poor choice for presidential candidates in this new era.¹⁸

Campaigns during this time were struggling with the new medium of radio, especially as it pertained to music. However, from these struggles came a new type of campaign song. The trend that began with Ragtime around the turn of the twentieth century became the norm, with performers and songwriters, such as Al Jolson, lending not only their musical talents but also their celebrity to the campaign.¹⁹ Additionally, this meant that the quality of musical output was vastly improved. While a campaign could capitalize on the use of existing tunes to ensure the audience was familiar, the construction of lyrics within those tunes was not always ideal. These new campaign songs eliminated that issue with fresh lyrics being set to fresh melodies.

There are several additional key moments in the twentieth century that lead us to where campaign music currently resides. The first of these moments occurred with Franklin Roosevelt in 1932. When he was looking for a song to represent his campaign at the Democratic National Convention, Roosevelt first gravitated toward “Anchors Away,” which would have emphasized his prior service as Assistant Secretary of the Navy. However, he and his brain trust ultimately decided to use the peppier song “Happy Days Are Here Again” as the musical message of the campaign.²⁰ What makes this song unique was that it was employed without any alterations to text or music. In other words, Roosevelt took an existing, essentially canned, song and turned it into the theme of his campaign. Toward the end of the twentieth century, this became a trend followed by virtually all campaigns.

Another new technology emerged in the election of 1952. This was the first time that television was featured prominently as part of presidential campaigns.²¹ This new medium changed many things about presidential

campaigns, and that included the way music would be utilized, something evident with both major party nominees that year, Dwight Eisenhower and Adlai Stevenson. However, of the two, Eisenhower's campaign was by far the more effective in the way it used this new medium to merge music and image together.

Eisenhower's campaign took an approach out of the Saturday morning cartoons. The campaign combined an original song, "I Like Ike," with an animated feature. This 60-second ad played this song over animated characters marching along with "Ike" banners while following Uncle Sam. What made this ad so effective, ultimately, was its imagery, which included the following:

[T]he elephant, the traditional symbol of the Republican Party, carrying a sheet on its back with Eisenhower's picture and having a sheet tied to its trunk with the word "Ike" written on it. The elephant also pulled a drum which it was pounding with a mallet held in its tail. In addition, . . . the song and the ad depicted three prominent Democrats as donkeys . . . The crowd of supporters was constantly moving forward (towards the right of the screen from the viewer's perspective).²²

This marriage of music with the moving image, something that television allowed on a large scale like no past medium, launched a new day in presidential campaigns. Candidates now had yet another way to express their messages via song, and they could do it in innovative ways.

John F. Kennedy would employ a similar strategy in his 1960 campaign, utilizing a combination of music and image to represent his campaign on the television. Perhaps his most famous political ad did not have a title, but it is often referred to simply as "Kennedy." The song combined an original composition with many still images, including several of the candidate. In this case, the song is much more famous and memorable than the images of the ad itself. Importantly for the future president, the song relied on a repetition technique, mentioning Kennedy's name 26 times over the course of sixty seconds.²³

The Kennedy campaign was also noteworthy because it helped bring about the reemergence of the parodied song.²⁴ As part of the 1960 campaign, Kennedy was able to incorporate the song “High Hopes” into his election year efforts. “High Hopes” was from the film *A Hole in the Head* and won the 1959 Academy Award for Best Original Song. Further, the song spent the entire summer of 1959 on the Billboard Hot 100 chart.²⁵ Kennedy adopted the song in the true parody fashion, changing lyrics to specifically insert the candidate’s name and speak about his virtues. Yet, in this case, the campaign chose to leave the hook of the song intact, allowing the audience to stay connected, both musically and textually, to the original composition.

Perhaps the larger impact with the use of “High Hopes” was that Kennedy was able to garner the use of celebrity with performances of the song by Frank Sinatra, another key aspect to music in this campaign.²⁶ This ensured that a popular celebrity endorsed the future president, meaning that the artist would not object to the candidate’s use of the song, a problem that would plague future White House hopefuls. Indeed, the affiliation and association of campaigns with famous musical personalities has become commonplace in modern presidential campaigns. This has also led to celebrities fighting to protect their music from campaigns, even if used legally, over implied endorsements and the guarding of their image from opposing political views.

While not the first candidate to play canned music, Ronald Reagan would finally establish what was begun by Roosevelt more than fifty years earlier by reigniting the use of the canned song, this time to become an ongoing trend. Reagan did this by adopting Lee Greenwood’s “God Bless the U.S.A.” in his 1984 presidential campaign. For Reagan, the song held a simple patriotic message that was easily communicated with the electorate. Furthermore, the song was exceedingly popular at the time, spending 10 weeks on *Billboard’s* Country Singles chart in the same year.²⁷ This new-found trend has led to some of the most memorable musical moments in presidential campaigns (e.g., Bill Clinton’s use in

1992 of “Don’t Stop” by Fleetwood Mac) and some follies as well (e.g., Ross Perot’s choice of “Crazy” by Patsy Cline in the same campaign).²⁸

There are positive and negative implications when a presidential campaign repurposes a canned song. On the positive side, a campaign can benefit from the immediate recognition that the electorate has with the song. Particularly if the song is currently on the radio, it can constitute free advertising for a campaign. For example, in the case of Roosevelt’s use of “Happy Days Are Here Again,” the tune was used in the 1930 film *Chasing Rainbows* and was still quite popular in 1932.²⁹ This can be a boon to a campaign as the song might still be receiving frequent radio airplay, thus offering free reinforcement of the candidate and their message. Further, campaigns do not need to wait for amateurs to create songs or work with composers/songwriters to have original works written for their campaigns that may or may not prove to be effective. Thus, a song that is already known to have a positive reception is ready upon demand.

However, canned music has the potential to produce some less desirable outcomes as well. First, as the content of the song is not tailored to speak more specifically about the candidate or the campaign, conflicting messages could be received by the public. This factor did not come into play with Roosevelt’s choice, as the song in its entirety helped Roosevelt to espouse the popular message that he could lead the country out of the Great Depression. Put another way, there were not lyrics subject to a great deal of misrepresentation or misapplication. But as more and more candidates adopted this strategy, they often relied on the hook of the song to deliver the message instead of the entire song as in the cases of Roosevelt and Reagan. For example, in Bill Clinton’s choice of “Don’t Stop,” the hook of the song delivers a powerful message to the electorate of hope for a brighter future. But when looking at the song in its entirety, it was originally written about the impending divorce between two members of Fleetwood Mac, Christine McVie and John McVie³⁰ (not necessarily a desirable message for a presidential campaign). In this way,

campaigns are relying on the ever shorter attention span of the public to convey their message when using a canned song.

Another unintended consequence is negative publicity from artists who do not want a candidate using their music. And this can occur in several forms. For instance, if a campaign plays a song without first securing copyright permission, this can lead to a cease and desist order (e.g., when Tom Petty ordered George W. Bush to stop using “I Won’t Back Down” in 2000) or, worse, a lawsuit (e.g., when Jackson Browne sued John McCain in 2008 for using “Running on Empty”).³¹ However, even when a campaign has secured the copyright permissions to use a song, that does not always mean that the artist supports a particular candidate’s use of their performance of that song, which can lead to just as much negative publicity if the artist publicly objects.

By the 2008 election cycle, the Internet was fundamentally changing campaign music norms. For instance, as it became easier for the average person to post on websites like YouTube, songs like “I Got a Crush on Obama” could go viral without any planning by, or involvement from, the candidate who was the subject of the song.³² This remained relatively rare in 2008 but would be the genesis of a trend that exploded in 2016. In an effort to actively involve voters, for the 2008 campaign Hillary Clinton permitted her supporters to select her theme song (Celine Dion’s “You and I”) in an online poll, although she later stopped using the song in favor of other music.³³ By 2012, it was commonplace for a candidate receiving his or her party’s nomination to release a campaign playlist on the Spotify music streaming service.³⁴

There is no doubt that the history of campaign music is long, vibrant, and ever changing. The 2016 presidential election was no different. Indeed, the relevance of music in the 2016 campaign for the White House took various forms and was constantly present in American media. Hillary Clinton made use of a music service agency and put a playlist on Spotify.³⁵ Donald Trump earned the scorn of various artists—including Neil Young, Steven Tyler, Adele, and the Rolling Stones—after playing their songs at

campaign events (a phenomenon explored in multiple chapters below). Bernie Sanders received high praise from many commentators for his use of Simon and Garfunkel's "America" in a television advertisement.³⁶ A music-licensing firm sued Ted Cruz over his use of background music in television ads.³⁷ Marco Rubio publicly expressed his affinity for hip-hop music.³⁸ Almost all candidates took steps to secure endorsements from musical celebrities, and some candidates sang or played musical instruments while campaigning. Moreover, to a greater degree than ever before, the creation and dissemination of "unofficial" musical activity on the Internet and in live performances provided musical artists and others opportunities to shape political discourse in ways that were wholly outside of the control of candidates and campaigns.

Taken in its totality, 2016 was a transformative election regarding music. However, this transformation can be best understood as the culmination of various changes to how music was used in campaigns for the last several presidential elections. In other words, what we saw in 2016 was the outgrowth of past developments, leading to a greater than ever use of popular music by campaigns, more and more musical artist endorsements sought by candidates, the employment of musical consultants, ever changing songs at campaign rallies, the burgeoning instances of musicians threatening legal action against candidates using their art, and an increase in artists and others using music as a form of political protest during and after the campaign. These are either new developments this cycle, or they were taken to a higher level than previously observed. In their totality, these trends coalesced to make the 2016 campaign the most significant one for music since the seminal 1840 election. It represented a culmination of emerging trends in recent election cycles and, in other ways, planted seeds for the future use of music in presidential campaigns. The chapters that follow will explore some of the new and thought-provoking trends of this election and how they may signal change for the future.

We will begin by looking at campaign music through a larger, more historical lens and how those views come into focus with the 2016 campaign. Justin Patch considers the employment of pop music by campaigns as well as its use by average citizens, showing how in 2016 many citizens posted music online to respond to presidential candidates. He additionally posits that we place more meaning in campaign music now than ever before. Lars J. Kristiansen focuses on punk rockers' protests of presidential candidates and presidents during their campaigns and while in office, examining these musicians' art from the presidencies of Ronald Reagan through Donald Trump. He ultimately shows us how punk rockers have changed the way they dissent against presidential candidates and presidents over time. Eunice Rojas illuminates for the reader how the last election engaged the Hispanic population in the United States to an unprecedented degree, resulting in great salience for Latino hip-hop. Specifically, she examines Residente and Rebel Diaz's involvement in presidential politics within the context of Antonio Gramsci's theories about counter-hegemonic struggles.

We then look at the 2016 election from a broad perspective of campaigns and messaging. First, Nancy Wiencek, Jonathan Millen, and David R. Dewberry reveal how in an era when more and more tracks are being used on the campaign trail, candidates create problems when they choose the wrong song. These authors argue that poor music choices by candidates suggest lack of effectiveness in obtaining endorsements, building coalitions, and communicating a clear message. Eric T. Kasper explains how the 2016 cycle was a significant campaign for candidates expressing their vision of the U.S. Constitution through song; he engages in textual analysis of several candidates' speeches and the lyrics of their song choices to show us how music was chosen to convey meaningful messages about constitutional interpretation.

Our latter chapters focus on individual campaign issues and strategies in 2016 and beyond. Quentin Vieregge investigates why reactions to the USA Freedom Kids' performance at a Donald Trump rally were so

strong. He ultimately contends that the answer lies in how Americans can view the same texts, people, and ideas to see different things while simultaneously being baffled by contradictory interpretations. Kate Zittlow Rogness demonstrates the implications of the “Fight Song” video compiled for the Hillary Clinton campaign at the Democratic National Convention. She reasons that, as a citizen-generated campaign message, the song signals a transformative identification between Clinton and her constituency.

The final chapters of this volume focus on the winner of the 2016 election: Donald Trump. Lily E. Hirsch argues why the forty-fifth president has had a more controversial relationship with music than any candidate in American history. Her assertion is that high-profile feuds between Trump and musicians served to distract the public and the media from key political issues and policy discussion. Daniel Oore establishes what Trump’s musicality—both as it was consumed and as it was reproduced through media and technology during the campaign—reveals about Trump as well as the consumers of this music. Lastly, David Wilson draws the contrast between the type of music that was typical for the Trump presidential campaign and that used during the president’s inauguration, explaining why this difference existed. Wilson also shows us that Trump’s use of music is different from other candidates both ideologically and in the way he interacted with the American artistic community.

In many ways, then, these chapters combine to make several similar arguments from across multiple academic disciplines. The 2016 presidential election was a watershed year for music. Donald Trump was a candidate who used music in ways not previously witnessed in American politics. User-generated music related to the election was being produced and distributed in new ways. The public’s interpretation of campaign music was varied.

What is unique about a text of this nature, though, is the wide variety of lenses through which the historical context of music and the music of the 2016 campaign are viewed. We combine in the same volume

chapters from academics who teach and research in political science, law, music, English, Spanish, and communication and journalism. When looking at campaign music through so many lenses and using such varied criteria, a book of this nature shows how different disciplines and methodologies can examine the same works and come to seemingly different conclusions, any (and perhaps all) of which may ultimately be correct. For instance, were the choices of music made by the Trump campaign demonstrative of organizational failure, as Wiencek, Millen, and Dewberry argue? Or was it brilliant strategy in order to cause conflicts that would resonate in the media and ultimately distract the masses from the real issues of the campaign, as Hirsch maintains? For another example, do presidential candidates choose songs with lyrics that express meaningful messages for the campaign, as both Patch and Kasper reason? Or is it the case that other elements of campaign music are really more important, particularly given how pop music lyrics are subject to misinterpretation, as Wilson explains? These are questions that must ultimately be answered by the reader, and reasonable people may disagree depending on the lens one is using.

Regardless of the perspective or discipline of the authors below, all of these chapters will amply demonstrate that music matters in presidential elections. It has for centuries. Now more than ever, though, campaigns, the media, and the citizenry are paying great attention to the politics of songs and musicians in our presidential elections. While we cannot predict the full significance of music in 2020, we can unequivocally state that it will indeed matter and that the employment of music in 2016 will influence that future use. We can also say that the 2016 presidential election cycle will go down in history as one of the most memorable and substantial when it comes to music by and about campaigns.

NOTES

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23. *Ibid.*, 129.
24. It is important to note that the spirit of the singing campaign and the use of parodied songs has never truly met its demise. Although trends change with music and the courses of that music in campaigns, the spirit of the early singing campaigns lives on through each of the developments in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. For example, in the 1948 election, Harry Truman's campaign successfully adopted "I'm Just Wild About Harry," making slight changes to the text to emphasize the candidate. This also occurred in Lyndon Johnson's 1964 campaign with the creation of the song "Hello, Lyndon!" based off the theme to the popular musical "Hello, Dolly!" More recently, in 2008 a combination of parody and celebrity endorsement took place with Hank Williams Jr.'s

- “McCain-Palin Tradition,” which was a play on his famous song “Family Tradition.” Original songs also continue to be written for campaigns with songs like “Raisin’ McCain” in 2008 and “Yes We Can” in the same year. Thus, the use of parody and original songs, while not as common, remains an enduring aspect of American presidential campaigns.
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CHAPTER ONE

THIS IS WHAT DEMOCRACY SOUNDS LIKE

REFLECTIONS ON POP SONGS IN THE 2016 CAMPAIGN

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INTRODUCTION

The 2016 presidential election resonated to the strains of pop music. From Broadway crossover hits to contemporary girl-power pop, '60s folk, and classic rock, familiar, comfortable, and radio-friendly music dominated campaign theme songs, mixtapes, and rally playlists. Candidates crafted their musical signatures by entering and exiting the stage to pop tunes selected for their feel-good appeal, aesthetics, message, innuendo, or sing-along chorus. This phenomenon is not unusual—candidates have utilized popular music, beginning with the first presidential campaign, and campaigns constantly adapt to the new ways that popular music is disseminated and incorporated into popular culture.¹ What is categorically different about this election is two-fold. The first is the dominance of pop music, a radio-friendly and industry-connected sub-set of the broader category of popular music. Even original songs written for presidential

campaigns, like will.i.am's "Yes, We Can" and Bikini Kill's "I'm With Her" are unapologetically pop in aesthetic and their relationship to mass culture production and distribution. The second is the reception that campaign music gets, the weight attributed to it by both the press and invested citizens. Campaign music, more than ever before, is now treated as if it carries meaningful information about candidates and their potential to perform the duties of the presidency. This is driven by the proliferation of news and social media that provide outlets for expansive analysis and opinion concerning the psychology and ideology of candidates read through music.² Campaign music has been released from its position as simply an appendage or accompaniment. The complex and contradictory semiotic codes of musical production, history, adaptation, and reception are now publicly debated, integrated into campaign strategy, and are a ground where political ideologies are confronted and contested.

While campaign officials have never released a statement detailing exactly why pop music is an essential element of campaign strategy, there are two compelling reasons. The first is precedent. Bill Clinton's 1992 campaign success is often coupled with his innovative use of pop music. From "Heartbreak Hotel" on *The Arsenio Hall Show* to using Fleetwood Mac's "Don't Stop (Thinking about Tomorrow)," pop music is woven into the narrative of Clinton's victory. This win was bound to spur imitators, and even Clinton's septuagenarian opponent in 1996, Republican Robert Dole, used an adaptation of Sam and Dave's "Soul Man," re-written as "Dole Man" by Sam Moore's wife.³ The second reason for the proliferation in pop is the expanded media and social media coverage of campaign music. With more bloggers, commentators, and opinion makers representing a diversity of ideological subcultures, a single song, like "Don't Stop" or Brooks and Dunn's "Only in America," is limited in its popular traction. More music gives the campaign a greater opportunity to be written about, talked about, and shared via digital media. It is possible that the proliferation of media and of pop music on the campaign are intimately linked.

From a host of commentary and analysis in the news, blogs, and popular social networking sites, to fan tribute videos, music occupies increasing space within campaign culture and media coverage. While pop music is socially and emotionally important, its expanding role as a validating force and partisan tool is cause for concern. Drawing homologies between campaign music and the candidate is dangerous business: it provides false cognitive shortcuts and relieves voters and media outlets from the difficult work of asking complex policy questions and deciphering complicated answers. Listening to or reading commentary about campaign music in lieu of lending a critical ear to policy is destructive and corrosive, and ultimately allows political machinery, which so often fails to work in the interest of the common good, to continue functioning as is. Utilizing pop music as a partisan tool not only corrupts the democratic process of the campaign as a public forum for competing ideas, it also violates the democratic spirit of pop music as a subjective art form disconnected from hierarchy and judgment. By listening to pop as an indicator of presidential qualification and quality, and allowing campaigns to politicize pop, we turn campaign audition into empty listening and reify the meanings of pop in ways that violate its spirit.

Pop can be put to political uses, and has been used effectively in the past.⁴ However, to best promote democratic values, pop's meanings should be passed horizontally, between citizens, not vertically, down to citizens from the culture industry. Pop as a commodity should be a tool with which the people individually and collectively craft their identities, enjoy their leisure, and aestheticize their worlds. In the dynamic digital world of the 2016 election, there were examples of citizens using pop music as part of political participation in compelling ways. These techniques are in their infancy, but hold potential to be more than univocal party propaganda. Pop can be a nuanced and creative tool to express the small political worlds of citizens and communities. Through a theoretical examination of 2016's campaign pop, I argue for the political potential of the musical commodity to be a democratic tool for the cultivation and articulation of new, complex political subjectivities. Following are

analyses of example discourses about campaign pop, and three examples of pop used in unusually subjective citizen activism that point towards alternate modes of political argumentation which move horizontally rather than vertically.

POPULAR MUSIC AND DEMOCRACY

This chapter examines pop music, as opposed to the broader and more encompassing category of popular music. But before proceeding any further, it is necessary to define terms and craft an argument *for* the democratic potential of pop. In this chapter, I am defining pop music as music conceived of, written, produced, and disseminated as a commodity: craft rather than art. Pop is oriented towards participation in commercial mass media, and engages with the celebrity system, which subsumes the persona and image of the artist into marketing and reception of the song. This is a sub-set of the wider genre(s) of popular music, which connote music of working class communities, low-brow or vulgar music, music that is or is modeled on forms of folk and vernacular music, or music that has a clear relationship to mass media and marketing.⁵ Popular culture is broadly defined by Stuart Hall as culture which is cultivated by marginal classes. These groups do not have full and unfettered access to hegemonic culture and do not have a direct hand in altering hegemonic cultural practices. It is on these cultural margins (not exclusively demographic or geographic margins) where the popular classes re-work pieces of hegemonic and marginal culture to suit their own needs and desires.⁶ In de-industrializing cities DJs took funk records and old recording equipment and fashioned hip-hop, disco, house, and dance hall; denizens of de-industrial fallout also sped up the blues and rock and roll to create heavy metal; in Appalachia, rural communities took well-worn forms of Anglo balladry and added new lyrics, instruments, and narratives to reflect local hardships and joys, planting the seeds of Americana, country, and American folk music; at the southern border, Chicano and Mexican farmers added the accordion to guitar and bajo sexto and set

border ballads to polkas and waltzes learned from German and Czech immigrants to form conjunto.⁷ These are a few of the many examples of excluded and marginal communities creating local culture out of the available intellectual, creative, and material resources.

Pop is a subsequent phase in popular culture's constant processes of creation, appropriation, and hybridity. Part of the process of hegemonic culture's constant renewal is the appropriation and incorporation of marginal (popular) culture. As we can see from the above examples, each of the forms that were once a communally held and locally specific musical practice have become regionalized, if not nationalized and globalized. In this process local forms are often changed to adapt to hegemonic tastes, desires, and limitations, although new forms also exert their own transformative force on hegemonic culture, as disco, hip-hop, metal, conjunto, and country all attest to. As popular music forms are either adapted or appropriated, they are disconnected from their original social relationships and become commodities—cultural products and/or cultural practices that are consumed in a market economy.

Pop music is descended from popular cultural practices, but is a commodity. The music is meant not only to generate profit for its performers, producers, marketers, and distributors, but the music itself is just one part of a larger system of celebrity and commodity marketing.⁸ Most of the artists represented on 2016 playlists (with the exception of First Love and, perhaps Woody Guthrie) are professional, and participate in a marketplace for their music, image, and brand. The music they perform is already a mixture of styles, genres, and genealogies, tailored for unapologetic mass appeal, not necessarily for its intended meaning, or to have an effect beyond being popular.

What makes pop music unique, and separates it from the large umbrella of popular music, is that it is a pure commodity. But it is as a commodity that it has democratic potential. Pop music, following Adorno's critique of the culture industry, is flawed for several reasons. First, pop is flawed because of the transcendence and objective value attributed to it—either

externally or by marketers.⁹ Second, pop is repetitive and standardized, marking it as pre-digested, and seeking standard, predictable, universal responses, something antithetical to individualistic, liberal society. As art music strains towards the transcendent or radical, it does so by rejecting substitution, by making each individual piece a necessity, down to the smallest section, fragment, or note. For Adorno, this represents the height of liberal society, where difference is not just existential, but essential to the whole, and individuality is respected.¹⁰ For Adorno, pop music's techniques of infinite substitution, lowest common denominator composition, feigned profundity, and mindless repetition relegate it to the status of mass-produced emptiness, providing entertainment, escapism, and false consciousness. By requiring nothing of the listener, and encouraging distracted and background listening, pop music actively detracts from the revolutionary or transcendent potential of serious music—turning that into a commodity as well and reducing music to exchange value.¹¹

Adorno's critique has flaws that have been extensively deconstructed in cultural studies, notably by the Birmingham School. One serious oversight is that Adorno's critique universalizes the listener and their responses. Adorno assumes a semiotic chain referred to in media and communication studies as the transmission model. This model postulates that the message from the source travels through the medium and to the receiver whole.¹² As Stuart Hall points out, products and commodities of mass culture are often re-worked locally to fit the signifying practices of consumers rather than the ideologies and intentions of producers.¹³ Re-signifying practices are an essential part of this process, especially for pop music. Pop music is an empty signifier, one that is easily augmented, altered, and distorted by the whims of listeners. Even the simplest ditties, as we see from "To Anacreon in Heaven," a (relatively) bawdy British drinking song, turned U.S. national anthem, which Igor Stravinsky was nearly banned from Boston for re-orchestrating, and became a Jimi Hendrix subversive classic, can be endowed with contrasting, complex meanings that pique distinct emotions and associations.¹⁴ Modern pop,

particularly remix culture, further challenges the fragile universalism of Adorno's critiques, and places pop back into the unmoored space of postmodern ambiguity, contingency, and dynamism.

It is the openness of pop's interpretations that gives it meaning. Contrary to Adorno's assertion that understanding music has been eclipsed by exchange value and that equivalence has replaced meaning,¹⁵ the idea that pop music is made to be an open signifier, in no way renders it *meaningless*. As an open signifier, pop allows listeners and consumers to attribute an infinite number of meanings to each song—even changing over time as the listener, their identities, and their social situations morph. Pop's democratic potential lies in an almost Kantian ability to be open to individual judgement.¹⁶ Pop eludes universal condemnation just as easily as it does universal accolades. Part of the joy of pop music is that it is a judgement-free pleasure, relieved of the burdens of value, taste, and legitimacy.¹⁷ It should be music to unapologetically satisfy the needs of postmodern individuals and communities, ad hoc or deep-rooted. One song should hold the potential to dance, weep, swoon, romance, or repel, depending solely on the listener and the moment of audition.¹⁸ Pop, as a commodity that the buyer controls, should be polysemic, polyvocal, polyvalent, and resistant to narrativization from above. Unfortunately, this ethos, which leads to broad appeal and listeners in diverse and divergent communities, is what leads political campaigns to attempt to capture lightning in a bottle by using pop music's expansive appeal to pique voter emotions.

In a mass-mediated age where more music is accessible for less money (allowing for differential levels of access), Adorno's exchange-value, transmission model analysis is inappropriate for understanding modern consumption of pop music. Conceptualizing music as infinitely interpretable opens a space to hear pop differently, as having *more* democratic potential than "serious" or expressly partisan political music. It also points to a corollary question about why we give up our freedom to judge pop music subjectively and allow politicians—leaders among *peers*—to

control and determine the meaning of pop, removing it from flexible local and individual control.

MEDIA COMMENTARY AND MUSICAL MEANING

Without pursuing exhaustive detail, the 2016 campaign was a pop-filled affair. Pop music comprised official campaign mixtapes, the playlists that filled time while audiences waited at rallies, the music that played candidates on and off stage at events, and the music used in broadcast and online advertisements. Every candidate but one entered and exited rallies to a pop song early on in their campaigns.¹⁹ While the songs used by candidates changed, for aesthetic, strategic, or legal reasons, nearly all the candidates kept their musical selection squarely in the pop vein, save for Bernie Sanders and Martin O'Malley who used Woody Guthrie's protest-song-turned-patriotic-jingle "This Land Is Your Land." The songs used on the trail, songs that ended up associated with candidates, adopted for fan tribute videos, and written about by journalists and critics, were songs like Twisted Sister's "We're Not Gonna Take It," Katy Perry's "Roar," Simon and Garfunkel's "America," Diplo's "It's a Revolution," REM's "It's the End of the World as We Know It (And I Feel Fine)," and Rachel Patten's "Fight Song." And all of these after candidates who used Metallica's "Enter Sandman," Zac Brown Band's "Homegrown," and Rascal Flatts's "Life Is a Highway" dropped out.²⁰ A scan of the commentary on campaign music highlights the role of pop and radio-friendly songs throughout the 2016 contest.

In the virtual world, partisans picked this up, using pop music to create new ads and tribute videos, political satire, and mudslinging videos.²¹ Even late-night comedy caught the trend, taking opportunities to lampoon both the use of pop music and the candidates' presentation of it.²² In short, pop music was meaningful to the 2016 candidates, as well as to members of the public, journalists, and professional entertainers.

Contrary to the idea of pop music as an open signifier, one that depends on audience participation and interpretation for its meaning, political uses of pop music sought to confine and define the meanings of these songs to listeners, just as the candidates used songs to craft their political identities. While the intentions of the campaigns are opaque—as of yet no one from the campaigns of 2016 has issued a formal statement on their uses of music—the reception and decoding of 2016’s vibrations was in evidence early on. From the first reverberations, commentary swirled about the nature of each campaign’s music, what message it was sending, to whom, and to what effect.

In September of 2015, Amber Phillips wrote, “The Music Each 2016 Candidate Chooses, and Why,” a musical rundown of each candidate’s music based on appearances at major Political Action Committee events and campaign stops. The article is unique in its thoroughness: every Democratic and Republican candidate is covered, even those with low polling numbers (most journalists focused on the leading candidates, particularly in the large Republican field). Phillips’s rubric for each candidate is consistent: after the artist and song, key and potentially influential lyrics are offered along with a note on the politics of the artist and the status of permission. Additional songs are sometimes included for campaigns that made broader use of music. What Phillips’s approach lays bare is that those listening, or at least those commenting on listening, are making connections between candidates and the meanings of their music. Even if there is irony (as was the case of Donald Trump using Neil Young’s “Rockin’ in the Free World” and REM’s “It’s the End of the World as We Know It”), confusion (in Hillary Clinton playing Edgar Winter Group’s “Frankenstein”), or incongruity (as in Bernie Sanders also adopting “Rockin’ in the Free World” and both Clinton and Jeb Bush employing Journey’s “Wheel in the Sky”), Phillips’s article, and many others like it (including one by the author), makes clear that there is a search for meaning, filtered through the campaign and the public politics of the artists.²³ Phillips, like many citizens, is searching for insight to

the candidate, their politics, and their supporters, through examining campaign music.

Articles, like Phillips's, that comment on campaign music for a general (partisan) readership, tended to be much less measured than hers. A smart and snarky piece entitled "Every Presidential Campaign Song Is Terrible" runs down the (sarcastic) top 10 original songs for the campaign, finishing with the now-infamous USA Freedom Kids' "The Official Donald Trump Jam." The authors offer derision to each song in turn, with references to the pop they attempt to imitate, from Shirley Temple to Nancy Sinatra and Boot Camp Clik. However, authors Myles Tanzer and Amos Barshad save special praise for "Man of the Hour" by "Jumpin'" Joe Matsko, a tribute to Ohio governor John Kasich. Interestingly, they provide the disclaimer, "And be forewarned: this shit is jaunty as fuck, and one listen just might be enough to leave you loving John Kasich, presidential candidate."²⁴ The implication, tongue-in-cheek as it is, is that voters can be swayed by music, and that one good theme song could be enough to turn a candidate polling at three percent into a contender.

On the partisan side, Stephanie McNeal and Bob Marshall's BuzzFeed article "Hillary Clinton's Official Spotify Playlist Is Perfect For Your Mom's Gym Mix. Or running for President. Take Your Pick" adopts a snarky but oddly positive attitude towards Clinton's mixtape, which was released in June of 2015. In postmodern blog fashion, the article is a series of gifs, YouTube links, and bold aphorisms, like the opening: "The mix of girl power jams and classics like J.Lo's 'Let's Get Loud' is the perfect mix for talking about women's rights issues, or for your middle-aged aunt who really needs some tunes to get her blood pumping at 24 Hour Fitness."²⁵ Beneath each of fourteen songs (the mixtape in its entirety contained twenty-three) are two statements, one about why the song is great for the gym and the other about why it is great for the campaign. While at first glance the article seems to be a good laugh for a good cause, buried in the text is a critique of the practice of campaign music pandering. Two examples from the bottom of the list, Jon Bon Jovi's

“Beautiful Day” and Mark Anthony’s “Vivir Mi Vida” demonstrate this critique with the biting satire that BuzzFeed is known for:

Why It’s Perfect for the Gym: Everyone needs that one song on their workout playlist that is incredibly embarrassing. This could be yours.

Why It’s Perfect for Running for President: Not every song on your campaign playlist can be from 2012 or 2013. You need a new jam, but not too new that it scares your voter base. The compromise: How about an old artist singing a new song?

Why It’s Perfect for the Gym: You have no idea what Marc Anthony’s saying (something about “living,” probably). But you like getting down to it in your dance-fitness class.

Why It’s Perfect for Running for President: You have no idea what Marc Anthony’s saying (something about “living,” probably). But you know that a large population of voters you’re trying to attract know exactly what he’s saying, and that’s good enough for you.²⁶

These last two analyses brilliantly point to common assumptions about those who choose and listen to campaign music. The first is the cold calculus involved in making a campaign’s musical selections. The commentary on “Beautiful Day” parodies the comfort of something just old enough to be a safe bet—time tested but not old—and the notion that voters (read: older Americans) are easily frightened by new cultural trends and sounds. The idea of making a cultural compromise with a new song by an old artist pokes fun at the innate conservatism of campaigns, even as they mimic hipness to attract younger voters. The second commentary pulls no punches with regard to the vicarious acceptance of tokens appropriated from marginal cultures. Although Mark Anthony is a cross-over artist, much of his Spanish-language catalogue is alien to English-language pop radio, “Vivir Mi Vida” included. The essentialization of Latinx voters expressed by McNeal and Marshall

lays bare the stereotyping and silencing done by *both* the campaign and partisans towards marginal groups through cultural appropriation. Both the campaign and their supporters realize the importance of Latinx voters, and are happy to have them musically represented in the campaign.²⁷ This cultural appropriation is a part of pop music's genealogy and is utilized by the campaign in similar fashion—a surface borrowing that often does not affect underlying ideological principles.

The critiques of the authors indicate that they question the efficacy of campaign music, seeing it as political theater, with some darker undertones. However, there is an unapologetic tone, beginning with the opening that celebrates the music and the messages of feminist empowerment and female inclusion. While the authors critique the cynical enterprise of cultural campaigning, the feeling of inclusion, of female voices being heard on the campaign trail, is celebrated. McNeal and Marshall almost perfectly point out the conundrum of music on the campaign—that we take such joy in music that it is difficult to ask politicians to turn it down, do more talking, and explain their vision for the role of the state in the lives of citizens. Few prefer a lecture or debate to a dance party.

A fourth example of analysis about how music matters comes from *Washington Post* pop music critic Chris Richards. In his scathing “Authoritarian Hold Music: How Donald Trump’s Banal Playlist Cultivates Danger at Rallies,” Richards draws a connection between Trump’s unusual playlist, which Richards describes as “hit shuffle [on Trump’s iPod] and crank it,” and the violence that was a common occurrence at campaign events. Richards chides his colleagues who take joy in ridiculing Trump’s tastes, while losing sight of the effects of the music: “while the pundits have enjoyed some high-quality giggles over the quirkiness of Trump’s song selection, what matters far more is how this music shakes the air, how it shapes the psychology of the room.” Richards’s concern is for both the sound of the music and its excessive volume. He notes the decibel level of the playlist outside of Trump rallies, and that the music seemed to

get louder over the course of the waiting hours, sometimes even driving Trump's faithful to protest. Richards's experience is that "the cranked volumes also stifle direct human conversation... which casts an ominous prophecy: If you'd like to be heard in Donald Trump's America, your options will be to shout or to be Donald Trump."²⁸

Richards presents an insidious vision for Trump's America, one in which violence and hatred are accompanied by a "Grammy-Day playlist," a selection of safe, familiar, predictable, and ubiquitous radio pop.²⁹ The viciousness of the music was certainly not in the lyrics: how could the music of Puccini, Billy Joel, Adele, Elaine Paige, or even Twisted Sister, represent the hostility found at so many rallies? Instead, Richards's anxiety finds its cause in the utter safety, banality, and commonplace nature of Trump's soundtrack:

These songs don't pump people up. They make everyone feel comfortable — in their indignation, in their suspicion, in their hostility. The songs that Trump has chosen couldn't be more banal, yet it's precisely their banality that makes them so incredibly effective. They infuse the hateful atmosphere he cultivates with an air of utter normalcy.³⁰

But even as Richards is repulsed by the auditory tactics attributed to Trump—combining safety and normalcy with danger and animosity—he is loath to turn a deaf ear to it. Trump's campaign music masks the perniciousness of patriarchal white nationalism, and causes audiences to lose their critical distance, normalizing the emotionally heightened atmosphere of a rally. By combining virulent and violent rhetoric against Muslims, immigrants, and Latinxs, with pop hits, Trump rallies combine odious political rhetoric with the affective comfort of the familiar. This sonic dominance suppresses potential dissent and encourages blind participation.³¹ Richards attributes substantial power and meaning to campaign music—attributing to it the force to enact a candidate's posturing and to smooth the cognitive path between rhetoric and action. Music is viewed as a co-actor in the political art of persuasion, accompanying actions

that would be deemed as despicable, inappropriate, or even criminal in everyday life in such a way as to render them not just acceptable, but desirable. Music can certainly have this effect, although it is far from a given, as Richards's own reporting demonstrates.

In these four examples, music is conceived of as an intimate to the campaign and a social co-actor. It has the power of persuasion, ranging from affecting candidate choice to provoking anti-social and anti-democratic behavior. It exposes the flaws and deceptiveness of both the candidate and the campaign system. Music captivates the emotions, and illuminates both the candidate and their supporters. Music is a window into everything about the campaign but the specifics of its governing ideas. It relays the campaign's ethos and affects, but not its policies, or its vision for the nation. This lacuna reinforces the divide that philosopher Mladen Dolar places between listening and interpreting singing and speech: that song is bad communication, but excellent expression. Song masks the text, and adds layers to its meaning that, unlike (most forms of) speech, are meant to be opaque, complicated, and transcendent, but at the expense of transparent meaning.³² In the context of the campaign, the powerful expression of music alleviates candidates from the burden of communicating policy, and lets journalists fill pages with music criticism rather than analysis of competing ideas.

From these examples, it is clear that campaign music exemplifies pop's position as an empty signifier (Richards even comments on it): sound without explicit meaning that readily adapts to the varied interpretations, needs, and desires of listeners. While this interpretation is the clearest in Richards's article, with Amber Phillips taking the opposite approach by examining the thumbnail history of each artist's political stances and highlighted potentially meaningful lyrics, pop as an empty signifier reinforces the notion that pop is an unusual commodity. This commodity is one that evades the commodity fetish. Music, in this instance, might correspond to Adorno's theory of commodity marketing—that popular music is advertising for a constellation of other commodities and ideolo-

gies, selling a lifestyle. The problem is that campaign pop is not purchased but foisted upon the audience; it is out of their control and they often willingly submit to it (not always without resistance, as Richards points out). Adorno connects popular music to bourgeois life through the exchange value of culture, that so-called art music is valued because of the high cost of the ticket, not because of a specific quality inherent in its compositions and performances.³³ However, a campaign is free from monetary exchange, and traffics in involvement. In this exchange, the campaign extracts presence (applause and vocal support) from the audience in exchange for an extraordinary experience. The fetish is the campaign itself—the candidate and the spectacle. Campaign pop is the soundtrack to a spectacle of citizens giving to the campaign in exchange for affect, community, and identity. In this exchange, attendees also gain a new relationship with the sounds of the campaign. In an era of equivalency rather than meaning, campaigns inject meaning into the lives of partisans by making quotidian radio pop profound, partisan, and connected to grandiose, nationalistic, optimistic, and often empty, rhetoric of office-seekers. In this transaction, the democratic potential of pop—that it can hold many meanings, and that these meanings can be determined by any listener—is lost.

PARTICIPATORY POP

Although not the first website to showcase amateur user-generated content, YouTube is undoubtedly the most successful. As part of a broader media shift driven by high quality, relatively inexpensive digital technology, YouTube is a platform for candidates to communicate directly with their supporters and make digitally sharable audiovisual clips and web ads. It also houses citizen responses to the campaign in the form of tribute and satirical videos.³⁴ In 2008, Jessica Ramirez of *Newsweek* magazine anointed YouTube the “most important political venue” of the election cycle, citing Senator George Allen’s meteoric tumble after a video of him referring to Indian-American videographer S.R. Sidarth

as a “macaca” was uploaded to YouTube and went viral.³⁵ While 2016 might be similarly labeled “The Facebook Election” for the social media platform’s importance in the battle for information, YouTube remains a key locus for campaign participation, and a generator of content for other social media sites through video sharing.

One genre of political YouTube video is the musical tribute, a video made in support of a candidate. These videos run the gamut from appearing serious to humorous and bawdy in tone. They also range from high-budget and slickly produced, like will.i.am’s “Yes We Can,” done to support Obama’s 2008 bid, which featured numerous celebrity appearances,³⁶ to videos made on free software that match still images to recorded music and sound clips. Tribute videos demonstrate the relationship between musical and political meaning that exists for individual users who exist within relatively anonymous political communities. Unlike platforms such as Facebook that make a user’s community visible, most YouTube users are displayed as monads, uploading their videos to the web for public consumption, adoration, or ridicule. These videos also attest to pop music as an open signifier, with pairings between images of candidates, supporters, critics, news media, and music that are sometimes baffling. The fungibility of pop music also demonstrates its democratic potential, that the same song can have vastly different meanings in the ears of consumers. Moreover, these songs can be influenced by factors far beyond the reach of the campaign. While many of the tribute videos on YouTube show the distinct influence of the campaign’s rhetoric and sonic footprint, some do not, and demonstrate how individuals use pop music for their own unique modes of expression, beyond the intentions of the artists and the campaign.

A perusal of Trump tribute videos unearths many that are based on Trump’s campaign music or songs that are typically associated with Republican candidates. There are a number that use Twisted Sister’s “We’re Not Gonna Take It,”³⁷ which was in heavy rotation early on in Trump’s campaign, alongside The Script’s “Hall of Fame,”³⁸ Disturbed’s

cover of Simon and Garfunkel's "The Sound of Silence,"³⁹ Toby Keith and Willie Nelson's "Beer for my Horses,"⁴⁰ Lee Greenwood's "God Bless the U.S.A.,"⁴¹ and Kid Rock's "American Badass,"⁴² which all channel predictable interpretations of Trump's aggressive, hyper-national, patriarchal ethos. However, one video among this group stands out for its unique musical selection and video production. Uploaded on April 3, 2016, by user GorillaRadio.tv, the video is a mash-up of Trump campaign footage set to a dance mix of the 1996 R&B hit "C'Mon N' Ride it (The Train)" by Jacksonville, Florida-based Quad City DJs. The original track and video are a tribute to the classic '70s song and dance program *Soul Train*, which featured the hippest pop, R&B, funk, and soul, danced to by a host of stylish, beautiful, and talented young people, mostly African-American. The show is regarded as "one of the great commercial institutions within the African-American diaspora," an institution that was responsive to locality, freshness, and Black entrepreneurship that set the tone for future networks like BET.⁴³ The video also obliquely references the cult classic *Space Is the Place* mythography of jazz legend Sun Ra, featuring a futuristic space vessel that hosts the dance party while it floats through a space-age city of gleaming skyscrapers.⁴⁴

The "Trump Train (Official Music Video)—High Energy" tribute is an example of pop music being re-assigned through combination with visual media. In this video, the visuals are all Trump and Trump surrogates (with the occasional clip of Megyn Kelly, who had a rocky relationship with Trump during the campaign). The five-minute video has three sections of music, which are paused twice for extended video clips. The first clip is taken from CNN footage of a rally in his Old Post Office Pavilion (now the Trump International Hotel) in Washington where Trump invited a professionally attired African American woman onstage (who identifies herself as Retired Staff Sergeant Alicia Watkins in the full C-SPAN video). He asks for her qualifications, introduces her to one of his construction managers, and then says "If we can make a good deal in the salary she's gonna probably have a job" after which she gives him a kiss.⁴⁵ The second extended clip is from a rally in Janesville, Wisconsin. During the rally,

Melissa Young, a former Miss Wisconsin dying of a terminal illness, speaks to Trump, thanking him profusely for taking the time to write a note to her while she was in the hospital and for connecting her son, who is Mexican-American, with a future college scholarship. Apart from these two clips, which emphasize Trump's relationship to an African-American woman and a Chicano boy, the video features a conspicuously large number of images of minorities supporting Trump. This included video clips of Trump with Michael Jackson, meeting with Black Pastors, with a "Latinos Support D. Trump" sign, and interviews (without sound) of African Americans wearing Trump attire at rallies. The imagery also featured clips of Trump interacting affectionately with small children, an aspect not often found in other tribute videos.⁴⁶

The pairing of Afro-futuristic Soul Train with Donald Trump appears dissonant at best, and possibly ignorant and offensive. However, it seems that the editor was keenly aware of common criticisms of Donald Trump, particularly with regard to his gender and racial politics.⁴⁷ What this video seeks to do is to dispel and mute those criticisms by pairing both long and short clips of Trump with minorities and women of color who are either supporters or beneficiaries. Without being heavy handed or overly didactic, the editor makes their position known through persuasive argument that is based on postmodern evidence. There are obvious failings: the outcome of Trump's meetings with the Black Pastor's group is not relayed and we do not know if Alicia Watkins received a quality job offer, or if Melissa Young's son will in fact be able to attend college (he is identified in the video as being seven years old).⁴⁸ While the art of persuasion is not beyond rebuke, the spirit of putting counter examples into public discourse to challenge existing narratives is a crucial element of the democratic spirit. "Trump Train" exhibits this, using a mix of images common to Trump tributes (like copious shots of Trump's private jet and helicopter, Trump delivering speeches, massive crowds of supporters, and glamorous images of Ivanka and Melania Trump) and uncommon ones (images of people of color, children, and extended video of his work with minorities) to offer a narrative that diverges from

typical pro-Trump rhetoric. This is facilitated by employing music with a clearly Black aesthetic: 1990s R&B-hip-hop with a “throwback” sound.

Another example of citizen musical-political interpretation is a Hillary Clinton musical tribute video entitled “Hillary: Rise.” Not as slick or sophisticated as “Trump Train,” the video, uploaded by user Sampo Wing, contains the text “Created by a couple who think Hillary’s had enough practice.”⁴⁹ The musical sound track, set to a collection of images, video clips, and sound bites, is the electro-pop-post-punk song “Deceptacon” by Le Tigre. This video is part of a complicated relationship among the Clinton campaign, contrasting feminist practices and ideologies, and the punk band Bikini Kill. (Kathleen Hanna, who founded Le Tigre was also the co-founder of Bikini Kill.)

From early on in her campaign, Hillary Clinton was dogged by an external conflict between self-defined feminist Democrats—often glossed as a disagreement between older and younger women (but more aptly between contrasting interpretations of feminist praxis). Comments made by former secretary of state Madeleine Albright, and feminist activist and author Gloria Steinem served to illustrate the feelings of the former. Shortly before the New Hampshire primary,

With her opponent, Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont, outdrawing her in support among young women, Mrs. Clinton’s candidacy has turned into a generational clash, one that erupted this weekend when two feminist icons, Madeleine Albright and Gloria Steinem, called on young women who supported Mr. Sanders to essentially grow up and get with the program.⁵⁰

Madeleine Albright’s comments came at a Hillary Clinton rally in New Hampshire in February of 2016. When introducing Clinton to the audience, Albright, the first female secretary of state (under Bill Clinton), emphasized younger women’s role in supporting Clinton, stating “just remember, there is a special place in hell for women who don’t help each other.”⁵¹ That same weekend, Gloria Steinem appeared as a guest on the HBO talk show *Real Time with Bill Maher* to promote her new

book. When the discussion veered into asking why younger women (who Steinem claimed are more conservative than older women) favored Bernie Sanders, Steinem replied “When you’re young, you’re thinking: ‘Where are the boys? The boys are with Bernie.’”⁵² These comments were met with a firestorm of anger, much of which was generated by young women who resented having their political views reduced to sexuality, their political preference reduced to gender, and being lectured to.⁵³ But there were also defenders of Albright and Steinem who sought to analyze a particular prickliness between women of different generations and intellectual lineages.⁵⁴

Bikini Kill, an all-female punk band and loudest representative of the 1990s riot grrrl movement, was injected into the mix of generational and ideological sparring by their fans. On February 15, fresh on the heels of the Albright and Steinem statements, John Podesta, Clinton’s campaign chair, tweeted a Clinton musical tribute video that used Bikini Kill’s “Rebel Girl” as the soundtrack.⁵⁵ The act garnered attention, with website Daily Kos reprimanding Podesta (and Clinton) for not knowing what a true rebel girl is.⁵⁶ Days later, Bikini Kill co-founder, drummer, and songwriter Tobi Vail asked that the video be removed from YouTube due to copyright infringement, which it was (although it has since been re-posted). Journalist Jamie Peck pointed out that Vail was an avid Sanders supporter, but Vail’s comments about removing the video were less about Clinton’s politics than about improperly using Bikini Kill’s music to advertise without first licensing it, which requires the band’s collective approval. Further complicating this situation was Bikini Kill co-founder Kathleen Hanna’s enthusiastic tweet that the tribute video fit her vision of the song.⁵⁷ After Vail’s copyright complaint, the Clinton campaign, which enjoyed the support of many musicians, distanced themselves from the video, making sure to quell the theory that it was a bumbling ploy to reach out to young progressive women from and influenced by the riot grrrl generation.

In June of 2016, Sampo Wing uploaded “Hillary: Rise.” The video is unique in that it features a nearly constant audio stream of Clinton statements over the music, with few spaces where vocalist Kathleen Hanna’s quirky and confrontational lyrics come through. The audio focal point is Clinton’s voice, with the driving electro-punk of “Deceptacon” providing the forward energy. This combination of song, candidate, and artist makes “Hillary: Rise” a complex tribute video, which requires a suite of knowledge on the part of the viewer. For starters, “Deceptacon” is not the well-worn classic that “Rebel Girl” is. “Rebel Girl” was part of the lingua franca of the riot grrrl movement, and in contrast, “Deceptacon” falls into the category of deep-track favorite for dedicated fans in the know. The lyrics engage in an intellectual antagonistic play with rock history, particularly the doo-wop song “Who Put the Bomp (in the Bomp Bomp Bomp)?” by the Viscounts. The Viscounts’ ditty is a narrative of falling in love to doo-wop, with the singer wishing to thank the (male) inventor of the doo-wop vocables for making his girl fall in love with him. “Deceptacon” begins with Hanna’s voice turning the question around: “Who took the bomp?” The song’s lyrics then go on to challenge and ridicule an antagonist and his music for removing the parts of rock that inspire love and instead making music that is boring, empty, without feeling, and without politics. Like the fictional cartoon characters from which the title comes, “Deceptacon”’s antagonists look to be innocuous or rebellious revolutionaries on the outside, but are pernicious beings on the inside, killing rock and the human spirit. However, the protagonist is not fooled and walks all over her patriarchal challenger.

“Hillary: Rise” is a unique form of political expression. From the outset, it is a demanding piece of media. The connections between the post-riot grrrl aesthetic, the complex poetics of the lyrics, the position of Clinton running against Trump (a quintessential insider/outsider matchup), Clinton’s public reputation, and the audio overlay of Clinton’s statements over the song’s lyrics, mitigate against easy interpretation. Unlike Clinton videos set to commonly known songs, the deep meaning and sentiment behind this video is only easily accessible to those who

know “Deceptacon.” A surface reading of the song might lead to a negative interpretation, with Clinton as the “Deceptacon,” the pernicious being inside a banal exterior. Clinton could be the one who “Took the bomp,” playing into anti-feminist stereotypes of highly motivated, successful women as castrators or “feminazis.”⁵⁸ To unearth the complexities of political association between Le Tigre (who recorded “I’m with Her” for the Clinton campaign in October of 2016), “Deceptacon,” Clinton, Trump, and the radical feminism of the late 1990s and early 2000s into the present, the viewer must either share a similar political-musical history with the maker, or be willing to work towards understanding. This is unusual for tribute videos, which typically aim for easy access and predictable interpretations. In this way, “Hillary: Rise” demands that the viewer be an intellectual participant—they cannot be Adorno’s empty modern subject who consumes entertainment in the background.

A third example of a tribute video was uploaded by user Sound of Silence on June 16, 2016. Entitled “The Sound of Silence—Election 2016,” the first half of the sound track is the original 1964 “The Sound of Silence” by Simon and Garfunkel; the second half is the 2015 cover by nu metal band Disturbed. The video also features sporadic diegetic sounds: the muffled voice of Martin Luther King Jr., crowd noise, and the haunting sound of children reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. The images of the video span two eras—the 1960s and the present—and set up a comparison between the ambitiousness of the former and the decadence of the latter. The images begin with a montage from the 1960s: JFK, the space race, Martin Luther King Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement, the 1960s women’s movement, the Vietnam War, and automotive manufacturing. It shows scenes of hope, optimism, and triumph. This montage is set to the original “The Sound of Silence” and ends with children, black and white, reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. Underneath this sound, the music transitions into the Disturbed cover. During this section, approximately one minute of the five-minute video, “Do you remember? Try...Those who forget the past are doomed to repeat it” appears, phrase by phrase.⁵⁹

The second section of the video deals with the present. It contains a much longer text and a more complex and varied set of images. The text reads:

On average voters age 30-60 have a 55% turn out rate. That means nearly half of our voices remain in silence. Wake up. It starts with...YOU. Without a strong middle extremists and radicals will rush to fill the void. From one small step we came so far... Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free...but not like this. We can do better. We must do better.⁶⁰

The message of the text is set to coincide with particular visuals. The second section begins with images of the middle-class life, the Constitution, the Lincoln Memorial, and Mount Rushmore before a picture of four young people sitting around a table, all lost in their smartphones. The image of World War II era Uncle Sam appears in the background of the text “It starts with YOU.” From there the video images are mostly taken from the 2016 campaign and Barack Obama’s presidency (with images of Ronald and Nancy Reagan, George H. W. Bush, and the dismantling of the Berlin Wall). Unflattering pictures of Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton, Bernie Sanders, and Barack Obama are shown with negative headlines and pictures from Benghazi, Trump Tower, Ferguson, the Black Lives Matter Movement, and an upside-down U.S. flag, a military sign for distress. There are also multiple shots of the words “John 3:16” spray painted on subway walls.⁶¹ A text in the information box below the video reads:

It is time for another candidate to come forward—another candidate who will break the cycle of inflammatory, divisive, partisan politics in America. That person is not present among our current options. We have a temperamentally unfit candidate, an ideologically unfit candidate, and a morally bankrupt candidate. Are these the best leaders this great nation can produce?

Who do you think should step up? Break your silence—leave the names of your ideal presidential nominees in the comments. If not now, when?⁶²

This video is a musical tribute, not to a candidate or party, but to democracy itself. Set to a familiar song (or pair of songs) that are political, metaphorical, and thought provoking, the maker both asks political questions and makes an imperative demand of the viewer. The maker also literally opens a space for dialogue by asking viewers to submit names of people whom they would like to see run for president.⁶³ By using a commonly known refrain, the maker turns the sound of silence to mean literally—rather than the “silent majority” favored by Richard Nixon and Donald Trump—the tens of millions of adults who do not vote and are swept along by the political system, which is deemed corrupt and in need of true representatives of American ideals. The use of popular music for a reformist political agenda is not unique, but this video makes use of an original song and a cover from two eras of upheaval and tribulation to demonstrate a cogent comparative argument. In 1960, the last election before the Simon and Garfunkel original was recorded, 62.7 percent of eligible voters cast a vote. Since then, the turnout has declined.⁶⁴ The maker also contrasts images of the Civil Rights Movement, scientific innovation, women’s liberation, and a vibrant manufacturing economy with racial unrest in Ferguson, Missouri, the continued fallout from the Great Recession, and other contemporary discontents. The video contrasts the achievements of Kennedy, particularly the space race and Civil Rights, and Reagan, with the fall of the Berlin Wall, with the dystopic present and images of the three major candidates, who the maker clearly does not think represent the best of American leadership.

“The Sounds of Silence—Election 2016” is a masterful use of pop music in politics. It utilizes the poetic ambiguities of a well-known original song and cover to perform political critique and advocacy. In this case the support is explicitly non-partisan. The maker advocates for the idea that there should be better options, and that by not voting, citizens are

allowing unfit candidates to eclipse better ones. By using the built-in comment feature of the YouTube platform, the maker of the video asks that a dialogue be started about potential presidential candidates who are not ideologically extreme, unqualified, or dishonest. This use of pop demonstrates the potential of a commodity to become politically and democratically meaningful in ways that the artists and marketers cannot determine or control. As Stuart Hall pointed out, those who consume commodities are not bound to the intended meanings of producers or sellers. Here, a piece of free media, the political bricolage, is made not only to speak from a subjective position, but is put into a space of virtually enabled digital dialogue with anyone who cares to contribute, or not.

CONCLUSION: LENDING AN EAR

As human beings, we function through pattern identification. If we did not, we would have to become reacquainted with every door knob we turn, different variety of apple we eat, or font we read. These shortcuts are necessary for daily functioning. But shortcuts enabled by pattern recognition also allow us to be cognitively complacent. We allow campaigns to harness the affective and imaginative power of familiar, catchy songs to impact how we conceive of and evaluate candidates, rather than fully examining candidates' work records, qualifications, and policy platforms, or paying critical attention to grounded analyses. This top-down approach to using pop music not only erodes the practice of democracy, but turns the campaign from a political experience to an aesthetic one.⁶⁵ However, pop used horizontally, as an expression of personal politics shared among peers, offers an alternative to top-down interpretation and use. As one example, tribute videos, through their song choice, sound design, and pairing of sound and image, enable citizens to have political expression that is more complex than the blunt and predictable use of music by campaigns, and to dialogue outside of the confines of network media (although comment sections tend towards the belligerent rather than dialogic). While not every tribute video brims with political insights,

challenges, and new political subjectivities, the form is in its infancy and holds potential. In lending our ears to the next election, instead of listening up, we should listen out and turn our ears to the subjective political expressions of our peers that are enabled in the digital era, rather than automatically equating shared culture and taste with political fitness and sensitivity. Pop music, outside of the hands of campaigns, can offer a fresh take on politics, ideology, and the campaign when passed horizontally, not vertically.

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60. Ibid.

61. "For God So loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." *The Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (New York: Harper Collins, 1989).
62. Ibid.
63. At the last accessing, only two people had responded to the video. One said that the video should have more views, and the other advocated for supporting Jill Stein (a Green Party candidate who has run on numerous occasions, including 2016).
64. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, "The American Presidency Project," accessed September 23, 2017, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/data/turnout.php>. Although different data emerges with different methodologies, numbers have been lower than the 62 percent voter turnout of 1960.
65. In "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Walter Benjamin explicitly links that substitution to fascism, in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 241-242.

CHAPTER TWO

“NOT MY PRESIDENT”

PUNK ROCK AND PRESIDENTIAL PROTEST FROM RONALD TO DONALD

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INTRODUCTION

When the Sex Pistols released their first single, “God Save the Queen,” in 1977, they unwittingly spearheaded a musically anchored critical tradition that still thrives today.¹ While the Sex Pistols cannot be credited with inventing protest music, or even hailed as the architects of punk’s musical expression, for they neither crystalized nor codified punk rock’s generic boundaries, they did explode the limits of punk’s rhetorical repertoire by adding new and novel tools to its conceptual toolbox.² In pairing genuine working-class anger with scathingly subversive lyrics, enlisting the profane in attempts to dismantle the sacred, Johnny Rotten weaponized musical dissent by lambasting England’s beloved figurehead, Queen Elizabeth II, during the lead-up to her silver jubilee.³ Eschewing both social and legal repercussions, defiantly extending middle fingers rather than olive branches, the Sex Pistols armed themselves with power

chords and anti-establishment rhetoric in their fight against authority, complacency, and the status quo.⁴ Successful in shocking the ostensibly delicate sensibilities of English mainstream culture, all the while delighting in their ability to ruffle the establishment's feathers, the Sex Pistols were summarily branded by the British press as villainous miscreants hell-bent on bringing civil society to its knees.⁵ Punk rock, rising from the ashes of the decidedly non-political progressive rock movement, was "born" (and promptly given a baptism by fire).⁶

Punk's innovation was not simply the combining of music and critique *per se*, for protest music enjoys a rich, long history.⁷ Even the ancient Greeks expressed unease about the potency and political influence of popular music. In *The Republic*, cautioning leaders of civil society to keep an ever watchful eye on popular music, and on musical innovation in particular, Plato warned that any change in the landscape of popular music holds the promise of swaying the minds of otherwise dutiful citizens, seducing them away from their civic virtues. If not vigilantly policed, Plato reasoned, popular music's potential for social upheaval and revolt could easily extend "its course of wanton disruption to laws and political institutions, until finally it destroys everything in private and public life."⁸ Even music without lyrics commands political force. According to Brown, Beethoven composed music fundamentally imbued with "political meaning."⁹ In writing music for popular audiences, to be played and enjoyed in music theaters open to the general public rather than performed in the exclusive "courts of the aristocracy and nobility," Beethoven made subtle political statements that "could appeal directly to the political sensibilities of the masses, or at least the masses who were sufficiently well off to be able to buy tickets to a concert."¹⁰ Typically viewed as a paragon of high culture, it appears that Beethoven also dipped his toes in the pool of popular culture.

Ancient (and not so ancient) history aside, what punks brought to the proverbial table was a no-nonsense approach to cultural and political critique—an unapologetic, "in-your-face" attack on the established order

and its most cherished values, symbols, and ideals. As Hebdige puts it, “[n]o subculture has sought with more grim determination than the punks to detach itself from the taken-for-granted landscape of normalized forms, nor to bring down upon itself such vehement disapproval.”¹¹ Such outright insolence, of course, is a rather recent innovation and most certainly a modern privilege. For large swaths of history protest singers were required, for fear of their personal safety, to obscure and hide the actual meanings communicated through their songs because the possibility of violence and bodily harm always loomed large. In order to fully understand protest songs, one thus had to be privy to the code—access to which was only granted genuine group members.¹² The singing of protest songs, therefore, has historically been as much an exercise in community building and group identity formation as it has been about change and social commentary. Protest songs, Knupp explains, have served as a means for groups facing difficult circumstances to not only comment on but also make collective sense of their shared experiences because they are “pre-eminently in-group messages designed to reinforce feelings of solidarity.”¹³ In describing the plight of African slaves in America, living under the constant threat of brutal beatings, lashings, and even death, Peretti offers that their “[e]xpressions of rebellion and the desire for freedom were translated into coded trickster work songs and spirituals about Moses,” a practice that for reasons of personal safety “persisted long after slavery was abolished.”¹⁴ Punk, of course, suffered no such burden. While the threat of violence was very much real, Johnny Rotten detailing how certain parts of London were out of reach because they could be hazardous to his health,¹⁵ the more likely consequence was ridicule, verbal lashings, and social ostracism—consequences which to a certain extent were very much the point.

Uncompromising in their approach, actively pursuing a program of deliberate self-marginalization while simultaneously delivering biting social critiques, punks went straight for the jugular by purposefully fouling society’s most powerful and sacred symbols. For the Sex Pistols, this meant taking aim at the English royal family—specifically its matri-

arch. The cover art adorning the band's first single, cleverly subverted and misappropriated by visual artist and Sex Pistols coconspirator Jamie Reid, featured a repurposed Cecil Beaton portrait depicting Queen Elizabeth II with a safety-pin through her mouth. Coupled with Lydon's contemptuous and scornful lyrics, the overall effect was as impressive as it was immediate. According to Jon Savage, English punk's premier historian, "God Save the Queen" was nothing short of a "grandstanding 'fuck you' to England that seemed to come out of nowhere."¹⁶ Caught off-guard, and therefore quite unsure about how to react, the tabloid newspapers accused the Sex Pistols of treason while the BBC promptly banned the single from radio airplay.¹⁷ Presented with a punk expression that was still very much undefined, the national media's kneejerk reaction was to ban and censor rather than engage with the ideational contents of punks' protestations.

Although the Sex Pistols are not the central topic of this chapter, the band nonetheless set a profound precedent for punk activity that remains relevant today, four decades later, and the examples described above are meant to contextualize and conceptually situate the rhetorical efforts of American punks described below. Circumventing traditional means of protest by enlisting new and novel tools, very much cognizant of the fact that affective symbolic play coupled with subversive media tactics wields the power to produce widespread controversy, the Sex Pistols found unique ways of drumming up enough momentum to not only partake in but outright hijack the national conversation, thereby lending credence to Johnny Rotten's foreboding warning that "we're the poison in your human machine."¹⁸ In looking at the history of punk following the dissolution of the Sex Pistols, it is clear that their influence runs deep and that others have successfully repurposed their divisive tactics for a variety of other causes. Most recently Russia's Pussy Riot, donning multicolored balaclavas and arming themselves with little more than some makeshift musical equipment and a video camera, took on the Russian government, the Russian Orthodox Church, the KGB, and prime minister/president Vladimir Putin by staging what they termed a "punk

prayer” in Moscow’s Cathedral of Christ the Savior on February 21, 2012, performing a ramshackle rendition of their song “Holy Shit” from the cathedral’s altar.¹⁹ The band was promptly arrested, tried, and eventually found guilty of hooliganism, a crime that carried a grueling two-year prison sentence.²⁰ In the process, however, Pussy Riot generated global headlines and managed to put intense scrutiny on the repressive policies enforced by the Russian government while simultaneously drawing heartfelt moral support from mainstream artists like Madonna, Sting, The Red Hot Chili Peppers, Faith No More, Franz Ferdinand, and the Beastie Boys’ Ad-Rock.²¹

Having previously only dabbled in matters related to party politics, largely content in merely straddling the conceptual border adjoining the social and the political, “[m]ost early American punks had little to say politically beyond simple parody”²² and “generally dealt in outrage for art’s sake.”²³ The Sex Pistols, having made “political messages central to their music,”²⁴ helped change that as their 1978 tour through the American south—ultimately culminating in their demise at San Francisco’s Winterland Ballroom on January 14, 1978—served as an inspirational catalyst for the development of American hardcore, a musically abrasive offshoot of punk with an unquestionably political edge.²⁵ Indeed, as a new wave of neo-liberal conservatism swept the United States in the early 1980s, epitomized by the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980, punk bands increasingly focused their attention on national and global politics.²⁶ Very much attuned to the widespread social and economic anxieties of the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Dead Kennedys, Reagan Youth, Millions of Dead Cops (MDC), Dirty Rotten Imbeciles (D.R.I.), and The Crucifucks, among others, mounted scathing and oftentimes amusing attacks on the Reagan administration and even took their dissent on the road with 1984’s *Rock Against Reagan Tour*.²⁷ Punk’s opposition to presidential politics, and to individual presidents themselves, did not stop there. President George H. W. Bush was chastised for his involvement in the Gulf War, as well as the mounting homelessness problem, which prompted punks to organize protest shows in front of the White House.

President George W. Bush was castigated for allegedly hijacking the 2000 presidential election, for passing and implementing the USA PATRIOT Act, and also for his role in sanctioning the second Gulf War—effectively provoking punks to revive Reagan-era tactics by organizing 2004’s *Rock Against Bush Tour*.

Although generally more vocal under Republican presidents than Democratic presidents, punks have not let presidents Clinton and Obama off the hook either. Ridiculed for his evasive grand jury testimony following the Lewinsky scandal, and described as “slick,” “slippery,” and “oily” after news broke that he had asked prosecutors to define the word “is,”²⁸ Bill Clinton ultimately faced accusations that he is just another career politician willfully changing direct questions into “trapezoidal, abstract queries.”²⁹ Barack Obama, on the other hand, prompted consternation for simply offering more of the same and being little more than a figurehead for a government continuing to push Reagan-era policies. On the face of it, however, punks’ critiques of Democratic presidents seem less vitriolic and rather uninspired when compared to their critiques of Republican presidents. In the following I more fully examine the rhetorical efforts put forward by punks seeking to protest a handful of American presidents, culminating with their treatment of Donald Trump, both as a candidate and as president. Before doing so, however, it is first necessary to briefly examine the relationship between punk and politics.

PUNK, POLITICS, AND MUSIC

The December 1976 issue of *Sideburns*, a Stranglers fanzine, featured a now classic piece of punk art. Under the heading “PLAY’IN IN THE BAND...FIRST AND LAST IN A SERIES,” readers were presented with three hand-drawn diagrams illustrating how to properly form an A chord (“This is a chord”), an E chord (“This is another”), and a G chord (“This is a third”) on a guitar fretboard and then immediately told: “Now form a band.”³⁰ Pithily capturing punk’s do-it-yourself (DIY) ethos

by combining presentational simplicity with ideational complexity, readers were encouraged to make something themselves, to partake in the emerging punk culture even if lacking technical skill or musical competence. Or more precisely, and very much to the artist’s point, *especially* if lacking skill or competence. Breaking down the discourses of mastery so central to the progressive rock movement that preceded it, and in the process branding itself as access music, punk celebrated amateurishness by rejecting the bloated pomposity and self-aggrandizing bravado of more traditional forms of rock and roll.³¹ In the words of NOFX’s Fat Mike, widely regarded as one of the more enduring figures in the history of punk rock music, “you don’t need talent, just sing out of tune... if I could do it so could anyone.”³² For punks, having something to say was deemed more important than being skilled musicians, even if some bands eventually figured out how to properly play their instruments. This general lack of focus on technical aptitude functioned as a powerful equalizer. In a cultural environment where the absence of skill was not only tolerated but outright celebrated, illusions of grandeur were quickly rendered meaningless. In deliberately seeking to negate the prevailing tropes of rock and roll while at the same time stealing and appropriating the tools of the trade (punk, after all, is still a form of rock music), Grossberg argues that punks “rejected the star system which had become so pervasive and had fractured the relation between musician and fan.”³³ Succinctly illustrating how punks practice what they preach, Phillipov explains that “acts like the Sex Pistols may have been headline material, but there was no distance between them and the people who regularly supported them—you could even stand next to Johnny Rotten in the urinal!”³⁴

This focus on equality and egalitarianism is also mirrored in punk’s politics. While disagreement still prevails concerning punk’s overarching political program, and whether such a program even exists, it nonetheless seems safe to suggest that punk’s politics typically fall somewhere to the left on the political continuum. In outlining punk’s overarching

approach to music, critique, and cultural production, Sabin offers the following definition:

at a very basic level, we can say that punk was/is a subculture best characterized as part youth rebellion, part artistic statement. It had its high point from 1976 to 1979, and was most visible in Britain and America... Philosophically, it had no “set agenda” like the hippy movement that preceded it, but nevertheless stood for identifiable attitudes, among them: an emphasis on negationism (rather than nihilism); a consciousness of class-based politics (with a stress on “working-class credibility”); and a belief in spontaneity and “doing it yourself.”³⁵

Extending Sabin’s definition, and in so doing crystallizing some of its characteristics, James suggests that punks typically favor: (1) a DIY approach to music production and aesthetics; (2) a pronounced distrust for the political institutions supporting the nation-state; (3) a distrust of capitalism and the subsequent alienation brought on by capitalist production processes; (4) a favoring of “street-level” viewpoints and a celebration of the “emotive proletariat spirit;” (5) a deep compassion for the marginalized; (6) an emphasis on inner strength and the perseverance to overcome adversity; and (7) a commitment to complete sincerity, honesty, and integrity.³⁶ Overall, James claims that punk has historically assumed a “left-of-center political position,”³⁷ an argument that also is echoed in Lynskey’s assertion that “the vast majority of today’s punk bands lean towards the left,”³⁸ as well as Mattson’s somewhat reserved conclusion that punks champion a form of “left-leaning anarchism” that is geared towards cooperation rather than chaos.³⁹

At the end of the day, punk’s political allegiances are contested territory and others have voiced legitimate concerns that the common practice of uncritically casting punk as a uniquely leftist endeavor is problematic. Phillipov, while prefacing her argument with the stipulation that “[p]unk found particular compatibility with the broadly Marxist principles fundamental to the development of cultural studies, values which, to a certain extent, continue to remain central,” also maintains

that scholars have “rarely interrogated the continued validity of viewing punk as necessarily politically radical.”⁴⁰ Historically speaking, Phillipov argues, researchers have “display[ed] a distinct unwillingness to engage with the ‘darker side’ of punk’s politics, instead presenting right-wing and fascist ideologies as merely an insignificant aberration within an otherwise left-wing movement.”⁴¹ This point is well taken. It also finds support in Sabin’s claim that the intellectual history of punk—routinely presented in academic research and in the popular press as being “solid with the anti-racist cause”⁴²—is rooted in myth rather than reality. In analyzing punk artifacts spanning more than two decades, examining fanzines, fliers, interviews, artwork, and lyrics by reading them against the officially sanctioned histories of British punk, Sabin provides a compelling account that reveals punk’s stance on racism to be ambiguous, contradictory, and ultimately quite complicated. Punk culture, Sabin suggests, is no more or no less racist than the parent culture it complements.⁴³ While punk bands playing Rock Against Racism (RAR) events is frequently touted as evidence that early punk was anti-racist, it is also the case that some of those bands were not all that enamored with the anti-racist message—some simply sought an audience or a paycheck. Others were also quite selective in their views about what constitutes racism and what types of racism were worthy of attention. Although support for and solidarity with Afro-Caribbeans was commonplace, punk bands even drawing on ska and reggae as musical influences, the plight of Jews, Arabs, Asians, and Hispanics was generally forgotten or deemed to be of limited import. According to Sabin, members of those groups were even mocked and vilified by bands and people claiming to support the Anti-Nazi League (ANL) and RAR.⁴⁴

The existence of fascist punk bands, commandeering a noticeable presence already from the outset, further complicates the claim that punk was and is inherently comprised of open minded leftists and anti-racists. Bands like Skrewdriver, the brainchild of right-wing ideologue Ian Stuart Donaldson, draped its neo-Nazi rhetoric in much the same musical dress as punk bands operating at the other end of the political continuum.⁴⁵

While support for RAR/ANL among punk bands is well documented in the literature, punk bands also rallied behind right-wing political organizations like The National Front and were responsible for founding the white-power music organization Rock Against Communism (RAC) and the record label White Noise Records. As such, some observers have been “less sanguine about the ‘musical idealism’ of RAR” and instead approached it “as one of several competing ideologies.”⁴⁶ Against this backdrop, Philopov is correct in her claim that racist and fascist punks are not merely an “aberration”—for there are numerous examples of punk bands pursuing hateful ends⁴⁷ or using punk music as a tool for mobilizing far-right hate groups.⁴⁸ Yet, and as far as numbers are concerned, racist and fascist punks constitute a much smaller group than punks who are either anti-racists or—at the very least—non-racist.⁴⁹

Attempting to sidestep the issue of punk’s political proclivities, Dunn and O’Connor approach punk from a sociological vantage by offering that punk is best construed as a trans-local “cultural field”⁵⁰ that subsumes a wide range of cultural activities, including fashion, music, film, art, food, and even pedagogy.⁵¹ This argument finds support in Thompson’s claim that there are “several major genres of punk textuality: music (recorded and performed), style (especially clothing), the printed word (including ‘zines), film, and events (punk happenings); together, these texts make up what I will term the ‘punk project.’”⁵² In the end, given punk’s multipronged approach, Ensminger’s rather poetic definition seems as fitting as any: “punk is a model of ‘dangerous’ imagination at play, armed desire, steering its adherents to feel more alive and in control of the wheel of destiny, not ludicrous and helpless, immobilized by their social roles.”⁵³

1980 TO 1992—“REAGAN SUCKS”⁵⁴

Following a landslide election victory over incumbent Jimmy Carter on November 4, 1980, winning 44 states and securing a remarkable 489

electoral votes, Ronald Reagan was inaugurated as the fortieth president of the United States on January 20, 1981. Promising to strengthen the military, restore the nation’s economic health, and balance the budget, all the while ushering in neo-liberalism during a “period [that] represents a turning point in US economic policy making,”⁵⁵ Reagan “was able to win over a national electorate that had once perceived him as too belligerently right-wing”⁵⁶ by vowing to “make America great again” long before this catchphrase became Donald Trump’s official campaign slogan. After launching his political career in 1966 by going after UC Berkeley peace activists protesting the Vietnam War, and the University of California more broadly for failing to punish student dissidents, Reagan pledged to “clean up the mess at Berkeley” and to send the “welfare bums back to work.”⁵⁷ While Reagan was popular among some segments of the electorate, punks were not among them. According to MacLeod, Reagan’s election victory “may have done more than any other event to revitalize punk and ensure its longevity—not only because punks opposed his conservative politics, but because here was an enemy with a face.”⁵⁸ Attuned to the fact that the “political winds were shifting dramatically,”⁵⁹ and having just discovered a loud and abrasive musical expression lending itself to critique, American punks married party politics and music.

Of specific interest to punks were Reagan’s social and economic policies, particularly his preoccupation with supply-side economics. Commonly termed trickle-down economics, or as it pertains to the current discussion, “Reaganomics,” supply-side economics works from the premise that economic growth can most effectively be realized by decreasing regulations and lowering taxes. In short, the Reagan administration claimed that lowering taxes on businesses would result in wealth generation that eventually would “trickle down” to middle- and working class families in the form of cheaper goods and services and access to more and better jobs.

The problem, punks pointed out, is that the model also effectively shifts the tax burden from corporate bodies to private citizens and only

serves to make the rich richer while further disenfranchising the poor by institutionalizing economic oppression. As such, Reagan's policies were doubly insulting to punks because unlike previous economic initiatives cut from the same conceptual cloth, Reagan claimed he cared about working people. According to Jello Biafra, the Dead Kennedy's eccentric singer and front man, Reagan was engaging in economic warfare that disproportionately targeted already vulnerable populations. In the song "Kill the Poor," accusing Reagan of underhandedly reviving the lily-white movement under the auspices of simply altering economic policies, Biafra paints a haunting picture of how Reagan's plans are ostensibly geared towards disenfranchising the poor and that they bear the sinister markings of economic eugenics. Further describing the imagined glee expressed by wealthy Reaganites upon learning that welfare taxes are on the proverbial chopping block, effectively removing programs put in place to ensure that the poor can sustain their continued existence, Biafra drives his point home by singing "The sun beams down on a brand new day / No more welfare tax to pay / Unsightly slums gone up in flashing light / Jobless millions whisked away / At last we have more room to play / All systems go to kill the poor tonight."⁶⁰

During the 1980s, punk music enjoyed only a limited appeal outside the confines of punk culture and few, if any, punk musicians entertained thoughts that playing punk rock music might someday yield a living wage. Operating in a do-it-yourself cultural environment entirely funded by its members, as such finding themselves wholly unimpeded by corporate censorship and control, aspiring punk bricoleurs were given free rein to taint, defile, subvert, and otherwise desecrate the Reagan administration's image in any way they saw fit without fear of monetary consequences (the social consequences they were more than ready to deal with).⁶¹ In much the same way that the Sex Pistols repurposed Queen Elizabeth II's image, American punk bands took to caricaturing Ronald Reagan on T-shirts, concert fliers, and record sleeves. A notable example in this respect is New York City's Reagan Youth. Displaying "perhaps more skill in the manipulation of symbols than in music," Reagan Youth connected the

Reagan administration with fascism and white supremacy by embellishing record sleeves with “classic images of Nazi officers and Klan members with burning crosses with the sort of sarcasm embodied in their name.”⁶² Even Reagan’s snacking habits became the subject of ridicule when Alternative Tentacles released *Let Them Eat Jellybeans!: 17 Extracts From America’s Darker Side*,⁶³ a compilation album featuring songs by bands like Bad Brains, Black Flag, Circle Jerks, Dead Kennedys, D.O.A., Flipper, and The Subhumans. The record’s title references the famous phrase “Let Them Eat Cake,” ordinarily credited to Marie Antoinette, while also satirizing the fact that Ronald Reagan considered jellybeans his favorite candy. The implication, albeit unstated, is that the poor can fill their starving bellies with jellybeans once Reagan enacts his economic policies.

Not only did Reagan feature prominently on the cover of punk records, he was also the topic of punk songs. The Dead Kennedys, displaying an almost obsessive fixation with Ronald Reagan, practically made a career of lampooning his policies and character in songs like “Moral Majority,” “We’ve Got a Bigger Problem Now,” and “Bleed for Me.” A standout track in this regard is Biafra’s irreverent spoken word performance, “Kinky Sex Makes the World Go Round,” from the album *Give Me Convenience or Give Me Death*. Configured as an erotic phone call between Margaret Thatcher and Reagan’s fictional Secretary of War, Thatcher moaning louder and louder as plans for world domination and ethnic cleansing are whispered over the phone, Biafra ultimately hypothesizes about the imagined dark desires lurking beneath the surface of the conservative movement. In addition to the abuse delivered by the Dead Kennedys, D.O.A.’s Joey Shithead called for what he saw as the end of militarized, fascist government in “Smash the State,” singing “Kill Ronnie Reagan and smash the state”;⁶⁴ the Crucifucks claimed that John Hinckley Jr., who shot Reagan in 1981 to attract the attention of actor Jodie Foster, set an example worth modeling when singing “Hin[c]kley Had a Vision”;⁶⁵ D.R.I. took up position against Reagan’s economic policies in *Reaganomics*, yelling “Reaganomics killing me / Reaganomics killing you”;⁶⁶ Wasted Youth questioned Reagan’s ability to govern by ridiculing the former actor’s

lack of credibility and credentials, scornfully proclaiming that there are crucial substantive differences between acting out scripted roles on the big screen and actually being president when singing “It ain’t movies it’s not TV / it’s pretty rough man you will see” in “Reagan’s In”,⁶⁷ and MDC fantasized about Reagan serving jail time in the humorous “Bye Bye Ronnie.” Even the largely non-political Ramones—much to the chagrin of guitarist Jonny Ramone, who considered Reagan the greatest president of his lifetime—joined in by ridiculing Reagan in their song “Bonzo Goes to Bitburg.”⁶⁸ Leading up to the 1984 presidential election punks even organized a concert tour, aptly titled *Rock Against Reagan*, featuring the Dead Kennedys, MDC, Shattered Faith, Reagan Youth, The Crucifucks, and the Minutemen, among others, which culminated with shows outside the 1984 Republican National Convention in Dallas, Texas. Although novel, punks’ efforts failed to rally the requisite support. On November 6, 1984, Ronald Reagan decisively beat Walter Mondale by carrying 49 out of 50 states and securing 525 electoral votes to Mondale’s 13.⁶⁹

In some ways, punks’ resentment and animosity toward Ronald Reagan is remarkable. No other president—with the exception, perhaps, of George W. Bush—has generated the same level of hostility and repugnance from members of the punk scene. Nonetheless, by the time Reagan left office in January of 1989, passing the presidential torch to George Herbert Walker Bush, the punk movement had lost some of the intensity and vitriol that marked its approach during the early 1980s.⁷⁰ The desire to be a productive political force, however, persisted as activist groups like Positive Force continued their work.⁷¹ Punks also remained steadfast in organizing benefits and protest shows when faced with issues of concern. Originally conceived as a response to the mounting homelessness problem, Positive Force’s outdoor concert in Washington D.C. on January 12, 1991, soon morphed into an impassioned anti-war rally when it became increasingly clear that the United States would likely intervene in the Middle East following Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait. Having secured the proper permits to assemble right in front of the White House, wanting to ensure the president would hear their protestations, activists set up a round-the-

clock percussion vigil that ultimately garnered the attention of the *New York Times* after President Bush complained that “those damned drums are keeping me up all night.”⁷² In the end, President Bush failed to inspire the same level of consternation as his predecessor and punks began focusing their attention elsewhere. More specifically, rather than dealing primarily in matters of party politics, punks set their sights on social and personal politics as the straight edge and riot grrrl movements gathered steam.

1992 TO 2000: TURNING “CLINTONESE”

By the time Bill Clinton took the oath of office on January 20, 1993, the burst of adrenaline sustaining punk through the 1980s had all but fizzled out. The cultural appropriation and corporate mainstreaming of punk rock music had also drastically accelerated after music industry executives realized that punk music, and derivative genres like grunge, enjoyed broader commercial appeal than originally anticipated when Nirvana’s smash hit *Nevermind* inched out Michael Jackson’s *Dangerous* from the top slot of the Billboard 200 chart on January 11, 1992. As an eager army of major label representatives came knocking, looking to sign just about any band with distorted guitars, punks faced an interesting dilemma. On the one hand, increased exposure and market penetration meant wider circulation of punks’ ideas. On the other hand, popular appeal also meant diminished credibility among members of the punk community and subsequent indictments of “selling out,” a *crime* usually punished with anger and ostracism.⁷³ There is, after all, nothing punk about VH1 awards shows, MTV music videos, and having Walmart hawking protest songs effectively castrated by people in suits.

Clinton, the first Democrat to be elected president following punk’s arrival, did little to solicit an impassioned response. In fact, very few direct references to Clinton can be found in punk rock’s musical library. Although Guttermouth claims that “Clinton equals Hitler” during the second verse of “Born in the USA,” the band is more widely known for

its absurd humor and offensive jokes than offering sustained political commentary, a point that comes across rather well toward the end of the song as singer Mark Adkins wryly sings “don’t let them win / don’t cast a vote / don’t live in silence / don’t put down your arms / don’t be a puppet / don’t choose their way / don’t feed the bears / don’t live their lie.”⁷⁴ The Anti-Heros, similarly, include a reference to Clinton in the song “Heross & Zeroes.” The critique, however, is mounted in general rather than specific terms and singer Mark Noah seems decidedly more perturbed by the role of money in politics and the electoral influence wielded by powerful religious groups than Clinton himself, singing “Truman, JFK, great leaders of old / Bush and Clinton, crucified on a cross of gold / we got the best leaders money can buy.”⁷⁵ In their song “These Colours Don’t Run,” Protest the Hero rebukes the Clinton administration for the Al-Shifa factory bombing in 1998. Ultimately, however, the band ends up critiquing U.S. foreign policy more broadly, especially the perceived hypocrisy of using terror to pursue terrorist targets, calling for the U.S. government to take a long hard look in the mirror: “Terrorism as defined by official U.S. documents is ‘the calculated use of violence or threat of violence, to attain goals that are political, religious, or ideological in state’ / a labeled rogue state, look at yourself.”⁷⁶

The punk community’s most vocal Clinton critic might very well be Henry Rollins, and even his admonitions are lackluster when compared to the outrage punks reserved for Reagan. On his spoken word album, *A Rollins in the Wry*, the former Black Flag singer dedicates a few minutes to discussing Clinton’s evasive language—dubbed “Clintonese”—during his grand jury testimony following the Lewinsky scandal: “Basically, he had 800 spears a minute thrown at him for five hours and he dodged every one of them. Amazing!” Impressed and appalled in equal measures, Rollins sarcastically compliments Clinton for his rhetorical acrobatics and argues that “he’s amazing, they should teach Clinton in college.”⁷⁷ Ultimately, however, Clinton failed to adequately aggravate punks. One reason, one might speculate, is that punks are more closely aligned with Democratic

causes and policies than they are Republican ones. In summing up punk practice in the 1990s, The Distillers’ frontwoman Brody Dalle offers that:

...Clinton was in the fucking White House. It was the golden years—like, “What the fuck do you have to complain about”? Punk became more about music and style than any political or social motivation. There’s no catalyst—there’s nothing driving it.⁷⁸

2000 TO 2008: “SOMEWHERE IN TEXAS THERE IS A VILLAGE WITHOUT ITS IDIOT”⁷⁹

Following the election of President George W. Bush in November of 2000, beating Al Gore in a close presidential contest that is still the stuff of controversy,⁸⁰ punk bands once again focused their attention on electoral politics. Claiming that Bush had hijacked the 2000 election, and that the Supreme Court was complicit in his ostensibly unlawful victory by suspending the Florida recount, punks eagerly dusted off the rhetorical munitions they had previously reserved for Reagan. The return to form was spectacular in its expediency given that punks had remained reasonably quiet about national politics for more than a decade. Bush’s rise to the presidency proved a turning point for punks as the then new war on terror and its corollary USA PATRIOT Act drew heavy criticisms. Even before wrapping up his first term in office Bush faced heavy scrutiny as NOFX released the pithily titled *The War on Errorism*, Anti-Flag released *The Terror State*, Green Day released *American Idiot*, Jello Biafra and the Melvins released *Never Breathe What You Can’t See*, Leftöver Crack released *Fuck World Trade*, and Bad Religion released *The Empire Strikes First*, the title of which draws not-so-subtle connections to the Star Wars universe’s imperialist villains while simultaneously condemning the Bush administration’s attempt to justify its intervention in Iraq by dubbing their bombings “preemptive strikes.”⁸¹ A clever callback to the early 1980s, referencing the Alternative Tentacles compilation album *Let Them Eat Jellybeans*, the record also featured the song “Let Them Eat War.” Claiming that economic considerations were the prime

mover behind the decision to once again deploy troops in the Middle East, singer Greg Graffin argued that working-class people were burdened with the heavy lifting while people in positions of power merely sat back and watched as the war effort's revenue stream produced profits ultimately kept from the very people who made those profits possible in the first place, proclaiming that "the war economy is making new jobs / but the people who benefit most / are breaking bread with their benevolent hosts."⁸² The ideographic ruse deployed in support of the war effort, Graffin suggested, was a collection of clichéd appeals to American exceptionalism, freedom, and bootstrapping narratives that ultimately sought to justify the continued sustainment of the military-industrial complex while paying little mind to the people whose lives and futures were actually on the line.

Song titles, of course, were not the only 1980s callback. Hoping to influence the outcome of the 2004 presidential election by endeavoring to swing the vote in favor of Senator John Kerry, NOFX's Fat Mike founded the not-for-profit voter registration organization PunkVoter in 2002 and also organized the 2004 Rock Against Bush concert tour. Concerts, featuring NOFX, Anti-Flag, Authority Zero, The Alkaline Trio, as well as spoken word performances by Jello Biafra, were held on college campuses in battleground states. Realizing that presidential elections can be decided by votes cast in single states, Bush inching out Gore in Florida by a measly 537 votes in 2000,⁸³ Fat Mike reasoned that a legion of voting punks might just topple the 2004 election if it once again came down to the wire.⁸⁴ Two volumes of *Rock Against Bush*, twin compilation CDs featuring a collection of punk bands as well as more mainstream artists like No Doubt, The Foo Fighters, and Billy Bragg, were also released in efforts to raise funds to pay for political ads in key markets. Selling more than 650,000 copies worldwide, the CDs proved an important revenue generator.⁸⁵

Much like Reagan, and Queen Elizabeth II before him, George W. Bush's image was also subverted, appropriated, and eventually printed

on posters, fliers, record sleeves, and T-shirts. The front cover of NOFX’s *War on Errorism*, for example, featured a caricature of Bush dressed up as a clown. The record’s liner notes followed suit by proclaiming that “somewhere in Texas there is a village without its idiot.”⁸⁶ PunkVoter.com also distributed information leaflets with titles such as “Real Quotes from a Real Moron,” “40 Reasons to Hate Bush,” and “The George W. Bush Resume,” most of which prominently displayed the president’s picture underneath the caption “putting the mock back in democracy.”⁸⁷ In efforts to raise funds for its political action committee, the amusingly titled Bush Administration Retirement Fund (B.A.R.F. P.A.C.), PunkVoter also sold George Bush T-shirts emblazoned with the caption “Not My President.”⁸⁸ During NOFX’s 2003 European tour, the same image was printed on hoodies but the caption was changed to “Idiot Son of an Asshole,” thereby serving as a direct reference to NOFX’s brand new anti-Bush song bearing the same title.⁸⁹

Running the gambit from serious to frivolous, punk songs about President Bush flourished as punks once again railed against a common enemy. On the more serious side of things, generally critiquing policy efforts and interrogating voting records, bands like Anti-Flag and Behind Enemy Lines accused Bush of being a liar and a thief, describing the president as an international “criminal with protection of the law.”⁹⁰ Jello Biafra, in his trademark style, dressed up otherwise reasonable points in hyperbolic rhetoric and even went as far as thanking Osama Bin Laden for revitalizing the U.S. economy by causing the war effort to move forward as retaliation for the 9/11 attacks.⁹¹ Somewhere towards the middle, leveraging serious points but couching them in novel metaphors, we find songs like NOFX’s “The Idiots Are Taking Over,” “Franco Un-American,” and “Idiot Son of an Asshole.” All the way over on the more frivolous side of the continuum, featuring a variety of ad-hominem attacks, some of which slide into the realm of conspiracy theory (likely for comedic effect), we find songs like the Angry Amputees’ “Dubya.” Describing Bush as an “oil pumping ho,” frontwoman Stacey Dee claims that his “grandpa worked for Hitler,” that his “daughters snort the coke,” that his

father “killed JFK,” and that his “mother looks like [Abraham] Lincoln,” only to finally conclude that “we’re gonna kick your fucking ass!”⁹²

In the end, Bush defeated Kerry in the election and punks, once again, failed to reach their goal. The upside for punk, however, is that efforts like PunkVoter were successful in mobilizing young voters, Siblo speculating that young people who voted for the first time in 2004, due to the efforts of organizations like PunkVoter, might be credited with helping elect Barack Obama in 2008.⁹³

2008 TO 2016—OBAMA

Running a campaign rooted in optimism and equality, at times flirting with collectivist rhetoric as he touted the hopeful yet arguably squishy tagline “Yes We Can!,” Barack Obama was sworn in as the forty-fourth president of the United States on January 20, 2009, after securing a comfortable win over John McCain in the 2008 election. A sympathetic optimist of measured response, Obama brought to the White House a bookish intellectualism that his predecessor sorely lacked. Charismatic and engaging, Obama seemed a different kind of politician. Having assembled a platform of progressive ideas major party candidates usually shy away from, Obama hit the campaign trail pushing plans to repeal the Defense of Marriage Act, uphold *Roe v. Wade*, lift bans on stem cell research, and even entertained ideas of moving the country towards a more caring healthcare model, vowing to put people ahead of profits. Punks, Ozzi explains, were taken aback as Obama appeared to be a reasonable step in the right direction: “Given the choice between him and yet another decrepit white man who popped a Viagra every time he thought about bombing brown people, punk made its choice.”⁹⁴

Even Jello Biafra, usually more liable to dole out sardonic criticisms than congratulatory niceties, seemed pleased with the election’s outcome and even penned an open letter to Obama in which he not only congratulated the president on his victory but also offered words of encouragement.

Posted to Change.gov, a site set up by the Obama administration to solicit feedback and ideas from citizens, Biafra wrote:

You have gone out of your way to build a bridge to those of us fed up with war, pollution, inequality, corporate lawlessness and business as usual. You have energized a whole new generation who is far ahead of their elders in knowing what urgently needs to be done. I have never seen such an outpouring of heartfelt emotion, hope and support for an American politician in my life, and I remember Kennedy well. You are the first president in my lifetime to have a bona fide grassroots movement behind you and ready to rock. I hope those crowds’ hope and urgency has penetrated deeply enough that you won’t let that bridge be washed away.⁹⁵

While the tone of Biafra’s lengthy letter was courteous and amicable, its fundamental intent was nevertheless to heed warning—having successfully instilled a newfound sense of hope in large swaths of the electorate, Obama better not blow it. Judging from the lack of consternation during Obama’s two terms in office, it would appear, at least from the punk community’s perspective, that he did a suitable job. That, of course, is not to say that there were not things for punks to criticize, for Obama continued, and even intensified, some of the policies and practices put in place by the Bush administration (e.g., drone killings of innocent civilians overseas, NSA spying programs, the failure to hold bank executives accountable for the financial crisis, his inability to close Guantanamo, etc.) of which punks had been critical. Even so, those issues, Ozzi argues, were perceived as individual problems rather than symptoms of an overall failure in leadership. Obama, after all, was perceived by punks as a “competent person steering the ship”⁹⁶ in the right direction. As such, he was given a pass.

2016 TO THE PRESENT—TRUMP

If history is any indication, Donald Trump will likely be remembered as a severely unpopular president among members of the punk community.

Given his penchant for self-congratulatory rhetoric, coupled with an unwavering sense of self-confidence, even when discussing topics on which he lacks specialized knowledge, Trump has emerged as an easy target for criticism among punks.⁹⁷ Unlike the more measured approach of his predecessors, generally able to take criticism in stride, Trump has shown an unusual willingness to engage with his detractors and even had a very public social media spat with Arnold Schwarzenegger.⁹⁸ A brander who ostensibly cares more about perception than he does substance, Trump will unquestionably suffer the Reagan and Bush image treatment and also figure as the central focus of punk songs.⁹⁹ In fact, following Trump's surprising election victory in 2016, Fat Wreck Chords promptly revived the "Not My President" T-shirts from the 2004 election by simply replacing the image of Bush with an unflattering picture of Trump—the label even took the extra step by also printing T-shirts with the caption "Not My Fucking President."¹⁰⁰ The Obscenities, a Scottish punk band protesting Trump's Aberdeen golf course, took a similar swipe at Trump's appearance and also heeded warning by cautioning people about the questionable business tactics of the "Chicago billionaire with synthetic hair," band members angrily admonishing "fuck off, Trump / fuck right off."¹⁰¹ Following suit by describing the U.S. president as a "sexist, racist, sorry excuse for a man," Swedish punk band The Sensitives offered more of the same while also brandishing a cautious sense of optimism when arguing, in the YouTube description accompanying their song "TRUMP," that "[d]espite all the horrible things about Donald Trump being the president of the USA[,] we can look forward to 4 years of great punk music because the inspiration have [*sic*] never been bigger!"¹⁰²

What punks choose to do with that inspiration is still an open question. While the recording of protest songs is one avenue that certainly will be pursued, some punks have also advocated for the utilization of more direct tactics. Even violent ones. Thomas Barnett, an Antifa member and the lead singer of Strike Anywhere, argues that Trump's rhetoric has radicalized the far-right to such a degree that fighting fire with fire is now a justifiable option. Explaining that "This isn't just a raft of right-

wing ideas—this is actual hate and violence, and the destruction of entire sections of humanity... I think anti-fascists’ pre-emptive street violence against Nazis is righteous and important,”¹⁰³ Barnett claims that dire circumstances not only demand but ultimately also legitimize drastic actions. This conclusion has met resistance from other punks, many of whom are pacifists or, at the very least, skeptical about the offensive use of violence.

Jello Biafra, a dyed in the wool punk rocker with few—if any—reservations about insurrectionary tactics, is nonetheless more hesitant than Barnett when it comes to the virtues of violence. Although acknowledging the uniqueness of the current political situation, and fully agreeing with Barnett that change is sorely needed, Biafra nonetheless adopts the more nuanced approach of a dove trying to navigate the hawkish winds of a polarized political climate:

More than ever, we have to keep our heads right now. And I am all about freedom of speech, but I think protesting these people non-violently is the way to go, because it lets the targets of the fascist speakers know they’re not alone and lets the fascists who show up know that there’s an awful lot of people who are not down with them, and a chorus of raised middle fingers is better than showing up with some kind of a weapon. Escalating the violence is not the way to go.¹⁰⁴

Biafra is also careful to explain that his problem is not necessarily with Trump voters, for he suspects they are deeply uninformed, but rather with the president himself. Although his band, The Guantanamo School of Medicine, recently updated the 1981 Dead Kennedys song “Nazi Punks Fuck Off” by retitling it “Nazi Trumps Fuck Off,” Biafra is nonetheless convinced that persuasion works better than fistfights and that dialogue might ultimately help preserve the sanctity of the democratic process: “My point is that you don’t do that [dismiss people without first finding out what they have to say], you sit down and talk to somebody, not

blog in an echo chamber. It might be stomach-churning, but you might plant a seed.”¹⁰⁵

President Trump has not yet served a full term in office. As such, only a limited number of printed and recorded materials are currently available for analysis. It is highly likely, however, that more will become available soon enough. Punks, after all, have not been shy about voicing their displeasure with Trump on Twitter, the president’s favored communication platform. From Bad Religion’s Jay Bentley and Brett Gurewitz to Against Me!’s Laura Jane Grace, The Lawrence Arms’ Brendan Kelly, and NOFX’s Fat Mike, snarky remarks and incensed bursts of outrage about the Trump presidency are now daily fodder. Bentley, angrily responding to Trump’s claim that he is going to “drain the swamp,” called foul and argued that Trump is “the greatest grift since Paper Moon. A circus clown... played by monied intelligence to rally [the] willfully ignorant to vote for [a] catchphrase,”¹⁰⁶ further adding that “by the time people had figured out how deep the swamp was, the life rafts had been locked to the shore and the life guards had all gone home,”¹⁰⁷ sentiments humorously mirrored in Kelly’s assertion that “The irony is that all these unqualified, millionaire dipshits that Trump is inserting into his cabinet would be better presidents than him.”¹⁰⁸ NOFX’s Fat Mike, also harboring deep-seated antipathies toward Donald Trump, expressed puzzlement and consternation that some Twitter users claimed to be both NOFX fans and Trump supporters, telling his followers to “get over telling me to get over it [the election outcome]! I will not get over it and I will fight against the sociopath Donald Trump until he is impeached.”¹⁰⁹

The same rhetorical irreverence has also been brought to the stage when punk bands perform. During the 2017 installment of Punk Rock Bowling, an annual Las Vegas music festival that doubles as a bowling tournament, punk bands and punk fans competing side-by-side for bowling trophies, a statue bearing the likeness of a naked Donald Trump was brought on stage and subsequently smashed to bits. Standing at the edge of the stage, holding a baseball bat in one hand while cupping a

microphone with the other, NOFX’s Fat Mike told audience members that “some people think that punk rock is not about politics. It is about fucking politics... If you are a Trump supporter, then fuck you and get the fuck out of our scene” before swinging the bat at the statue, taking its head off in one fell swoop.¹¹⁰

In broadening their approach, punks have also set their sights on other members of the Trump administration. During the confirmation hearing for Jeff Sessions, Trump’s pick for attorney general, tensions were running high and audience members interrupted the proceedings on numerous occasions. A particularly memorable moment, caught on camera by journalists from ABC News, occurred when a group of protestors started chanting “No Trump! No KKK! No fascist USA!”¹¹¹ Green Day, having chanted those exact words onstage at the 2016 American Music Awards just a few months earlier, were quickly—and erroneously—credited as the chant’s originators.¹¹² Initially a line from the MDC song “Born to Die,” a two-minute hardcore ripper in which singer Dave Dictor takes a stand against Austin, Texas, neo-Nazis during the early 1980s,¹¹³ the lyrics originally went “no war, no KKK, no fascist USA.”¹¹⁴ That the song’s lyrics should be invoked during Sessions’s confirmation hearing is no accident. Sessions’s nomination by Reagan a few decades earlier was rejected by the Senate Judiciary Committee after evidence surfaced suggesting that Sessions harbored racist tendencies. More specifically, Sessions was accused of failing to denounce the KKK as his former colleagues “testified [that] Sessions used the n-word and joked about the Ku Klux Klan, saying he thought they were ‘okay, until he learned that they smoked marijuana.”¹¹⁵

Henry Rollins, leveraging his regular *L.A. Weekly* column as a means for venting political frustrations, has frequently reproached the president’s actions and has also emerged as a vocal critic of Trump’s cabinet members. In sharing his thoughts about the back-and-forth between Trump and North Korean dictator Kim Jong-un, focusing particular attention on the escalating threat of nuclear war following Trump’s “eighth-grade school-

yard” insults on Twitter, Rollins describes Trump as the most “mindlessly reckless” president in U.S. history while simultaneously casting Secretary of State Rex Tillerson as a “corporate megafuck,” ultimately arguing that Trump does not possess the intellectual wherewithal to offer anything but “bullshit-infused exhalation[s].”¹¹⁶ Trump’s White House Press Secretary, Sarah Huckabee Sanders, is also rebuked for her role in peddling what Rollins considers to be easily discreditable nonsense. Claiming that her role in the Trump administration is strikingly similar to the one served by Saddam Hussein’s “good-news knucklehead, Muhammad Saeed al-Sahhaf [more commonly known as “Comical Ali”]” who would, regardless of how many bombs were dropped over Baghdad, appear in front of the television cameras to inform the world “that the terrified American forces were running at all speed back to the safety of their mothers’ skirts.”¹¹⁷ While pursuing a similar approach, Rollins nonetheless claims that Huckabee Sanders lacks al-Sahhaf’s “oratory skill and comic timing,” concluding that she is “a grim-faced, one-woman barroom brawl.”¹¹⁸ Beneath the thin veneer of sarcasm-laden comedy, Rollins’s trademark anger clearly shines through. Describing the Trump presidency as a “dumpster fire,” further arguing that nothing about the current administration resembles anything one might otherwise call normal, the former Black Flag singer urges people to remember what politics used to look like and refuse to accept the “new normal” as anything but a temporary aberration that should be opposed at every turn.

In an interesting turn of events, some have argued that Donald Trump himself is a punk.¹¹⁹ Given his lack of relevant governmental experience and institutional knowledge, as well his disregard for established political decorum, having made not-so-subtle remarks about the size of his penis during the Republican Primary Debate in Detroit, Michigan, mocked a disabled reporter while on the campaign trail, and called former San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick a “son of a bitch” while occupying the Oval Office,¹²⁰ Piers Morgan—in an interview with Johnny Rotten on *Good Morning Britain*—argued that Trump embodies the spirit of punk, that he is “the absolutely archetypal anti-establishment

character,”¹²¹ and finally concluded that Trump is to politics what the Sex Pistols were to music. Rotten, although failing to properly address Morgan’s proposition, nonetheless offered:

The Donald. Here’s a complicated fella...There’s many, many problems with him as a human being, but... there might just be a chance that something good will come out of that situation because he terrifies politicians. And this is joy to behold.¹²²

On the face of it, one might initially be tempted to accept Morgan’s analysis. However, if we recall the definitions of punk put forward by Sabin and James, it soon becomes evident that there is very little that is punk about Donald Trump. To be sure, petulance for petulance’s sake is not punk. Chaos without critique is not punk. Right-wing ideologies are not (generally) punk. Inherited wealth is not punk. Living in a golden tower is not punk. Sexism and ableism is not punk. Running for office as a vanity project is not punk. Even so, and regardless of whatever else might be concluded about the Trump presidency at present, it seems safe to suggest that Trump has been exceedingly successful in motivating punks to once again dust off their rhetorical armaments and take up position against another Republican president.

While only a handful of bands have recorded Trump-themed punk songs at the time of this writing, more are surely underway. After all, L7, a pioneering riot grrrl band that called it quits in 2001, recently came out of retirement and marked the occasion by recording their first new song in 18 years. Titled “Dispatch from Mar-a-Lago,” seeking to mock what Trump himself has dubbed the “Winter White House,” the song sees singer Donita Sparks take aim not only at the president’s Twitter usage but also issue warnings that it is only a matter of time before people start “storming the gates at Mar-a-Lago.”¹²³ Other recent examples include Dead Ending’s “Ivanka Wants Her Orange Back,” an eerily incestuous number, and Pussy Riot’s “Make America Great Again.” A Trump themed band, operating under the moniker Anal Trump (surely a nod to the Newton, Massachusetts, grindcore band Anal Cunt), also

released—only three days before the 2016 election—an album titled “That Makes Me Smart!” With a total running time of three minutes, the album nonetheless contains thirty original tracks. Song titles, all of which were inspired by or make reference to statements made by Trump while on the campaign trail, include such numbers as “I Like The Soldiers Who DON’T Get Captured,” “I’d Date My Daughter,” “Poor People Are Too Stupid to Get a Loan from Their Parents,” “Harriet Tubman Is, Like, A 3,” “Grab Em by the Pussy,” “I’m in Astonishingly Excellent Health,” “Trump Tower Has the Best Taco Bowls,” “Nobody Respects Women More Than Me,” and “Blood Coming Out of Her Wherever.”¹²⁴

As his presidency matures, it will be interesting to see what else punks have to say about Trump. He has, after all, already drawn more ire from members of the punk community within the span of a year than Obama did in two consecutive terms. The way things are progressing, there is no real reason to believe the trend will slow down or reverse. In the meantime, let us hope that Ozzi is not correct in his dystopian predictions:

It’s been discussed ad nauseum how a Trump presidency might revive the spirit of punk rock and, seeing as how we’re dealing with a psychologically unstable egomaniac bragging about expanding nuclear capabilities, who the fuck cares? We’ll all be lucky if, after four years, we still have an earth left on which to play any kind of music.¹²⁵

CONCLUSION

Although a necessarily truncated account of punk’s involvement with presidential politics—after all, the sheer volume of available material cannot faithfully be unpacked and analyzed in the space of a book chapter—it is still possible to offer some preliminary conclusions about the relationship between punks and presidents.

First, as I hope to have convincingly illustrated above, Republican presidents are much more likely to engender impassioned responses

from punks than are Democratic presidents. While it is true that the milquetoast George W. H. Bush largely eluded heated criticism, it is also the case that both Reagan and George W. Bush found themselves on the receiving end of fervent punk protestations. Given how the Trump presidency is currently unfolding, it seems likely that he will suffer the same fate. The reason, one might speculate, is that Democratic presidents are more closely aligned with punk’s prevailing thought patterns and values structures and are thus perceived as less offensive than Republican presidents.

Second, whereas punks have traditionally relied on music—both live and recorded—as the primary mechanism by which to circulate their dissident ideas/ideals, technological innovations and communicative advances have provided punks with new and novel platforms for the leveraging of presidential critiques, especially in 2016 and beyond. Social media, and Twitter in particular, has allowed punks to more easily reach audiences located outside the confines of the punk community and has also ensured that punk fans can easily interact and discuss politics with band members. The increasing centrality of the Internet has also allowed for new forms of punk organizing. The PunkVoter initiative, for example, essentially took the form of a dissent-laden, online public relations campaign that encouraged sympathizers from across the globe to pledge support for Fat Mike and his coconspirators’ efforts to oust George W. Bush during the 2004 election by donating time, money, and effort or by simply buying CDs to help raise funds. Even so, and while message delivery systems might be different, there is nothing fundamentally different between punks’ critiques of Ronald Reagan and Donald Trump—at least not in terms of message content. While differing historical circumstances ensure that individual policy efforts diverge, it is nonetheless quite easy to point out similarities in punk practice over time as the overall approach to critique remains largely the same.

Finally, even though punk is generally considered an “outright frontal attack on the system,” an assessment that remains valid when accompa-

nied by a few caveats, the 2004 PunkVoter campaign nonetheless reveals that some punks are willing to suspend rigid ideological principles in favor of pragmatism when the stakes are high by working with mainstream organizations in pursuit of a common goal. Of course, since it is, at our current juncture, functionally impossible to elude or operate outside of the capitalist structure, punks are by definition very much part of the system they endeavor to critique. While the level of participation certainly is negotiable, punks, still resisting crude forms of capitalism by favoring DIY business practices and grassroots cultural production because they are viewed as less alienating and more virtuous than wholesale commodification, are still very much part and parcel of modern capitalism. As such, punks are not exempted from the system; they are not outsiders looking in. They are instead insiders throwing wrenches in the gears. They are interrupters, bricoleurs, and culture jammers. Although written almost four decades ago, it seems that Hebdige's contention that "punk did more than just upset the wardrobe. It undermined every relevant discourse"¹²⁶ still remains a valid proposition. Presidents beware.

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CHAPTER THREE

RAPPING FOR A REVOLUTION

LATINO HIP-HOP ARTISTS AND THE 2016 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

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INTRODUCTION

The 2016 U.S. presidential election cycle engaged the Latino population in the U.S. to an unprecedented degree. On June 16, 2015, Donald Trump infamously opened his campaign by accusing Mexicans crossing the border into the U.S. of being murderers and rapists, and throughout the campaign his promise to build a wall at the border with Mexico featured prominently in his rallies.¹ In contrast, Republican primary candidates Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio attempted to appeal to Hispanics through their own Cuban heritage and even sparred with each other over their Spanish speaking abilities in a South Carolina debate.² The importance of the growing Latino population was also not lost on the primary candidates on the Democratic side, as they struggled with each other to keep the support of the Latino demographic, which has traditionally leaned heavily to the left in the U.S.³ For example, both Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders

promised to offer top political posts to Latinos and vowed to work on passing a path to legal status for undocumented immigrants.⁴ Because of this heightened challenge to and interest in Latino voters from both sides of the political aisle, Latinos played an even greater role in presidential politics than they had in past elections. With Hispanics accounting for 12 percent of the total of eligible voters,⁵ with an intensified focus on Latin American immigrants, and with an under tapped youth vote in play as always, politically conscious Latino hip-hop artists also had a significant interest in the 2016 election. This chapter will examine the ways in which two Latino hip-hop groups used their music as well as their musical platforms to convey messages steeped in the history of U.S. –Latin American relations to their Latino fans and listeners to attempt to spur a social justice revolution.

Through their music and their activism, both of the artists examined in this chapter advocated for a type of revolution during the lead-up to the 2016 presidential election. René Pérez Joglar, a Puerto Rican rapper, writer, and producer, who is best known by his artistic name of Residente and as half of the award-winning hip-hop duo Calle 13, offered his public support to Bernie Sanders's political campaign during the Democratic primary. On the other hand, Rebel Diaz, a Bronx-based hip-hop duo of brothers with Chilean roots, displayed dissatisfaction with all of the presidential candidates on both sides of the political aisle and advocated instead for a revolution against the U.S. political system through community activism. In addition, they regularly tweeted criticisms and challenges to virtually all of the candidates, and even confronted Ted Cruz in person while he was still in the race. Embracing his Chilean heritage, Rodrigo "RodStarz" Venegas of Rebel Diaz compares his group's activism for social justice in the Bronx to his parents' struggles against the U.S.-backed military dictatorship in Chile during the 1970s and its neoliberal policies imported from the U.S.,⁶ and these messages resonate with U.S. Latinos with origins in many different Latin American nations. Therefore, this chapter examines Residente and Rebel Diaz's involvement in presidential politics within the context of Antonio Gramsci's theories about counter-

hegemonic struggles for cultural power within elitist capitalist systems. Furthermore, it studies the ways in which both artists draw on the political history of U.S. imperialist intervention in Latin America to support and promote a counter-hegemonic alternative to challenge the U.S. political status quo.

GRAMSCI AND COUNTER-HEGEMONY

The nineteenth-century Italian Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci examined the relationship between Western Europe's dominant and subordinate social classes and used the term "hegemony" to describe the way in which the "dominated or subordinate... consent to their own domination by ruling classes, as opposed to being simply forced or coerced into accepting inferior positions."⁷ Following the Gramscian idea of the nature of hegemony, Neo-Gramscian Nicola Pratt proposes the term counter-hegemony to refer to "a creation of an alternative hegemony on the terrain of civil society in preparation for a war of position."⁸ Gramsci himself, rather than using the term "counter-hegemony," differentiates between a war of maneuver, which he defines as a direct and quick use of physical force against the hegemonic State, and a war of position, which is a longer fought cultural and ideological battle. According to Pratt, "Gramsci was also interested in how the 'subaltern classes' could overturn the hegemony of capitalism. He regarded civil society as the trenches in which social forces would establish their 'war of position' against capitalism."⁹ Panagiotis Sotiris, in writing on counter-hegemonic movements in institutions of higher education, defines counter-hegemony as not merely any resistance to neo-liberalism, but instead as "the strategic condensation of a new politics of labour, an attempt at social experimentation beyond capitalism, new forms of democracy and collectivity and new forms of social interaction."¹⁰ This way of envisioning counter-hegemonic struggles opens the door to creative forms of resistance against the dominant classes.

Dominic Strinati, in his *Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture*, describes the reasons why Gramsci advocates for a war of position rather than one of maneuver: “According to Gramsci, the liberal democratic societies of western capitalism... have... complex civil societies which reinforce the hegemony of the dominant group.”¹¹ In order to affect the civil societies that keep the dominant groups in power, “the revolutionary forces have to take civil society before they take the state; they therefore have to build a coalition of oppositional groups united by an hegemony which usurps the dominant and prevailing one.”¹² Similarly, in writing on counter-hegemonic coalitions in Malaysia, Lilian Miles and Richard Croucher explain that Gramsci’s war of position involves “developing the links between oppositional groups and forging their disparate oppositional notions into a coherent, ‘counter-hegemonic’ politics that could challenge the established... elite for state power.”¹³ Furthermore, Miles and Croucher clarify that political elections, outside of those taking place internally in the workplace, are for Gramsci insufficient to wage a war of position. “Elections were merely an echo of the battle, refracted through bourgeois politics, not the battle itself.”¹⁴ As elections are not, according to Gramsci, where the true battles are waged, we must look elsewhere to find evidence of class struggles. Music, with its ability to engage the emotions and rally an audience into the collective performance of song, provides an ideal medium through which to cultivate counter-hegemonic thought.

REBEL DIAZ

The duo Rebel Diaz, whose members, the brothers Rodrigo and Gonzalo Venegas, are the children of exiles from the Augusto Pinochet dictatorship in Chile, rap in both English and Spanish about social justice issues and have participated actively in community organizing efforts in New York and Chicago.¹⁵ Although the duo has engaged to some degree in electoral politics ever since the 2008 elections, Rodrigo Venegas, known by the stage name RodStarz, has expressed a Gramscian view of presidential elections. In an April 2016 interview RodStarz answered a question

regarding which candidate he supported by criticizing the entire U.S. electoral process: "I'm gonna side with the people [this election]. I think that this country has a two-party dictatorship that's ran [*sic*] by the corporations so I don't really see any candidate doing better to represent the people."¹⁶ RodStarz is not at all alone in elevating the importance of music and activism over that of the democratic process. In an article on musicians and the Latino vote during the 2008 U.S. presidential election, Jean-Michel Lafleur and Marco Martiniello explain one of the reasons why immigrants and racial and ethnic minorities often choose music as a means of political mobilization:

When looking at rap... it can be noted that some of these young rappers, often coming from immigrant or ethnic minorities, have a lucid and constructed discourse and clear political views. These young people are wary of political institutions that they perceive as distant, and they express their views or challenge the existing system in general, as they also do with the ethnic and racial discrimination of which they consider themselves to be the victims, through music. This then becomes the preferred means adapted to their political demands.¹⁷

During the 2008 presidential elections the members of Rebel Diaz were prime examples of young immigrant and ethnic minority rappers using their music to express their political views. The Venegas brothers had founded Rebel Diaz in 2006 and their break-out performance took place at an immigrant rights march in New York in that same year.¹⁸ As the duo began to participate in live concerts they also worked to transform their struggling South Bronx community. RodStarz explains how in 2006 they took over an abandoned lot that had been used simply for drinking and drug use and converted it into a community garden in which musical shows and other cultural activities could take place.¹⁹ Mark Naison, in writing on migration and musical creativity in the Bronx in 2010, describes how Rebel Diaz forms part of an integrative and innovative musical movement there:

As immigrants from the Dominican Republic, West Africa, Mexico, South America and South Asia are entering Bronx neighbourhoods, they are fusing their indigenous musical forms with what they are hearing on the airwaves and on Bronx streets... An amazing new group from Chile, Rebel Diaz, is giving political hip-hop a new lease on life.²⁰

In October 2008, while many hip-hop artists were lending their support and approval to Barack Obama's campaign, Rebel Diaz penned a hip-hop "Open Letter to Barack Obama" that described the duo's growing disillusion with the candidate. By sampling a portion of the Dido song "Thank you," Rebel Diaz's "Open Letter" models itself on "Stan," Eminem's critically acclaimed song in which a dangerously obsessed fictitious fan and Eminem engage in an escalating dialogue to the backdrop of the chorus of Dido's "Thank you." The nod to Eminem's song about the hazards of hero worship is used as an ironic undertone in "Open Letter" to criticize fervent Obama supporters who were not able to critically and thoughtfully scrutinize his actions and stances. After explaining the reasons why he was at first predisposed to support Obama, the poetic voice of the open letter criticizes Obama's silence on the subject of police killings and alludes to the Obama campaign slogan by stating, "We need more than hope 'cause this system doesn't work."²¹ Later in the song the poetic voice condemns Obama as "Mr. corporate sell-out to the imperialist dollar,"²² but in the last lines acknowledges that he prefers Obama to the alternative, which, in a reference to John McCain's running mate, is merely "one heartbeat away from Sarah Palin."²³

On November 3, 2012, Rebel Diaz uploaded a song to YouTube from an album that they would not officially release until over a year later. The song, entitled "Revolution Has Come," derives both its title and its chorus from the Black Panthers chant, "the revolution has come, time to pick up the gun" that was heard frequently at civil rights marches in the 1960s. In the song, which was made public just three days before Obama's reelection, RodStarz, standing at the center of a classroom dressed like

Ernesto “Che” Guevara, the Argentine hero of the Cuban Revolution, reiterates his lack of support for the president and his preference for community organizing over backing any particular candidate: “Swear to God on my mama, never supported Obama... I’d rather focus on the streets organizing the tribes.”²⁴ Earlier in the lyrics RodStarz criticizes both Democrats and Republicans as being in bed with multinational corporations, and the video features two men wearing Obama and Mitt Romney masks robbing a convenience store manned by RodStarz as representative of low income minorities standing to lose no matter which candidate comes out on top in the election. The song also bemoans police brutality, the prison industrial complex, and the housing crisis, and despite the reference to picking up a gun in the chorus, it advocates community involvement over violence. In a 2014 interview, RodStarz explained that the video for “Revolution Has Come” featured images of schoolchildren holding up books when, “time to pick up the gun” is heard. According to RodStarz, in the song and video “the gun is a metaphor for the weapons we can use now! Education! Teaching the young people about the struggles of the past so that they can prepare for the future.”²⁵

In addition to encouraging community cultural engagement in their music, the members of Rebel Diaz were practicing what they were preaching. Just two months before the 2012 election, Denise Perry, a community organizer for the Black Organizing for Leadership & Dignity (BOLD) project, published an article in which she describes the effectiveness of workshops held by the duo:

When I was the director of an organization that worked with Black and Latino youth in Miami, I noticed that music helped create a form of communication that fostered both a strong cultural and organizational identity. The youth members used it to entertain and to raise money with talent shows, but they were moved to a deeper interest in their organizing work when the hip-hop duo Rebel Diaz came to talk with them about the power and meaning inherent in their music.²⁶

Perry concludes her article by explaining in Gramscian terms that resistance to oppression must be rooted in culture and that “liberation depends on waging cultural revolution, thus producing a radical transformation of both self and society.”²⁷

In an interview with artist-activist and radio producer Sufiya Asia Yamin in January of 2014, Gonzalo “G1” Venegas once again describes Rebel Diaz’s commitment to community engagement in terms of revolution, which is a way of advocating a Gramscian war of position: “We feel that the most revolutionary thing we could do in the current... political climate is to create a safe place for young people to gather around, provide them with the infrastructure needed to create an alternative culture.”²⁸ Later in the same interview G1 refers to hip-hop as “a global resistance, a global language”²⁹ that “speaks to the struggles of poor people, of oppressed people, throughout the world.”³⁰ In order to resist against extermination in the form of gentrification, police brutality, and mass incarceration, G1 proposes to “create infrastructure and alternative institutions for culture.”³¹ These “alternative institutions” and “alternative culture” that the members of Rebel Diaz are interested in helping to create are an example of part of a Gramscian counter-hegemony in which low-income and minority youth are given the tools to promote and grow a cultural identity counter to the hegemonic one that supports the political, economic, and social status quo held in place by consent to the bourgeois elite.

Given Rebel Diaz’s history during the 2008 and 2012 election cycles, it is of little surprise that the duo did not come out in support of any of the candidates on either side of the aisle in the lead up to the 2016 election. On July 27, 2016, while the Democratic National Convention was underway in Philadelphia, RodStarz unambiguously declared his loathing for practically all the candidates: “Real Talk. Fuck this election. Fuck the Green Party. Fuck Bernie. Fuck Hillary and the Democrats. Fuck Donald and The Republicans.”³² Rebel Diaz’s opposition to major candidates such as reality star and real estate magnate Donald Trump,

Tea Party conservative Ted Cruz, and establishment Democrat Hillary Clinton is unsurprising. During the campaign RodStarz described Trump as “a blatant racist” and “a fascist” while Ted Cruz, with policies to the right of Trump, was for them “more of a problem in a way.”³³ As for Clinton, Rebel Diaz criticizes her for representing corporate interests, for once referring to young black males as “superpredators,” and for having supported a coup in Honduras in her role as Secretary of State.³⁴

A few weeks prior to the Republican primary in New York, RodStarz and G1 had the opportunity to express their views directly to one of the candidates they found most abhorrent. On April 6, 2016, the members of Rebel Diaz received word that Ted Cruz was scheduled to appear at a Latino-Chinese restaurant in the Bronx to meet with a group of local ministers at the invitation of New York State Senator Reverend Ruben Diaz Sr., a cowboy-hat-wearing conservative Democrat from Puerto Rico with a soft spot for both Ted Cruz and Donald Trump.³⁵ Wielding a microphone for Telesur English, RodStarz, in his journalistic capacity as host of the Telesur web show *Ñ Don't Stop*, approached Senator Diaz to ask him why he would invite an anti-immigrant candidate such as Cruz to a neighborhood and restaurant of immigrants. According to RodStarz, Senator Diaz “knows us and where we stand... but we thought bringing Ted Cruz to the community was a huge insult.”³⁶ Senator Diaz ignored the repeated questions posed to him by RodStarz, and the duo was asked to leave the restaurant, but one of the brothers managed to yell out, “We live in one of the poorest congressional districts in the country... and to receive this right-wing bigot is an insult to the whole community... You're running on an anti-immigrant platform, and you're speaking in the Bronx. You should not be here!”³⁷

In his discussion with Adelle Platon about the confrontation with Cruz, RodStarz explains the political implications of the duo's actions during that encounter. After lamenting the two-party system in place in the U.S. that forces many citizens to choose between what they consider to be two evils at the voting booth, RodStarz describes his direct engagement with

one of the candidates as akin to and even more powerful than voting: “When we went in and shut down Ted Cruz, we were voting that day. Our vote wasn’t for the Democrat [or Republican], our vote was for the people.”³⁸ In another interview in the wake of the Ted Cruz incident G1 expressed to Justin Hunte his skepticism for the entire political process: “The reality is that the electoral process every four years is a charade... We know how much money controls this process. We know the undemocratic aspect of superdelegates and Electoral College and SuperPac money.”³⁹ Nevertheless, while for Rebel Diaz confronting the candidates directly and publicly is more powerful than participating in a highly flawed electoral process, much of the media appears to downplay this sort of political action. Justin Hunte, in writing about the Rebel Diaz clash with Ted Cruz, laments that many media outlets derided the duo’s attempts to ask questions as “heckling”: “It was a weird inversion that highlighted an inefficiency in the fiduciary responsibility of the media and our political process.”⁴⁰

Given the Gramscian view of elections as being merely the reflection of a battle, Rebel Diaz’s stance of favoring direct action over voting is an example of engaging in the battle itself. While Rebel Diaz have little to no faith in presidential elections, they have somewhat more confidence in the electoral process at the local level. In a similar way to how Gramsci favors workplace politics over state politics, the members of Rebel Diaz reject the national electoral process but support the local political process. In the same interview with Justin Hunte regarding the clash with Ted Cruz, Gonzalo “G1” Venegas qualifies his rejection of the electoral process: “I think the focus on local elections is important and legitimate to engage in in terms of these local leaders who are making decisions [that are] affecting our lives on the everyday local level.”⁴¹

In his interview with Adelle Platon regarding the confrontation with Ted Cruz, RodStarz points out the importance of his parents’ political background in Chile to the duo’s formation as artists and activists: “I’ve been involved in activism since I was born. My parents were political

prisoners in Chile under the CIA-funded military dictatorship of Pinochet in South America... I grew up under the table of political meetings.”⁴² Growing up in exile from a country they had never had the chance to know as children, RodStarz and G1 found that the messages in the U.S. hip-hop music that they were drawn to were similar to what they were hearing in the Latin American political discussions at home:

Hip-hop always spoke to me, a child of the movement... When I was 13 and listening to A Tribe Called Quest, Public Enemy, Poor Righteous Teachers, and Common Sense, a lot of the messages that hip-hop was putting out were aligned with what our parents were talking about but it was to a different beat, different energy. Ultimately, the messages they were sending were the same—fighting for social justice, talking about people in power in our communities... so for me, what made me fall in love with hip-hop was the energy, the beats but also the messages that I was hearing in the music that let me know that the struggle my parents were fighting for was still alive.⁴³

In another interview about the confrontation with Ted Cruz, RodStarz further explains the duo’s advocacy for the entire immigrant community: “What offends me about Ted Cruz and about politicians like this guy is that you can just come to an immigrant community... and not acknowledge that immigration is a U.S. foreign policy issue.”⁴⁴ The Venegas brothers’ Chilean heritage and their parents’ firsthand experience with the far-reaching negative effects of U.S. intervention abroad make them particularly sensitive to the connection between U.S. foreign policy and issues surrounding immigration: “We always talk about immigration being this domestic issue that the U.S. is going through, but U.S. foreign policy has made living conditions unlivable for people abroad.”⁴⁵

Rebel Diaz’s efforts to speak out for both the entire immigrant community and the low-income population in the Bronx in opposition to Ted Cruz’s anti-immigrant platform exemplify Strinati’s description of subaltern groups needing to create a coalition of oppositional groups to contest the hegemonic force of the dominant class. The duo’s constant attempts

to unite Latino, African American, and immigrant concerns under the umbrella of low-income and minority issues is yet another example of a Gramscian alliance of resistance groups. By actively supporting and advocating for immigrant groups and organizations such as Black Lives Matter, Rebel Diaz has worked to create a united resistance among the low-income Latino and Black communities against the hegemonic forces of the capitalist elite.

In July 2016 another coalition of oppositional groups gathered to protest the official nomination of Donald Trump at the Republican National Convention in Cleveland. On their web show *Ñ Don't Stop* Rebel Diaz's RodStarz stood in front of the convention center to report on the anti-Trump protest efforts both in Cleveland and back home in New York.⁴⁶ In addition to performing as the opening act for the rap rock group Prophets of Rage, RodStarz describes how Rebel Diaz participated with other protesters in a march through the streets of Cleveland. For this event, branded "End Poverty Now, March for Economic Justice," Rebel Diaz joined with Tom Morello and Chuck D from Prophets of Rage and with representatives from organizations such as the Black People Advancement and Defense Organization, the Farm Labor Organizing Committee, Vets Versus Hate, NARAL Pro-Choice Ohio, and Witness Against Torture.⁴⁷ In an interview with Amy Goodman from *Democracy Now!* during the course of the march, RodStarz explained his reasoning for participating in the protest:

We're out here in the streets of Cleveland fighting against the fascist otherwise known as Donald Trump. He's a racist, and it's a problem for this country that he's even the candidate. A lot of folks thought it was a joke, that it was part of a reality show gone wrong. But the reality is that the reality show gone wrong is the current state of the U.S... So, we here demanding... freedom for our people, justice for all those murdered by police, and at the same time saying dump Trump and his racist fascist ways.⁴⁸

Rebel Diaz's active involvement in the anti-Trump protests did not by any means translate into an endorsement for Hillary Clinton or even indirect support for her candidacy. In another interview that took place during the protest itself, RodStarz described the march as an alternative form of engagement in what he and his brother considered a flawed and illegitimate political process. Since neither of the major candidates supported the type of revolutionary policies that the duo represent through their music and their activism, they stated that they take to the streets to communicate their message directly to the people:

I think that marching here is symbolic, but it's important because it shows... the world that we're not going to just sit back and allow this fascist wave to take over the country...Whether it's Hillary or it's Trump...the future doesn't look that great... It's a dictatorship of the corporations. So we say we have to vote every day with our actions.⁴⁹

In yet another interview, RodStarz doubles down both on the idea of the creation of a coalition of different oppositional groups arising out of the issue of poverty and on the protest as a form of resistance against the political process itself. In response to a question asking him to comment upon the relatively close physical proximity between his home in the South Bronx and Trump Tower in Manhattan, RodStarz draws a stark contrast between himself and the Republican nominee:

New York is a tale of two cities. You have the rich, which Donald Trump represents, and you have the poor people, which I represent and which we represent in the South Bronx... and whenever you have people that live in conditions of poverty there's culture that comes out of those communities like the hip-hop that we make. Those messages are going to be about resistance, they're going to be about survival, surviving the oppression that we live in on an everyday basis... We're not down with Trump. We're dumping Trump. Dumping Hillary... The two party system has never represented any of us anyways.⁵⁰

One of the Rebel Diaz's staple songs to perform during the anti-Trump protests both in New York and in Cleveland was "Which Side Are You On? REMIX." Originally written in 1931 by Florence Reece in response to the violence that had befallen her family over miners' strikes in Kentucky, "Which Side Are You On," which urges listeners to fight for miners' rights, became emblematic for labor unions and was sung over the next several decades first by the Almanac Singers and later by Pete Seeger on his own. In the Rebel Diaz remix of the song, the original chorus of the song is heard in the background of new lyrics rapped by Rebel Diaz along with the hip-hop duo Dead Prez and Rakaa Iriscience of the group Dilated Peoples. First released on Rebel Diaz's 2013 album, *Radical Dilemma*, the Remix "highlights various social ills within US society, including political conformism, the prison industrial complex and economic inequality."⁵¹ In 2015, two years after the release of *Radical Dilemma*, the duo uploaded an official video for the song and gave the following explanation of its renewed relevance:

We are living historic moments of oppression, to which the people have the right to respond with historic moments of resistance. The Which Side Are You On REMIX came out on our Radical Dilemma album, but the time is NOW for the song and the message it represents.⁵²

Reviewing the song for the online Latino cultural magazine *Remezcla*, Maribel Falcón explains how it attempts to unite the Latino and Black communities to create a stronger force within a political process in which both groups suffer from fears of disenfranchisement: "Through the historical context of revolution and resistance, the song asks a simple and obvious question, especially for Latino/as who are seeking to forge solidarity with the Black community."⁵³ Falcón elaborates upon this idea of Rebel Diaz's song as an attempt to create a coalition of oppositional groups with details as to the similarities between the history and circumstances of the Latino and Black communities:

Thanks to the social sciences, we now know with certainty that black and brown communities in the U.S. face the same systematic injustices. We share the brutal history of colonization and now we see rapid gentrification sweep our neighborhoods. Despite our shared struggles, we have a lot of work to do in regards to racism and xenophobia within our own families and communities. But the work is being done, slowly and surely, and this song and video reflects that history and perhaps serves as a starting point to what lies ahead.

In the late hours of November 8, 2016, when it was beginning to become apparent that Donald Trump would ultimately win the election once all the votes had been counted, RodStarz took to Twitter to issue a volley of tweets to connect the imminent election results to issues of race in the U.S.:

What we are witnessing is a clear rejection of the corrupt #Democrats and a growing wave of #Racism and #WhiteSupremacy #Elections2016.⁵⁴

Tonite the anti immigrant racist white supremacist majority in this country spoke up. The country got too black and brown for them! #USA.⁵⁵

Two days after the election, amid a series of tweets regarding the election results, the official Rebel Diaz Twitter account posted a short message that read, “We must become #Ungovernable.”⁵⁶ The “ungovernable” hashtag used by the duo is a reference to a widespread resistance movement against the Trump administration that promoted a series of protest marches to coincide with the day of Trump’s inauguration. For that same day Rebel Diaz hosted a cultural event in Brooklyn with music provided by socially conscious hip-hop artists Tef Poe, Sa Roc, Loaf Muzik, and Chelsea Reject. The description of the event on the Rebel Diaz Facebook page invited the public to participate in collective action to prepare for the new administration and “be ungovernable.”⁵⁷

Ultimately, Rebel Diaz's engagement with electoral politics during the 2016 electoral cycle, while failing to translate into any substantive political change, helped to strengthen the bonds between the Latin, African-American, and immigrant communities in cities such as New York, thereby serving to help create a coalition of oppositional groups to take on the hegemonic dominant class. The election of Donald Trump in November 2016, rather than deflating the duo that had protested so vehemently against him, inspired them and their followers to further action through the Ungovernables event on Inauguration Day.

RESIDENTE AND COUNTER-HEGEMONY

The political views espoused by Rebel Diaz are similar to those of another more renowned Latino hip-hop artist, René Pérez Joglar. Known by the artistic name of Residente, since the mid-2000s Pérez has been known as the more outspoken half of the Puerto Rican duo Calle 13, which also has a long history of dedicating its music to social justice issues. Although their self-titled first album avoided political and social justice issues, while they were recording it in September 2005 the group requested permission from their record label to upload a song to the Internet to protest the FBI killing of Puerto Rican independence activist Filiberto Ojeda Ríos. The song, entitled "Querido F.B.I." ("Dear F.B.I."), encourages the Puerto Rican public to take collective action against what the group views as the oppressive colonial tactics of the United States. Over the next several years Calle 13's music became increasingly political, and according to a writer for the Puerto Rican newspaper *Claridad*, "2009 was the year in which Calle 13 established themselves as the voice of the Latin rebellion because their lyrics about inequality, humiliation, and injustice, about unabashed... hypocrisy of those in power resonated in every nook and cranny of Latin America."⁵⁸

Nevertheless, unlike the members of Rebel Diaz, who rap mostly in English because they grew up in Chicago and are currently based in New York, Residente's music with Calle 13 has been almost exclusively in

Spanish. While Rebel Diaz targets a public mainly in the inner cities of the continental U.S., Calle 13's audience tends to be Latinos in the U.S. as well as Latin Americans in general, wherever they might live. Although the Puerto Rican reality of being a U.S. territory whose people are all automatically citizens of the United States differentiates Puerto Ricans to a certain degree from other Latinos, Calle 13 attempts to homogenize the Latin American experience in order to unite everyone with roots in the southern continent against a common enemy embodied in the government of the United States.⁵⁹ According to legal scholar Melinda Molina, Calle 13's music intends to gather members of various diverse groups around a common cause:

Calle 13's music presents multiple perspectives on the Latino experience in the United States, and represents a cultural response to currently debated social issues. Their music conveys a universal message that the Latino experience in the United States—while multidimensional—retains universal experiences of marginalization that transcend immigration status, national origin, racio-ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity that often prove divisive.⁶⁰

Furthermore, Molina points out that Calle 13's "lyrics resonate widely with Latinos regardless of nationality or immigration status because in supporting the concept of Pan-Latino identity, Calle 13 is necessarily calling for collective action and empowerment among Latinos."⁶¹

Unlike Rebel Diaz, Calle 13 did not engage actively in the 2008 or 2012 presidential elections, except to participate in non-partisan *Get Out the Vote* campaigns. While Residente did go on record as being more inclined to vote for Obama over McCain in 2008 in large part because of the two candidates' records regarding support for the Iraq War, he also made mention of the fact that he cannot vote in U.S. presidential elections.⁶² In what has long been a bone of contention for many Puerto Ricans, although they are U.S. citizens, Puerto Ricans can only vote in presidential elections if they reside in one of the fifty states but not if they live on the island. Nevertheless, by early 2016 Residente, who had

recently parted ways with Eduardo Cabra (Visitante), the other half of Calle 13, in order to pursue solo projects, began to publicly offer his support for Bernie Sanders's candidacy.

On February 3, 2016, just two days after the Iowa caucuses kicked off the primary season for both parties, Residente published a tweet—first in Spanish and immediately afterwards in English—praising Bernie Sanders's record in support of the working class.⁶³ That same day journalist Jorge Rivas speculated about the possible impact of Residente's support for Sanders: "Residente's apparent endorsement could help Sanders in states like Florida, where the population of Puerto Ricans rivals the numbers of [B]oricuas in New York... and could also compel young Latinos critical of the U.S. government to actually hit the polls and support Sanders."⁶⁴

Over the next several weeks Residente continued to use his Twitter account to urge his followers in the United States to cast their primary vote for Bernie Sanders. On February 17 he tweeted in Spanish that all Latin Americans living in the United States who defend laws in favor of immigrants' rights should vote for Sanders.⁶⁵ Precisely one month later Residente tweeted a video of Sanders's response to a question posed to him during a debate hosted by Univision.⁶⁶ In the video Sanders doubles down on comments he had made three decades earlier regarding the U.S. invasion of Cuba in 1961 and uses the rest of his time to further condemn the United States' history of helping to overthrow governments throughout Latin America, for example in Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Chile. Residente uses this video to show his largely Latin American and Latino followers how well he believes Sanders understands the history of U.S. interventions in Latin America and the atrocities committed in the wake of them. The next day Residente shared with his followers a link of the BernieSanders.com website in which the candidate set out his plan to end the financial crisis in Puerto Rico.⁶⁷

This series of nearly weekly tweets during the months of February and March led up to Residente introducing Sanders at a rally in the South Bronx on March 31, 2016, in anticipation of the New York primary three

weeks later. After listing several reasons for supporting Sanders, such as the candidate's debt relief plan for Puerto Rico and his promises to protect the rights of the LGBT community, Residente culminated his list with Sanders's longstanding critical stance regarding U.S. intervention in Latin America: "I support Bernie Sanders because he has spoken out against those Latin American dictatorships financed by the United States which left more than half a million people dead or disappeared."⁶⁸ In addition to putting forth the reasons for backing Sanders, Residente went into detail regarding his opposition to Clinton's candidacy:

The thought of Hillary Clinton who has dared to praise the likes of Henry Kissinger, the author of the most despicable Latin American genocide and the architect of Latin American dictatorships responsible for all those who disappeared in the 60s, 70s, and 80s is enough for me not to vote for her. I'm not with her!⁶⁹

It is interesting to note that while Residente was attending a rally with Bernie Sanders in Rebel Diaz's South Bronx backyard, RodStarz was out of town issuing a series of irritated tweets. Despite the Bronx duo's shared stance with Sanders on many issues, the candidate's lack of support for Palestine and a rocky encounter with Black Lives Matter activists appeared to disqualify him as a viable option in RodStarz' opinion. The morning of the event he tweeted, "Please stop tagging me on anything #Bernie related. I'm in Atlanta now, and even if I was in #TheBronx I'm not supporting a #Democrat."⁷⁰ Later that night, after the event he once again took to Twitter to criticize Bronx activists in attendance at the event.⁷¹

Less than three weeks after the South Bronx rally, Residente and Sanders sat down for a bilingual conversation that was later posted on the BernieSanders.com website and shared by Residente on Facebook and Twitter. After discussing issues related to NSA surveillance, the Puerto Rican debt crisis, and Puerto Rico's prospects for independence, Residente turned the conversation to the topic of the violent history of U.S. interventions in Latin America, and Sanders quickly denounced

the United States' actions in support of regime change and the U.S. government's financial and political support for brutal dictatorships. In response, Pérez declared Sanders to be the only candidate who recognized the importance of this issue and stated that he could not understand how any Latinos could vote for any other candidate.⁷² Despite Residente's efforts in the South Bronx and his interview with Sanders posted just two days before the New York primary, exit polls a few days later indicated that Clinton not only won the state primary handily but carried the Latino vote, earning 63 percent of that demographic.⁷³

In an odd twist of electoral processes, while Puerto Ricans residing on the island cannot vote in the general presidential elections, they do vote in primary elections for the U.S. presidency. On the day of the Puerto Rican primary, Residente once again took to Twitter to remind his Spanish speaking followers of Sanders's understanding of and support for Latin American and Puerto Rican issues.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, once the results were counted, Clinton won 61 percent of the votes cast on the island and claimed all seven of the territory's delegates.⁷⁵ The next month, after having clinched the nomination, Hillary Clinton received Sanders's endorsement to the chagrin of many of his supporters, including Residente. Indeed, despite his vehement opposition to her candidacy, Residente also begrudgingly asked fans to vote for Clinton shortly before the election. Appearing with other Latino artists at the U.S./Mexico border in San Diego for an event against intolerance, Residente performed one of Calle 13's most emblematic songs and offered tepid support for what he considered the lesser of two evils. According to Alex Zaragoza "[b]efore closing the concert with his new song 'Latinoamérica'... Puerto Rican rapper Residente gave the most halfhearted endorsement of the night. 'Both candidates are terrible, but we have to vote for the least terrible, which is Hillary.'"⁷⁶

On the morning of November 9, as the nation woke up to the news of a President-Elect Donald Trump, Residente tweeted a video of the Calle 13 song "Los idiotas."⁷⁷ Released on the album *Multi Viral* in February 2014,

the song contains lyrics that appear to anticipate Residente's attitude toward a future President Trump.

No hay nada más preocupante que un idiota peligroso
 Su arma más peligrosa es desinformar a la gente
 Son idiotas peligrosos con cara de presidentes.⁷⁸

(There is nothing more disturbing than a dangerous idiot
 His most dangerous weapon is to spread disinformation to the
 people
 They are idiots with the face of presidents.)⁷⁹

Just three days after the election, Lin-Manuel Miranda, the creator of the Broadway musical *Hamilton*, released a track from the *The Hamilton Mixtape*, an album of remixes of songs from the musical along with new tracks inspired by the musical. One of the two tracks released on November 11, 2016, was “Immigrants (We Get The Job Done),” which features various hip-hop artists representing several important immigrant populations in the U.S. In addition to Residente, who performs his portion of the song completely in Spanish, the song includes sections by K’naan (born in Somalia), Snow Tha Product (a Mexican-American), and Riz MC (British-Pakistani). As a whole “Immigrants” offers a dark and yet inspiring message about the hardships suffered by immigrants, the hard work that they do, and the little credit that they receive for their efforts. According to a journalist for an online Latin American news source, after Trump’s campaign promise to deport millions of undocumented immigrants if elected president, Residente found a way through the *Hamilton Mixtape* project to send a message of hope to the immigrant community.⁸⁰

In terms of electoral results, Residente’s enthusiastic support of Bernie Sanders and appearance with him at the rally in the Bronx did not translate into a win for the candidate in New York or Puerto Rico, but Residente’s endorsement of Sanders’s efforts to dethrone the corporatist class and spur a political revolution constituted part of a counter-hegemonic effort to unite the lower and middle classes against the ruling rich elite.

CONCLUSIONS

The counter-hegemonic efforts of both Rebel Diaz and Residente were informed and influenced by their Latin American heritage and their knowledge of the history of U.S. interventions in Latin America. Rebel Diaz's war of position through music and activism stems in large part from their particular and personal interest in the Chilean situation in which a U.S. backed military regime enforced neo-liberal policies along with state-sponsored violence. Though they perform mostly in English and in the United States, they are part of a tradition of Chilean musicians who have put their music to the service of counter-hegemonic efforts.⁸¹ Residente, on the other hand, draws from his personal experience as part of a colonial territory of the United States and his concern over the imperialist interventions of the U.S. in different parts of Latin America to support a candidate interested in toppling the United States' hegemonic control of Latinos and Latin Americans.

In the wake of the 2016 election, both Rebel Diaz and Residente continued working in the same vein as during the campaign. Just a few months after the election, in March of 2017 Residente released his first solo album after his split from Calle 13 in 2015.⁸² The self-titled album and its accompanying documentary trace Residente's travels around the world as he searched for his ancestral roots indicated by his DNA. Both projects focus on issues of diversity, unity, and equality throughout the world. In an interview about his new album Residente clarified that although the project began before Trump became a political figure, the Trump presidency and the divisive political climate have made Residente's message particularly significant: "I think that... the topic is now even more relevant because of what is happening with Trump."⁸³ In another interview about his new solo project, Residente brought up his continued admiration for Bernie Sanders and indicated that he hoped he would run again in 2020.⁸⁴ Furthermore, on September 6, 2017, shortly after President Trump announced on Twitter that he planned to phase out the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program instituted

by President Obama, Residente had the opportunity to sit down once again with Sanders, this time to discuss the effect such an action would have on immigrants in the U.S.⁸⁵

As for Rebel Diaz, the duo took its cultural event concept from Inauguration Day, which used the hashtag “ungovernables,” on the road in August 2017, performing and hosting dialogues in cities such as Baltimore, St. Louis, Milwaukee, Detroit, and Philadelphia. On the flyer for the tour that the duo posted on the official Rebel Diaz website, the series of events are introduced with three questions: “Who are the ungovernables? What unites us? How do we create a new culture?”⁸⁶ With these three questions Rebel Diaz renews its commitment to advocacy for community organizing solutions to political situations and social injustices, and in doing so the group continues working toward the Gramscian concept of a united coalition of oppositional groups helping to create and foster a new counter-hegemonic culture.

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CHAPTER FOUR

POLITICAL MUSIC, MEDIA SPECTACLE, AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE

WHAT THE WRONG SONGS SUGGEST ABOUT
CANDIDATES AND THEIR CAMPAIGNS

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INTRODUCTION

Political campaigns historically have used music to reflect a candidate's ideology and create an atmosphere intended to energize and/or sway voters. The results have been varied: While a wise musical choice can result in boosting a campaign, a poor choice can reveal the candidate's lack of ability to effectively campaign or run an organization. In either

case, campaign music, selected to create an emotional connection between a candidate and the voters, has important consequences for a candidate's image.²

Tumolo refers to the use of music in the political campaign as “audible optics” that position a candidate in a positive light “to encourage voters to perceive their candidate as worthy of a vote.”³ Within this framework, Tumolo suggests that music serves as a strategic public relations tactic that is used to create a representation of the candidate to an audience.⁴ In other words, a political campaign will draw on the same public relations principles used by a corporate practitioner to create and manage a candidate's image or brand. In most sociological approaches to public relations, campaigns are designed to create what Berger and Luckman refer to as a socially constructed reality of everyday life, or, in this case, political life.⁵ As such, there is a “struggle of actors in a public battlefield of meanings” seeking to establish a positive image that will gain momentum for the candidate on the campaign trail.⁶ Simply put, the campaign's music—both individual songs and entire playlists—contributes to the invention of the candidate as her/his image is shaped by popular soundtracks designed to communicate with—entertain, inspire, engage—the voting public.⁷

But what happens when a political campaign makes a questionable music choice and, rather than creating positive audible optics, it results in a negative media spectacle? Because today's media, both traditional and social, have rendered most aspects of life “public,” political campaigns typically cannot afford to attract negative publicity simply as a result of a poor song choice. Even more, as candidates promote “their” songs at campaign rallies, fundraisers and other organized events, the scrutiny these decisions receive clearly must be anticipated.

To provide some context, Kellner builds on Debord's assertion that media spectacles are those attention-grabbing occurrences that dramatize controversies and struggles, and become sensationalized in our media culture.⁸ The resulting spectacle “stupefies social subjects and distracts

them from the most urgent task of real life.”⁹ In the political sphere, this has the likelihood of drawing attention away from the positive image of the candidate that the campaign has worked to construct. The classic example of such a spectacle is that of Ronald Reagan using Bruce Springsteen’s “Born in the U.S.A.,” which resulted in controversy that still reverberates to this day.¹⁰ But there are many more examples, the most recent prominent one being that of President Donald Trump, who, during his presidential campaign, used Neil Young’s “Rockin’ in the Free World,” which was immediately and severely rebuked by the artist.¹¹

While the primary thematic element of the media spectacle focuses on the often ill-advised choice of the music itself, this unwelcome discourse obscures a much richer and arguably more important concern. That is, a questionable song choice not only is likely to result in some short-term backlash, the choice also suggests that the campaign lacks organizational communication competence. In other words, the musical choice is a symbolic manifestation of a campaign’s poor leadership. Specifically, the poor music choice suggests that the campaign: 1) lacks effectiveness in obtaining endorsements from others, 2) lacks effectiveness in building coalitions, 3) lacks effectiveness in communicating a clear and well-thought-out message, and/or 4) lacks effectiveness in being genuine in front of the public. Consequently, this chapter contributes to the scholarly literature holding political campaigns are expositions of how well candidates can demonstrate their ability to effectively run an organization, which at the ultimate level is the job of the president and other political actors.

To make this argument, we have relied on close textual analysis—the “mindful, disciplined reading of an object with a view to deeper understand its meanings”¹²—to provide a richer and deeper understanding of our text, the media spectacle surrounding the often-ill-advised musical selection in political contexts. To guide our analyses, we use the social construction perspective of communication as it applies to public relations.¹³ Consequently, before outlining the goals of an effective public

relations strategy, we first address the framework of social construction and how it can be used in examining the intersection of music and politics.

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION, MUSIC, AND POLITICS

There is little question that the study of popular music offers a rich foray into social analyses. For instance, in his analysis of the complex image created of John Lennon, Mäkelä demonstrates how the analysis of popular culture has evolved into a legitimate arena for social scientific research. Showing Lennon to be, “not only an influential marker of history but also a product of his time, a construction who was dependent on institutions, practices and people framing his mass-mediation,” Mäkelä incorporates a social construction framework into his semiotic research on rock and roll culture.¹⁴

Similarly, Lieb explored the social construction of Lady Gaga as a female pop star.¹⁵ Lieb argues that Gaga’s construction comes from the social interaction that is informed by music industry insiders (e.g., publicists and managers) who, along with the artist herself, create a narrative through cultural objects (e.g., her costumes, albums, or a tour, etc.) for her audiences. This social analytic perspective reveals that there is a dynamic sphere of influence involving both dominant, corporate messages and “micro-level influences, such as friends and thought leaders in their given cultural circles.”¹⁶ Ultimately, as Lieb argues, how “various audiences interpret or receive Gaga’s actions, music, or narrative depends upon the meanings they ascribe to her.”¹⁷

Social constructionist and semiotic approaches, like those by Mäkelä and Lieb, share a common theoretical orientation and their combination creates a dynamic framework for studying the symbolic nature of human interaction. Following Shotter, there is growing acknowledgement of the *process* through which meanings are generated and the *means* through which such meanings are conveyed.¹⁸ As he explains, “What one has in common with other members of one’s social group is not so much

a set of shared beliefs or values as such, but a shared set of semiotic procedures..., ways of making sense—and a certain set of ordered forms of communication.”¹⁹ From this perspective, communication is understood as the process through which social reality is constituted. As Berger and Luckmann put it simply in their seminal text, people “cannot exist in everyday life without continually interacting and communicating with others.”²⁰ Chen and Pearce extend this notion by placing emphasis on the interdependent relationship between persons and meanings.²¹ The result is an appreciation for the ongoing process of people “constructing social realities.”²²

A fundamental challenge in social construction research is to ground the dynamics in question in empirical observations of everyday life. What at first may present itself as a mundane aspect of the world in which we live (e.g., a song) often takes on new importance when analyzed for its social significance (i.e., as political rhetoric). The social construction framework offers a lens through which the establishment of emergent meanings can be studied as discourse. “Social constructionists understand social life—specifically communication—through the metaphor of conversation. This metaphor directs our attention to social life as a nonsummative, interactive, co-created, co-creating, and inherently unfinished process.”²³ This perspective for scrutinizing the evolution of meaning in our social worlds “consists more in a new way of thinking about the human condition than in a new awareness of a particular form of human action.”²⁴

It thus becomes paramount to recognize that the human condition is shaped by the mutual influence of social artifacts and the symbolic meanings assigned to them. Artifacts are produced into a web of pre-existing meanings and in turn help to shape those meanings. Indeed, even the most ordinary items around us hold the potential to teach us more about our social environments. For example, consider the changing role that music collections have played as a social marker. When records and CDs were displayed openly in the home (or dorm room), it was a common practice for guests to peruse a library looking for shared items

and favorites as a point of conversation. Today, in a market dominated by digital files and open access sources, music ownership provides much less of a window into a person's tastes and preferences. To have a record album on display suggests a visible investment in that artist. The same is not necessarily true of having an artist's music included in a streaming playlist. Thus, the way in which music is collected and displayed has gone through significant changes that not only affect how songs are accessed but also what people's music collections "say" about them. As Leeds-Hurwitz argues, "The everyday forms the ground, not the figure and by its nature we do not notice it. Yet, if we are to understand the highly structured behavior of others and ourselves, the not generally noteworthy is precisely what we must subject to study."²⁵

Following a social constructionist perspective, public relations relies on and uses communication to produce a mutual understanding of reality to develop positive and supportive communities in which an organization (or in this case a political campaign) regards itself as a member.²⁶ Politicians have long been advised by public relations professionals to shape and sell their image. One notable example is the advice that then California Governor Ronald Reagan received from Michael Deaver, a public relations professional, who literally wrapped Reagan in the American flag "in an attempt to position him as an American hero and patriot."²⁷

However, if communication is to be understood as the process through which social reality is constituted—whether it be in an informal interpersonal interaction, business context, or political campaign—then the success of the communication itself rests upon the communicator's competence. Communicative competence encompasses both the "ability to produce messages in a way that their intents can be inferred by others" as well as "the ability to receive messages conveyed by others."²⁸ In terms of a comprehensive political campaign, the communicator is not an individual but an organization. Thus, the degree to which the campaign can be said to possess organizational communication competence can

be measured by the symbolic meanings assigned to the campaign by the public and the media.

CAMPAIGN TACTICS, THE MUSIC SPECTACLE, AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE

To successfully organize a political campaign, one that draws voters to the candidate and ultimately produces votes for the candidate, the campaign should have a high degree of organizational communication competence. The goal of the campaign staff is to shape how the public will socially construct a version of reality for the political candidate through strategic communication. They aim to carefully craft what will be perceived as a mutually beneficial identity to the voters through a variety of tactics. Consequently, we review four important campaign tactics, explain how the wrong song creates a musical spectacle, and also reveal how the wrong song choice may reveal poor organizational communication competence.

1. Endorsements and Campaign Music

Celebrity endorsements are a traditional public relations and marketing communications tactic used to bring attention to a new product or to raise consumer consciousness for a brand.²⁹ While a brand might create its own celebrity (e.g., the Maytag Repairman, the Jolly Green Giant, or Flo from Progressive), in this context the endorser is a real recognized person who, through their association with the brand, brings added value as a result of their image and reputation.³⁰ In most cases, since the celebrity is a paid spokesperson for the brand, the company carefully seeks an effective and credible individual with a perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and/or attractiveness that is relatable to the target audience.³¹

In the case of a political campaign, celebrities use their social capital and popularity to draw attention to a candidate or encourage ordinary citizens to support a cause.³² When an endorsement comes from a celebrity,

media attention can focus on positive aspects of the candidate at little or no cost. As a result of the positive publicity, voter turnout, votes for the candidate, and contributions to the campaign may all be increased. For example, when Oprah Winfrey endorsed Barack Obama during the Democratic presidential primary in 2007, not only did the exposure have a positive impact on Obama's perceived electability but Winfrey's unparalleled influence may have won Obama approximately one million additional votes during the primary election.³³

There are, however, potential hazards to the celebrity endorsement, particularly when there is perceived incongruity between the endorser and the emergent construction of the political candidate. Take for example the endorsement of presidential candidate Donald Trump in November 2016 by the *Crusader*, one of the most prominent newspapers of the Ku Klux Klan. While the Trump campaign "sharply and swiftly criticized the article," candidate Trump and later President Trump continued to be dogged by the endorsement.³⁴ Considering that the controversy continued to manifest itself on a number of fronts related to the campaign, one could surmise that effective problem-solving and solution implementation, critical components of communication competence, may have been lacking in the campaign organization.³⁵

Thus, for a political campaign, endorsements from desirable interest groups or well-respected individuals may convey to voters important information about the quality or values of a candidate. Campaign playlists similarly have the potential to factor into the symbolic association between a voter and the candidate. In an attempt to connect a wide base of voters with the candidate, playlists might include a variety of musical genres, songs in which the lyrics resonate with the voters, or carry weight because of the artists' fame and popularity. As a result, a well-received playlist, such as Obama's 2012 Spotify playlist, may symbolically reap the same benefits as a celebrity endorsement in terms of shaping reality.³⁶ However, one of the most common media spectacles related to a candidate's playlist comes from a musical artist's or group's objection

to the use of a song. Rather than providing the type of positive publicity that the campaign seeks, the artists generate negative media coverage as they denounce the candidate and typically request that the campaign stop using the music. The unintended consequence is a contested social reality.

This type of media spectacle happens more often to Republicans than Democrats primarily because musical artists tend to be more liberal in their politics and do not wish to be associated with the more conservative candidates.³⁷ In a long list of examples, Kasper and Schoening point to presidential candidates' unauthorized use of copyrighted material.³⁸ For example, during the 2000 election, George W. Bush's campaign encountered multiple objections by musicians including Sting, Tom Petty, and John Mellencamp apparently because they failed to secure the artists' permission before using their music.³⁹ Then in 2004, John Hall of the band Orleans objected to Bush's campaign playing the song "Still the One" at organized events. In a very public spectacle, Hall not only cited the lack of permission, but he also emphatically stated that he was no fan of the president.⁴⁰ Such public negativity during the 2000 and 2004 campaigns did not cost Bush the election, but it may have contributed to both elections being very close.

In 2008, Republicans John McCain and Mike Huckabee were both accused of playing songs without permission. Artists including ABBA, Van Halen, and the Foo Fighters all created very public media spectacles as they objected to the candidates' unauthorized use of their music. Jackson Browne also sued John McCain and the Republican Party for copyright infringement of his song "Running on Empty" used in a campaign ad that aired on television and the web.⁴¹ And the band Boston took particular exception to Huckabee's use of "More than a Feeling," reportedly stating that they had never explicitly supported a political candidate and would not start now "by endorsing a candidate who is the polar opposite of most everything Boston stands for."⁴² In the 2012 presidential election, Republican vice president hopeful Paul Ryan, who shared the ticket with presidential nominee Mitt Romney, played Twisted Sister's "We're Not

Gonna Take It” at campaign rallies. The band’s front man, Dee Snider, publicly denounced this use of the song as well as Ryan’s politics in general. The campaign stopped playing the song and issued a response, “We’re Not Gonna Play It Anymore.”⁴³

While examples for Republicans are easier to find, there are instances when Democratic candidates also failed to receive endorsements from musicians resulting in similar negative publicity. In 2008, presidential candidate Barack Obama received a letter from Sam Moore of the legendary R&B duo Sam and Dave, asking the campaign to no longer play their song “Hold On, I’m Comin’,” fearing that it would look like Moore endorsed Obama.⁴⁴ In 2012, Cyndi Lauper expressed her displeasure that the DNC, led by chair Debbie Wasserman Schulz, used her song “True Colors” without her permission. Writing on Twitter, Lauper stated, “I wouldn’t have wanted that song to be used in that way” and, in response to the song’s use to portray the Republican hopeful in a negative light, “Mr. Romney can discredit himself without the use of my work.”⁴⁵

In each of these examples, not only did the campaigns fail to obtain the endorsements from the artists, the artists also became outspoken critics of the candidates, creating media spectacles and negative publicity for the campaigns. This trend continued well into the 2016 campaign. For example, when Donald Trump’s campaign used Neil Young’s “Rocking in the Free World,” Young strongly spoke out not only against Trump’s use of the song but also against Trump’s policies.

However, Trump did receive celebrity endorsements from other rockers such as Gene Simmons from Kiss, Ted Nugent, and Kid Rock. Interestingly, while Gene Simmons spoke favorably about Trump, he and his bandmates “politely declined” the opportunity to play at Trump’s inauguration.⁴⁶ While the other two vocally supported Trump through the campaign, Kid Rock was not invited to perform at Trump’s inauguration, and Nugent apparently preferred to go on a hunting trip rather than attend the inauguration.⁴⁷ The most prominent musician at Trump’s inauguration was country superstar Toby Keith, who had made it clear that he was

no fan of Trump or Clinton.⁴⁸ Even though most musicians would be honored to play at such an event, Trump's inauguration was unique in that most musicians did not want to be associated with him. For example, musicians ranging from Elton John to local high school marching bands all refused to participate.⁴⁹

This all suggests that Trump's ability to gain, keep, and manage celebrity endorsements, a valuable skill in politics, was a potential weakness of his campaign and may continue to be throughout his tenure in office. One mitigating factor, however, is that Trump himself is a celebrity. That is, his approach may not be focused on gaining celebrity endorsements because he may feel he does not need any more celebrity endorsement other than himself.

Hillary Clinton, on the other hand, had success with gaining celebrity endorsements from musicians including Taylor Swift, Kanye West, Bruce Springsteen, Bon Jovi, and Stevie Wonder.⁵⁰ Given her experience in prominent political positions for decades, Clinton demonstrated the critical ability to gain celebrity endorsements from musicians. However, as noted earlier, it is acknowledged that since the world of music typically leans left politically, the same musicians who supported Clinton arguably would have supported almost any Democratic candidate regardless of who was nominated.

2. Building Coalitions and Campaign Music

To win elections, political campaigns must mobilize supporters and persuade swing voters to join their side.⁵¹ According to Winston, building a winning coalition for a political candidate requires that a campaign efficiently and effectively identify who the voters are, where they can be found, and how the campaign will hold them.⁵² Historically, one of the most successful coalitions has been with organized labor and the Democratic Party who worked together to re-elect President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1936.⁵³ More recently, Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, an independent until his Democratic presidential run in 2016, created a

successful movement by building a coalition among existing progressive groups, trade unions, and activist organizations such as Occupy Wall Street. While the Sanders campaign relied on traditional campaign tactics such as canvassing, rallies, and public discussion groups, he was able to further mobilize his coalition on social media. While Sanders did not win the party's nomination, his campaign did exhibit a high degree of organizational communication competence in selecting and implementing his campaign strategies.⁵⁴

It is also critically important during a political campaign that the candidate build a wide coalition among various groups of voters to establish a broad base of support. Beyond securing the endorsements from musical artists, the use of popular music has the capacity to bring groups of people together around a common message. Individual songs can take on anthemic qualities when they resonate broadly with the public. Ronald Reagan's references to Bruce Springsteen's song "Born in the U.S.A." during his 1984 re-election campaign is significant here. Choosing this song backfired and led to a media spectacle on two fronts. Not only did Springsteen object to Reagan's use of the song, thus missing out on an endorsement, but the campaign had also falsely assumed that the song was a patriotic anthem rather than an "awareness-raising protest against the (mis)treatment of soldiers who had returned from war."⁵⁵ By not understanding the artist or the song, the campaign also failed to connect with a younger audience. According to Dewberry and Millen, "To many Springsteen fans, the use of the song contributed to the growing impression that Reagan was out of touch."⁵⁶

A similar dynamic unfolded in 2000, when Republican hopeful John McCain chose "The Liberty Bell," a rousing John Phillip Sousa march, in an attempt to underscore his military background and personify his political brand as an American hero. As the campaign began to use the song at his rallies, audiences responded with laughter and "making jokes about lumberjacks and silly walks."⁵⁷ Unbeknownst to the campaign, the march had been used as a theme from the British comedy show

Monty Python's Flying Circus. Thus, rather than building a coalition with some of his potential base, the song choice “confirmed the candidate’s ignorance of popular culture.”⁵⁸

The right individual song or entire playlist, comprised of a set of songs from diverse musical genres, can create broader appeal among a larger base. As Gorzelany-Mostak notes, the playlist should be a “thoughtfully organized cluster of songs intended to establish a presidential persona or brand, underscore or intensify a candidates’ words and actions, and appeal to a specific demographic.”⁵⁹ In 2008 when Barack Obama was still a Democratic presidential hopeful, he shared a diverse and inclusive campaign playlist ranging from his favorite bands of the 1960s and 1970s to newer contemporary artists. His official playlist included songs by Earth, Wind and Fire; Elton John; Bob Dylan; The Rolling Stones; and Bruce Springsteen, as well as by rappers Jay-Z and Ludacris.⁶⁰ For Obama, the inclusion of rap music in his playlist contributed to the mobilizing force of young voters who elected him to the presidency. Yet the alliances he built with the hip-hop community during his first presidential campaign ironically faced criticism four years later. In February 2012, when Obama released his new playlist, surprisingly rap was not represented. Some saw this as a strategic move by the campaign as a result of public backlash resulting in a media spectacle months earlier after Common, a Chicago rapper, recited controversial anti-George W. Bush lyrics during a poetry event at the White House.⁶¹ However, the obvious omission of rap from the new playlist “opened [Obama] up to some scathing attacks” from both artists and fans who had previously supported him.⁶² According to Gorzelany-Mostak, “Obama’s alleged inability to rectify issues plaguing black communities might partially explain hip-hop’s lukewarm stance.”⁶³

In the examples of Reagan and McCain, poor music choices left voters feeling that the candidates were out of touch, costing them the opportunity to build a broader coalition with a larger voter demographic. In the example of Obama, the campaign had initially built a strong coalition within the hip-hop community, but sustaining that support during his

re-election proved difficult as a result of the omission from the new playlist. While Obama focused on the hip-hop community, Hillary Clinton appealed to women with her campaign music.

Hillary Clinton's campaign playlist, which she released on Spotify, reflected the historic nature of her campaign. Although not the first woman to run for president, she was the first female nominee of a major party to run for president, which is all that more impressive considering she won the popular vote. Her campaign used a number of strategies to reach out and mobilize female voters. One such approach was to include a number of female artists with songs in her campaign playlist that addressed the theme of strength.⁶⁴ In addition, Clinton wrote an op-ed for the music magazine *Billboard* extolling the virtues, strengths, and setbacks women in music have faced and praised them for serving as role models for young women.⁶⁵ Clinton's message in her playlist and in her writing was that there are strong women out there and it is important to listen to and learn from them. While the message resonated with the majority of women (Clinton won 54 percent of the female vote), there remained a divide among the female demographic, particularly by race.⁶⁶ Clinton's female coalition was strongest among black, non-white, and Hispanic women voters, with only 34 percent of white non-college educated women and 51 percent of white college-educated women voting for her.⁶⁷ Thus, the Clinton campaign's strategy of reaching out to female voters, whether it be with music or not, did mobilize a large number of female supporters for Clinton, but the campaign made too broad of an assumption about all women as a single demographic when building its coalition.

3. Clear Messaging and Campaign Music

The process through which the campaign creates meanings and selects the appropriate channels through which such meanings are conveyed, requires a high degree of organizational competence among the campaign staff who seek to create a positive and desirable representation of their candidate. Perhaps one of the most effective speeches made by a recent

presidential candidate was that by Democratic candidate Barack Obama in 2008 titled, "A More Perfect Union." The speech, a response to attacks on his affiliation with the Rev. Jeremiah Wright, outlined a clear and well-thought-out path for America on the topic of race. The speech was widely viewed as a key rhetorical moment in the Obama campaign, demonstrating the candidate's ability to address conflict effectively and his ability to shape public perception.⁶⁸

For other candidates, however, the lack of clear messaging or even poor messaging raises a signal that the campaign itself is struggling with communication competence. Republican incumbent U.S. Senator George Allen, during a 2006 campaign rally, went off script to introduce his opponent's campaign tracker, a man of Indian ancestry but born in Virginia, using the derogatory term "macaca."⁶⁹ Similarly, Texas Governor Rick Perry, during a 2011 Republican presidential debate, awkwardly struggled to "remember the name of a third federal agency he would eliminate if he became president."⁷⁰ Shortly thereafter, as a result their inability to produce an effective message, both withdrew from their respective races.

Poor music choices may also suggest that a political campaign lacks effectiveness in communicating a clear and well thought out message. Take the case of Ross Perot, the Texas billionaire who ran for president in 1992 as an independent against George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton. While adopting the theme song "Crazy" by Patsy Cline at the end of the campaign, Perot may have sought to mock his critics or demonstrate his own sense of humor. Regardless of his intent, the song showcased the ineffectiveness that plagued his campaign throughout his run for office. Effectively announcing his candidacy on the *Larry King Show*, he quickly rose in the public opinion polls and gained a folk hero-type status among his supporters as he sought to "reinvent Presidential politics."⁷¹ Perot was a political outsider who had never been elected to public office. His message was simple—his experience was in getting things done unlike the career politicians he was running against. As his campaign

progressed, however, he was pressured by the media to provide more detailed positions on the issues. Over time, Perot's campaign became fraught with internal conflicts and quarreling, as well as staff firings.⁷² Consumed by conspiracy theories, Perot actually dropped out of the race in July only to re-enter in October. The press "repeatedly deemed him a nut-bag" and President Bush, responding to Perot's allegations of plots by Republican dirty tricksters, actually called him "crazy."⁷³ As the label seemed to stick, that November Perot urged voters to "round up all their crazy friends and get them to vote."⁷⁴ While Patsy Cline's song seems an unlikely theme to end his campaign, it also could have foreshadowed a Perot presidency if he had been elected.

In 2008, when songwriter Gretchen Peters learned of the Republican vice presidential hopeful Sarah Palin's use of her song "Independence Day" at the candidate's rallies, she publicly responded. In a press release issued by Peters, she stated that, "The fact that the McCain/Palin campaign is using a song about an abused woman as a rallying cry for their vice-presidential candidate, a woman who would ban abortion even in cases of rape and incest, is beyond irony. They are co-opting the song, completely overlooking the context and message, and using it to promote a candidate who would set women's rights back decades."⁷⁵ Instead of suing the campaign to make them stop playing the song, Peters donated all of the election season royalties from the song to Planned Parenthood. But Peters did not stop there. She also encouraged others to make their own donations on behalf of "Sarah Palin," raising a million dollars for the organization during that period.⁷⁶ Use of the song, which had originally been written for country singer Martina McBride, backfired for the Palin campaign. This issue is not necessarily that the McCain/Palin campaign failed to understand the lyrics of the song (or chose to use it anyway), but that poor music decision was a symptom of a larger problem, failure to communicate a clear, consistent, and well thought out message whether it be about music or policy.⁷⁷

In the summer of 2016, Donald Trump emerged as the Republican nominee for the presidential election. Trump's campaign created a playlist that might best be described as eclectic featuring songs from classic British rockers, Broadway show tunes, a classical aria sung by Pavarotti, and more. While he did have musical artists who endorsed him, Trump often chose songs by other artists such as R.E.M., Aerosmith, Neil Young, and Adele, all of whom publicly denounced the campaign's use of their songs.⁷⁸ In the case of the Trump campaign, however, his supporters saw him as a unique candidate whose antiestablishment appeal seemingly transcended the fallout from the negative backlash.⁷⁹

But perhaps even more importantly, the eclectic Trump playlist failed to connect clearly to his campaign's primary message, that a businessman was needed to fix Washington, an argument similar to Ross Perot's message from more than 20 years earlier.⁸⁰ However, while Perot's campaign imploded leaving him to dance to Patsy Cline's "Crazy," the Trump campaign played the Rolling Stone's "You Can't Always Get What You Want" at the candidate's victory speech, despite complaints from the band.⁸¹ According to Kasper and Schoening, an artist's objections may be muted by the positive effects of rallying crowds, but "doing so risks garbling the message meant for casual voters and jeopardizes drawing the attention of swing voters in a negative way."⁸²

From these examples, it is evident that candidates don't always choose songs or create playlists that effectively communicate a clear and well thought out message. While Perot may have chosen Patsy Cline's "Crazy" as a final campaign theme song as a jab to his critics, the fact that we are still referencing the song choice highlights that the selection represented an unfortunate message about the failure of his campaign. Similarly, Sarah Palin made a critical error by not listening to the lyrics of "Independence Day," which ultimately backfired when the rally song failed to reinforce the conservative's message which played out in a very public media spectacle. But it was in the 2016 campaign that we saw poor musical messaging reach new heights. While Perot and Trump were both political

outsiders each with staff that may have lacked campaign experience in messaging, Perot is remembered as having only one unfortunate musical choice which muddled his message. Trump's playlist, on the other hand, repeatedly raised objections from many of the song's artists including the Rolling Stones, Adele, Neil Young, and R.E.M. While Trump's eclectic playlist may have failed to create a clear message for the campaign and jeopardized his ability to draw the support of more swing voters, the controversy may have been muted by the positive effects of rallying crowds among his base thus, rather than having a negative effect, actually solidified his outsider message.

4. Authenticity and Campaign Music

As political campaigns manufacture a public perception of their candidate, they promote a socially constructed reality that the campaign hopes will produce a win for their candidate. Research suggests that what ultimately matters in a political campaign is voters' *perceptions* of a candidate's authenticity, rather than a candidate's *inherent qualities* of authenticity.⁸³ Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush have been cited as examples of two flawed, but authentic candidates. Whereas Clinton was able to overcome reports of his extramarital affairs by never preaching family values or moral superiority, Bush was able to overcome perceived intellectual shortcomings by not pretending to be "a Rhodes scholar" and instead playing the role of a "religious straight shooter... selling his gut instinct and bravado."⁸⁴

If candidates lack perceived authenticity, they may be seen as pandering to the voters. In the 2000 presidential election, Democratic candidate Al Gore was perceived as pandering to the Cuban-American community during the Elián González saga.⁸⁵ Whereas, during the 2012 presidential race, Republican candidate Mitt Romney, a Harvard-educated millionaire from New England, found a love of "cheesy grits" and use of "y'all" while on the campaign trail in the South.⁸⁶ In both of these examples, the candidates were unable to produce messages competently to support an authentic reality for the voters.

As the above discussion illustrates, a campaign song or more encompassing playlist is intended to construct a positive image for a political candidate that will rally potential voters. However, according to Tumolo, the wrong song or poorly constructed playlist can bring negative media attention to the candidate if the selections are thought to be “pandering” or if the candidate is perceived to be substituting “political platforms with jingoistic sound bites.”⁸⁷

Mitt Romney’s 2012 presidential campaign playlist has been described as having a “very un-Romney-like tone” after the Bostonian abandoned a 2008 favorite, “Sweet Caroline,” in an attempt to create sound bites that would appeal to the Republican’s right wing political platform.⁸⁸ The campaign’s subsequent playlist consisted of a collection of songs that included retro pop music from the 1960s and 1970s as well as country music, with some suggesting that his selection of songs tried to project an ethos of Southern masculinity in an attempt to erase his perceived New England roots.⁸⁹ He further brought media attention to himself by alienating women when his campaign found only one female artist to include on his Spotify list—Carrie Underwood.⁹⁰ Romney’s playlist was seemingly designed to downplay the perception that he was arrogant and out of touch, in an overt attempt to appeal to the Republican base.

Some criticized Hillary Clinton’s 2008 playlist for not reflecting her true character. During her Democratic primary presidential bid that year, the Clinton campaign created a playlist described by Gorzelany-Mostak as one that promoted a message of “female empowerment, self-determination, and strength.”⁹¹ But as the author notes, some critics created fictional playlists for the candidate that included songs such as “It’s All About the Benjamins,” “The Great Pretender,” “Cold as Ice,” and “Evil Woman,” suggesting that these songs might be a more appropriate representation of her true character. But, it was during Clinton’s 2016 presidential bid that her authenticity problem became especially pronounced.⁹² While she continued to hone the themes for her campaign (e.g., empowerment, leader of and fighter for people, as well as strength and optimism), Clinton

seemed to simply be giving the audience what she thought they wanted to hear. While Clinton was successful in choosing some of the most popular songs of the past five years, she lost her genuine identity by not including songs that may have been more representative of her authentic self:

There were no songs included from the late 1960s (when she was a young teen getting her political balance), or the 1970s (when she went from being a student who worked on Watergate to becoming First Lady of Arkansas), or from the 1980s or 1990s (when she went from First Lady of Arkansas to First Lady of the United States), or to the 2000s (when she was a U.S. Senator.)⁹³

Compounding the failure of Clinton to represent her genuine self, Bergado also notes that the songs selected by the campaign overtly tried to appeal to young people and, that the inclusion of Marc Anthony's "Vivir Mi Vida" and Jennifer Lopez's "Let's Get Loud," seemed "to be pandering to the Latino community pretty hard."⁹⁴ While in both elections, media attention on Clinton was fierce and her playlists became fodder in an endless media spectacle, it was the 2016 campaign playlist that failed to produce the much needed authenticity Clinton needed to win the election. Rather, the playlist seemed to run counter to her campaign message, "I'm With Her," because the playlist did not reveal who she was but seemed to be based on a political calculation to reach out to younger voters, who, more and more, were aligning themselves with her Democratic primary opponent Senator Bernie Sanders.

Defining a candidate's genuine character through a music playlist as well as finding a playlist that does not pander to a voter base, however, may be impossible. While Barack Obama's selection of songs came across as genuine to many, Gorzelany-Mostak writes that some found that the playlist failed in its mission to strive for true diversity, with others feeling that he showed "a narcissistic inclination" as with will.i.am's "Yes We Can," a song in which the lyrics came entirely from Obama's 2008 primary concession speech in New Hampshire.⁹⁵ Charen suggested that Donald Trump should learn from "Obama's self-aggrandizing mistakes."⁹⁶

But for the Trump campaign, it may be both about self-aggrandizing and his irreverence in using the music to pander to and rally his base. To announce his campaign, Trump created a media spectacle in which he descended an escalator at Trump Tower to Neil Young's "Rockin' in the Free World."⁹⁷ In another example, Terry reports that, "When Adele told Trump to stop using her songs, a day later her track 'Skyfall' soundtracked Trump's helicopter landing, and the following day her 'Rolling in the Deep' played as he walked onstage at a rally."⁹⁸ In a similar spectacle of irreverence, in responding to a cease-and-desist letter from Steven Tyler of Aerosmith, Trump defiantly took to Twitter telling the rocker that not only did his campaign find a better song to replace "Dream On," but, as a result of the controversy, Tyler had gotten more publicity than he had in 10 years.⁹⁹

While both Mitt Romney and Hillary Clinton may have provided too much leeway in allowing their campaign staff to choose songs that ultimately did not reflect their genuine personas, the playlist of Barack Obama and the use of music by Donald Trump might reveal other personality flaws such as self-aggrandizing or irreverence for one's publics. In the end, however, whether it be a particular favorite song or a rally playlist, the campaign's selection of music provides voters with a lens through which they make assumptions about whether the candidate is being genuine or simply pandering for votes.

CONCLUSION

As we have discussed, the goal of campaign staff is to shape the way in which the public socially constructs the identity of a political candidate through strategic communication. Such organizations attempt to carefully deliver what is perceived as a mutually beneficial reality to the voters through a variety of public relations tactics including endorsements, coalition building, clear messaging, and authenticity. The use of music is one way in which political campaigns communicate the values of the candidate to voters. However, the meaning of music, like all symbolic

forms of expression, is not determined by a single entity or intention. Rather it is in the complex public sphere of competing messages that meaning emerges, changes, and is ultimately remembered.

The campaign playlist continues to gain importance in the era of digital music streaming. In early political campaigns, we find examples of candidates choosing a single campaign song either written specifically for the campaign or later chosen in its original form to represent a candidate's agenda. But with the advent of the digital age, the single campaign theme song has given way to the more encompassing campaign playlist. With the launch of Spotify in 2008, the campaign playlist has become a staple for candidates to attract supporters by tailoring a host of songs that they believe will represent their identity, campaign agenda, or convey a particular political message.

In the 2016 presidential campaign, the playlist took center stage as voters easily downloaded the candidates' hand-picked songs perhaps in an attempt to find a meaningful connection through the shared experience of music. But the easily accessible digital format also created other problems for the candidates, including increased scrutiny and more prominent media spectacles. For example, we were able to quickly learn of Hillary Clinton's success in attracting a long list of music industry endorsements, many of which were featured on her playlist. In contrast, we saw Donald Trump struggle to secure endorsements from the music industry that led to an endless array of media spectacles as musicians publicly denounced his use of their songs. In addition, the candidates' campaigns attempted to build important coalitions through their song selections making this another important public relations strategy. When examining Hillary Clinton's playlist, it is evident Hillary Clinton paid special attention to reaching and mobilizing women voters. By including a number of female artists with songs that addressed the theme of strength, she did well among the female demographic, but simultaneously found herself being criticized for pandering to specific ethnic populations. In terms of clear messaging, Donald Trump may have had the most garbled message with

his eclectic mix of songs, but could be complimented for the authenticity in which the songs represented him and his musical tastes, even if considered to some as being self-aggrandizing. Yet, for Hillary Clinton, authenticity seemed to elude her and her campaign, perhaps because she narrowly focused her playlist on popular songs rather than songs that represented her genuine experience.

Overall, the campaign's music, like all strategic communication messages, should be carefully selected to aid in the invention of the candidate as her/his image. As the examples above demonstrate, too often political campaigns make a questionable music choice and, rather than creating positive optics for the campaign, they result in a negative media spectacle. While a questionable song or playlist choice may result in some short-term backlash, we suggest that the unwelcome discourse actually reveals a much deeper concern regarding the campaign's lack of organizational communication competence which results in an unintended contested social construction.

Heide argues that Berger's social constructionist paradigm offers great value to the study of public relations. Namely, the perspective asks us "to uncover the different levels of meaning hidden from the consciousness of everyday life—to 'see through' and 'look behind,' and to receive a better understand of what goes on in a particular context."¹⁰⁰ Consistent with this perspective, the aim of this analysis goes beyond the simple suggestion that politicians are out of touch musically when they use a song or playlist that results in an unwanted and damaging spectacle. The argument is that such decision-making and its impact on the social construction process invites scrutiny of the organizational communication competence of political campaigns that is otherwise hidden behind the façade of that spectacle.

In this kind of analysis, it is difficult if not impossible to separate the organization (i.e., the campaign) from the individual (i.e., the candidate). In fact, from a social construction perspective it is largely unnecessary. However, the fact that politicians typically have accepted the ultimate

responsibility for such actions of their campaigns is significant for a number of reasons. First, it is poor leadership to blame one's own staff for problems. It is difficult to imagine a candidate "throwing a staff member under the bus" for choosing a song while maintaining a presidential image. Second, fighting for the use of the song is not a good strategy when faced with controversy—especially the explicit objection of the artist. The spectacle of a politician attacking an artist is equally difficult to envision. Third, it is ostensibly better for the candidate to appear to be out of touch musically than to reveal a sense of organizational incompetence. In this sense, the spectacle actually can serve to obfuscate a major issue, the lack of organizational communication competence of the campaign.

This is where Berger's debunking motif provides guidance.¹⁰¹ The debunking motif urges critics to look beyond the "generally accepted answers" and cautions scholars to be "suspicious of official interpretations."¹⁰² To these ends, this chapter has focused on looking beyond the media spectacle which often follows poor song and playlist selections by candidates, to explore the role that organizational competence plays in the social construction of political realities. In the end, this is a far more significant aspect of political candidates and their campaigns than their choices in music.

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CHAPTER FIVE

WE THE PEOPLE SING

PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES' USE OF MUSIC TO EXPRESS DIFFERENT METHODS OF CONSTITUTIONAL INTERPRETATION

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INTRODUCTION

When campaigning for office, politicians strive—among other things—to appeal to voters' emotions.¹ Since people of all ages perceive music to have a powerful emotional impact,² music becomes one way in which politicians engage in emotional appeals to voters.³ Given these facts, it should come as no surprise that music serves as one of the modes of communication for U.S. presidential candidates. Indeed, campaigns have used music in this capacity for centuries, and it has been a driving force in television advertisements since the 1950s.⁴ More specifically, Blankenship and Renard demonstrate that contemporary presidential campaigns tend to use a variety of popular songs to express policy positions to different groups of voters,⁵ making music not only a persistent but also an indispensable part of American presidential campaigns.

Similarly, a large majority of Americans believe that the U.S. Constitution is both an enduring document and one that remains relevant and important to our country.⁶ Although the Supreme Court and other American tribunals shape the legal interpretation of the Constitution,⁷ the document is also a political one that is part of the country's popular culture. In this sense, the Constitution, although it encompasses ideas and attitudes that are legal in content,⁸ affects—and reflects—what occurs in popular culture. Considered another way, the Constitution is a political document, and all of its provisions are in place because they were ratified by a supermajority of states, reflecting American popular will. As Cantor amply demonstrates, popular culture affects what we believe is proper in politics and law,⁹ and the Constitution is something shaped by this too. Browne and Browne explored on the eve of the Constitution's bicentennial how public perceptions about the Constitution's meaning are shaped by many aspects of popular culture, including books, television, film, myths, architecture, periodicals, and music.¹⁰ For instance, after the *Miranda v. Arizona* (1966) decision requiring police to inform suspects of their rights to silence and to an attorney, this right became popularized by the reciting of *Miranda* warnings to suspects in detective fiction; to close the loop, the Supreme Court later cited that because "the warnings have become part of our national culture," it was a reason to uphold the *Miranda* decision.¹¹ Today, one can add the popular culture artifacts that surface on the Internet, including what is written on social media and posted on YouTube, to Browne and Browne's list.¹² This is certainly relevant to presidential elections, as candidates for the White House have long campaigned for or against the Supreme Court's interpretation of the Constitution, inserting into popular culture their vision of the Constitution as the correct or just one via their public speeches.¹³

That presidential candidates would use music, and not just words, to express their views on the Constitution is a logical campaign strategy, particularly given that many voters think the Constitution is so important. Even the Supreme Court when issuing decisions, including decisions interpreting the Constitution, has quoted or summarized song lyrics.¹⁴ It

would make sense, then, that if presidential candidates are using music to proclaim their ideas generally, they may also sometimes use it to express what they think about the Constitution. Moreover, 2016 was a banner year for such music, with several candidates playing music to tell voters about their version of constitutional interpretation and what that means for government power and individual rights.

This chapter will explore constitutional interpretation through music associated with four presidential candidates from the 2016 election—Ted Cruz, Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton, and Bernie Sanders—by using legal and qualitative political science methodologies. More specifically, it will do so by engaging in textual analysis and exploring how candidates use music to express jurisprudential theories about the Constitution. For each candidate, this chapter will explore the person's main approach to constitutional interpretation, based on their public statements, votes, and/or actions. Second, the chapter will demonstrate that these candidates' use of campaign music is largely consistent with their spoken words on the subject, using multiple musical examples from each candidate in the 2016 election cycle. The chapter will conclude by considering the importance of not only music to communicate political messages but also the significance of candidates using a variety of methods, including musical communication, to make their views of the Constitution known to the public.

One further note is necessary. Songs can be interpreted in multiple ways. While one campaign may use a particular song to express a message about the Constitution, another candidate in another context could use the same song to express a very different message, perhaps one that has nothing to do with the Constitution. In the analysis below, this chapter emphasizes not simply song choice and lyrics, but the use of that song and lyrics in the context of what else the campaign is doing, to determine what the song may or may not say about the candidate's preferred method of constitutional interpretation.

TED CRUZ: ORIGINALISM

An originalist understanding of the U.S. Constitution asks either what the people who framed the constitutional language intended to do or what it meant to people at the time the provision was enacted. There are, in this sense, two schools of originalists. Those who adhere mainly to a form of original *intent* look to what the people who wrote the Constitution intended to do, proclaiming that this is a neutral approach to finding the meaning of the document because it takes us back to what the people who wrote the language were attempting to create.¹⁵ Those who instead advocate a form of original *understanding* think we should ask what people at the time of adoption generally would have thought it meant, again as a way to limit the power of contemporary judges to read their own views into the document, instead locking the meaning of the Constitution to the time when each of its provisions was first enacted.¹⁶ Although original intent and original understanding—by focusing on either what the Framers themselves intended or what ratifiers and others thought when it was enacted—can sometimes result in different outcomes, both strands of originalism often reach the same interpretations of the Constitution because they are both anchored in a similar place historically.¹⁷ Traditionally, but not always, originalism has been a method of interpretation used by conservatives.¹⁸ Supreme Court Justices Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas are best known for exhibiting the approach of originalism.¹⁹

Texas Senator Ted Cruz has frequently extolled the virtues of originalism. Upon the death of Justice Scalia in February 2016, Cruz tweeted, “Justice Scalia was an American hero. We owe it to him, & the Nation, for the Senate to ensure that the next President names his replacement.”²⁰ During the confirmation hearings for Scalia’s Court successor—Justice Neil Gorsuch—Senator Cruz issued a statement proclaiming that in 2016, the Republican majority in the U.S. Senate “advised President Obama that we would not consent to a Supreme Court nominee until We the People, in the presidential election, were able to choose between an

originalist and a progressive vision of the Constitution.”²¹ The statement went on to declare that in “November, the People spoke, clearly. They elected President Donald Trump, who had repeatedly promised to nominate a justice firmly committed to following the law and the original understanding of the Constitution. Today, with the nomination of the Honorable Neil Gorsuch... President Trump has fulfilled that promise.”²² Cruz’s support for an originalist approach to the Constitution has led him to conclude that there is no constitutional right to an abortion or same-sex marriage and that the Second Amendment protects an individual right to keep and bear arms.²³

During the 2016 race for the White House, Senator Cruz employed musical choices that showed rally-goers that he was a constitutional originalist. Very early in the campaign, on August 21, 2015, Cruz held his “Rally for Religious Liberty” in Des Moines, Iowa. At the conclusion of his final speech, Cruz was played off stage to Newsboys’ “All Creatures of Our God and King.”²⁴ The song uses religious imagery to praise God. Similarly, at a campaign rally in Fort Wayne, Indiana, on April 28, 2016, Cruz played Alan Jackson’s “Small Town Southern Man,”²⁵ a song that repeatedly describes the subject of the song as a man who “bowed his head to Jesus.”²⁶ In songs like these during his presidential campaign, Cruz engaged his supporters and potential voters with a particular message about religious freedom under the Constitution. As expressed by Justices Scalia and Thomas, and other originalists, the freedom of religion under the Constitution permits the government to interact with, and even promote, religion, including in the public posting of the Ten Commandments, vouchers for parochial schools, and prayer in public schools.²⁷ While simply playing religious songs on the campaign trail is not, in itself, overwhelming evidence of an originalist approach to the freedom of religion, coupled with his comments at these speeches, such musical exhibitions serve to reinforce the position that Cruz is an originalist in this regard. For instance, when Cruz stated during a “Good Morning America” town hall event in April 2016 that “[w]hen it comes to religious liberty, religious liberty is something that protects all of us...

If someone wants to change the marriage laws, I don't think it should be five unelected lawyers down in Washington,"²⁸ Cruz made clear that his view of religious liberty was one that took priority over more progressive visions of equality, something well within what is typically an originalist view of that right.²⁹ Music with religious themes serves as a reminder to the listener that not only religion, but also an originalist version of religious freedom, is something Cruz prizes.

Originalists also tend to have stronger support for state powers, seeing a more limited role for the federal government, as the view of national power in the 1780s was quite limited; originalists in recent decades have emphasized both the *Federalist Papers* and anti-Federalist writings when concluding that the national government has exceeded its constitutional authority at the expense of the states.³⁰ Senator Cruz has long espoused such a position, including when it came to what he saw in 2015 as excessive federal intervention in defining marriage: "the Obama administration has disregarded state marriage laws enacted by democratically-elected legislatures to uphold traditional marriage."³¹ It is not just Cruz's statements that express this idea—his music on the campaign trail did too. It is within this context that Senator Cruz walked onto stage at a campaign event in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, on February 4, 2016, to Montgomery Gentry's "Where I Come From," a song used by the Cruz campaign with some frequency in 2016.³² The lyrics describe life in rural America positively, proclaiming an aversion to the way people live in major cities: "Don't you dare go running down/ My little town where I grew up/And I won't cuss your city lights."³³ Coupled with Cruz's speeches, it is clear that this song's placement at the event was to emphasize the need to interpret the Constitution to lodge more power at the state level, so that those in more urban areas could not use federal government power to impose a more liberal way of life on more rural states.³⁴

Throughout his presidential campaign, Senator Cruz placed emphasis on an originalist notion of freedom, focusing more on libertarian visions

of liberty rather than more progressive notions of rights; he also elevated this above similar constitutional values, such as equality, something demonstrated in his statements above about same-sex marriage. Such a view is consistent with an originalist view of the Constitution.³⁵ Two of Cruz's staple songs while campaigning were Brooks and Dunn's "Only in America" and Aaron Tippin's "Where the Stars and Stripes and the Eagle Fly." On the evening of the Nevada caucuses, Senator Cruz concluded his speech by telling the crowd that they were one step closer to "getting back to the Constitution, getting back to free market principles, getting back to the unbelievable opportunity that is the American dream."³⁶ He then walked off stage to Brooks and Dunn's "Only in America," a song which emphasizes the ability to achieve one's dreams in the United States, due, it is implied, to our freedoms. In a similar vein, Cruz launched his presidential campaign by stating that it "is the time for liberty. It is the time to reclaim the Constitution of the United States!"³⁷ He later walked off the stage to Tippin's "Where the Stars and Stripes and the Eagle Fly,"³⁸ the lyrics of which place importance on American freedom, particularly alluding to the Statue of Liberty and the role of America's soldiers in fighting for our freedoms. Similar to Cruz's other campaign music, these songs exemplify a conservative/libertarian originalist perspective that dovetails with what he is telling persons listening to his speeches about what he believes is the proper understanding of the Constitution.

DONALD TRUMP: STRUCTURALISM (SORT OF)

Structuralism is a form of constitutional interpretation that emphasizes the dominant themes of the Constitution to better comprehend the text of any particular clause in the document. Put another way, one understands the Constitution's meaning from a structural perspective by drawing inferences from the document's overall structure, highlighting the relationships among institutions created by the Constitution.³⁹ Thus, if the text of the clause being interpreted is not clear, a structuralist approach infers its meaning from the larger constitutional principles

that stretch over the document. Two common constitutional principles that are used to help decide the meaning of a clause are “federalism” and the “separation of powers.”⁴⁰ Even though these terms do not appear in the Constitution, they represent concepts that help to explain what individual clauses in the document mean. A structural approach can also be used to understand liberty protected by the Constitution by reasoning what that concept means from the document overall and how it fits into the greater system of institutions established by the Constitution.⁴¹ Such an approach tends to offer more flexibility than a more rigid, history-based method of interpretation like originalism.

Ted Cruz’s comments above about Donald Trump being an originalist notwithstanding, Trump really expressed more of a structuralist approach when campaigning. Although Trump as a candidate did not have as well developed a constitutional methodology as Cruz (who is an attorney and has practiced constitutional law), he nevertheless tended to express a form of constitutional interpretation most similar to structuralism. This should come as no surprise, as the method is one well-suited to a non-attorney with a leadership style that focuses on big ideas rather than details. According to his now famous book, *The Art of the Deal*, Trump believes the following: “I like thinking big. I always have. To me it’s very simple: if you’re going to be thinking anyway, you might as well think big.”⁴² While campaigning for the presidency, Trump did not discuss many details of the public policies he was advocating, maintaining that his “voters don’t care and the public doesn’t care” about policy specifics.⁴³ Although structuralism as a form of constitutional interpretation employed by judges and legal scholars is not meant to be an oversimplification of complex issues and concepts, for a constitutional layperson it can involve looking at the big picture and relating particular issues to major constitutional themes. It is in this latter sense that candidate Trump largely referenced the Constitution on the campaign trail, including with his use of music.

Donald Trump launched his presidential campaign on June 16, 2015, descending the escalator at Trump Tower in New York City to the sound of Neil Young's "Rockin' in the Free World."⁴⁴ This is not a simple song extolling Western freedoms, however. The lyrics appear to be part a celebration of the fall of Communism but also are significantly critical of the price paid by the West to defeat the Soviet Union, including failures to adequately fund public education, protect those in poverty, and address the problems of homelessness.⁴⁵ There is a real question how much the Trump campaign peeled back the layers of meaning in the song, though, as Trump may have simply thought the hook ("keep on rockin' in the free world") was a short, branded statement that fit his overall message, and President Trump has expressed that he is a fan of Neil Young's music generally.⁴⁶ From a big picture perspective, what the crowd tends to hear is something general about freedom, so one can understand the strategy, even if it appears to be a misinterpretation of the specific lyrics. And the use of the song, particularly the hook, before the speech that would kick off Trump's presidential run exhibits a structural understanding of freedom under the Constitution. This notion of freedom and limited government power being the opposite sides of the same coin came out in several statements in Trump's campaign launch, including where Trump blasted what he saw as an overreach of executive power and a lack of protection of certain freedoms. For instance, at one point in the speech, Trump declared that "I will immediately terminate President Obama's illegal executive order on immigration, immediately [and] fully support and back up the Second Amendment."⁴⁷ In the same speech, Trump emphasized the importance of protecting free markets.⁴⁸ Throughout the speech, he did not provide much detail regarding presidential powers and rights, nor did he reference either the history or the text of the Constitution. Rather, he simply referred to bigger notions under the Constitution of limited power and the general idea of freedom—whether it be economic pursuits or a vague notion of a right to possess guns.

As the campaign progressed into the calendar year 2016, one of the questions raised by Donald Trump was Ted Cruz's eligibility to serve

as president. Article II of the Constitution requires the following: “No person except a natural born citizen... shall be eligible to the office of President.” Ted Cruz was born in Canada to an American mother; constitutional scholars—using originalist, textualist, and pragmatic methods of interpretation—agree that even though Cruz was born abroad, since his mother was a U.S. citizen, Cruz is a natural born citizen according to the Constitution, meaning that he is eligible to be elected president.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, Donald Trump insinuated in January 2016 that “it’s not a settled matter” that Cruz is a natural born citizen because he was born in Canada; Trump went on to claim that “honestly, I don’t know, because some people say you have to be born on the land, OK? You have to be born on the land. That’s what I always thought before, you have to be born on the land. So he was born in Canada.”⁵⁰ This understanding of the Article II requirement, although it is probably more than anything else devoid of any in-depth study of the Constitution, is closer to structuralism than any other methodology. Indeed, Trump’s approach to this question did not closely examine the text, nor did it delve into the relevant history of the clause; furthermore, it did not focus so much on a pragmatic or living constitutional approach (methods of interpretation that are explored below) to the document. Instead, Trump takes a big picture approach to the Constitution, including (presumably) the idea of separation of powers in the respect that the presidency is meant to be a limited institution in which foreign tyrants cannot take over the office.

Donald Trump did not simply state these ideas in his speeches. To help remind rally goers of his own birth on American soil and of Cruz’s birth in Canada (a move that should not surprise us, given Trump’s previous focus on President Obama’s place of birth),⁵¹ he played at these rallies Bruce Springsteen’s “Born in the U.S.A.”⁵² Much like “Rockin’ in the Free World,” “Born in the U.S.A.” looks good on the surface for this purpose, like it may be a patriotic tribute to the country. However, examining the lyrics reveals a different story: Springsteen was decrying what was happening in the U.S. in the mid-1980s, including the plights of veterans and the jobless.⁵³ Still, Trump’s structuralist approach in using

the song is clear, as he played it to emphasize his big picture approach to interpreting the relevant portion of Article II, with no direct emphasis on history, text, or consequences.

For one more example of Trump's pseudo-structuralism through song, we can review his use of the Beatles' "Revolution" while campaigning before the New Hampshire primary in February 2016. Trump also used the song as walk on music and exiting music when giving his victory speech on the evening of the New Hampshire primary.⁵⁴ Trump declared in his speech that evening not only that "we are going to make America great again," but also that, among other things, he would put businesspersons in key leadership positions, he would rebuild the military to defeat ISIS, and he was adamant that "we are going to preserve our very sacred Second Amendment."⁵⁵ These approaches to these issues are certainly within a structural interpretation of the Constitution: the structure of the document limits government power as a way to protect individual freedom, including economic rights and personal liberties; it also ensures that the president, as commander-in-chief, has purview over military matters in a separation of powers system. Trump walked on and off stage to "Revolution," which was likely used by the campaign to emphasize that Trump as president would spark a "revolution" compared to the Obama administration's positions on these issues and the Constitution. Besides the constant reference to the word "revolution," the song might have been used by the Trump campaign because it has lyrics that can be used to support free market capitalism by explaining that those who are favorable to communism are disfavored (e.g., "But if you go carrying pictures of Chairman Mao/You ain't going to make it with anyone anyhow").⁵⁶ Of course, like his use of other songs on the campaign trail, Trump's playing of this song is also a bit of a misrepresentation, as "Revolution" eschews the use of force, including the private use of firearms and/or government use of military force ("But when you talk about destruction/Don't you know that you can count me out") and begs those seeking revolution to produce detailed plans ("You say you got a real solution/Well, you know/We'd all love to see the plan").⁵⁷ In many ways, these lyrics are

out of line with the speech Trump gave that night. Nevertheless, the refrain of the song and some of the lyrics can be used to fit Trump's structuralist position on constitutional interpretation, explaining why he used the song in New Hampshire.

Overall, looking at Trump's song choices reveals less constitutional complexity than those made by Ted Cruz. This is not simply a reflection of the fact that it is arguably easier to construct a structuralist approach than an originalist approach, as less detail is needed to advance this theory of interpretation. It also probably reveals that Cruz's campaign paid more attention to this detail given Cruz's background as a constitutional lawyer and that his campaign overall was more detail-oriented on policy than Trump's campaign was.

HILLARY CLINTON: PRAGMATISM

Like structuralism, pragmatism is typically not as meticulous of an inquiry as originalism, and it likewise does not delve into the Constitution's history. Simply put, a pragmatic interpretation of the Constitution asks what outcome will produce the best future results.⁵⁸ It is a theory of constitutional interpretation that has roots in the legal realist approach of Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr.⁵⁹ Putting aside questions of how reasonable interpreters can disagree over which results are the "best" ones under the Constitution, this method is a more consequentialist one, at least in theory, compared to either originalism or structuralism. As a presidential candidate Hillary Clinton's approach to the Constitution, both in her speeches and in her musical choices, most closely resembled pragmatism.

There is no question that Hillary Clinton has taken a pragmatic approach to rights of all sorts, both at home and abroad, for years. In 2009, she noted that "principled pragmatism informs our approach to human rights," stating in this regard that we must be "doing what is most likely to make them real."⁶⁰ Clinton's outcome oriented approach to many

issues of public policy has led multiple media outlets to characterize her as a pragmatist, including on issues of rights and government power, and especially when running during the 2016 presidential election.⁶¹ While campaigning, Clinton stated, “I know how much money influences the political decision-making. That’s why I’m for huge campaign finance reform,”⁶² indicating a pragmatic view of the freedom of speech because of the effects of money on the policy-making process. Regarding the Second Amendment right to keep and bear arms, Clinton advocated expanding background checks and barring guns from domestic abusers and the mentally ill, which her campaign characterized as “commonsense approaches to reduce gun violence.”⁶³ Clinton has also showed an outcome understanding of the Fourth Amendment and the right to privacy, stating that she has “always believed in a zone of privacy,”⁶⁴ but also focusing on the needs of law enforcement and intelligence agencies to gather evidence on criminals and terrorists by voting for the USA PATRIOT Act in 2001 and its renewal in 2006.⁶⁵

Looking specifically at the Fourteenth Amendment, Clinton’s pragmatism is again evident. Clinton famously said in 1995 that “women’s rights are human rights,” clearly showing her emphasis on sex equality.⁶⁶ Beyond rhetoric, Clinton had a history in the Senate of promoting reproductive rights, equal pay, and family leave,⁶⁷ although she did not take a bold stance on gay rights when running for the president in 2008, instead refusing to support same-sex marriage at that time, in part for pragmatic reasons regarding her electability.⁶⁸ Speaking of a woman’s right to choose, Clinton made her position clear during the campaign: “I will defend *Roe v. Wade*, and I will defend women’s rights to make their own health care decisions.”⁶⁹ Her pragmatism on this matter, however, was also demonstrated in her past support for restrictions on late term abortions, something she reaffirmed during the campaign: “I have been on record in favor of a late pregnancy regulation that would have exceptions for the life and health of the mother.”⁷⁰ Of course, some of Clinton’s stances on these issues may reflect her policy views rather than her interpretation of the Constitution; like Trump, some of her statements

about constitutional interpretation were not as forthright or as developed as Cruz's stated views. Nevertheless, she spoke about equality, rights, and even Supreme Court decisions interpreting the Constitution during the campaign, and her pragmatism showed through in these comments.

These comments were accompanied by musical selections that reinforced a pragmatic approach to these rights. For instance, in 2015 Clinton released a "Girl Power" playlist on Spotify, including Martina McBride's "This One's for the Girls," Cyndi Lauper's "Hey Now (Girls Just Want to Have Fun)," No Doubt's "Just a Girl," Alicia Keyes's "Superwoman," and Sara Bareilles's "Brave."⁷¹ The themes of these songs tend to be, with few exceptions, about the difficulties women face in life and overcoming those obstacles. There is a clear focus on promoting the rights of women in various ways, and this dovetails well with a pragmatic approach to constitutional interpretation: do what is necessary to protect women's rights because that is a laudable outcome. This is even clearer when examining a song not on this list but one that Clinton used repeatedly on her official playlist, during the campaign at rallies, and in campaign advertisements: Katy Perry's "Roar."⁷² The song is particularly relevant in this regard, as it is, in some respects, the contemporary embodiment of Helen Reddy's "I am Woman, hear me roar" lyric from the 1970s⁷³ and reinforces Clinton's emphasis on a pragmatic feminist's interpretation of the Equal Protection Clause. Indeed, after walking onto stage to this song at the Iowa Jefferson-Jackson Dinner on October 24, 2015, Clinton discussed the need for women to have the same access to health care as men and the need for the Supreme Court to protect everyone; she also complained about members of the other party: "For people who claim they hate big government, Republicans sure love using government, to step in and make decisions for women about our bodies and our rights... I will do everything I can to protect a woman's right to choose."⁷⁴ Clinton then went on to discuss "making a positive difference in people's lives."⁷⁵ Here, Clinton was emphasizing a pragmatic approach to women's constitutional rights, and constitutional rights in general,

in that she believed enforcing such rights will be the best consequence for people in the real world.

Hillary Clinton exemplified her pragmatic method of constitutional interpretation in other music choices as well. Her vision of an energetic, active federal government that is greatly empowered by the Constitution took center stage during her victory speech on the night of the New York primary, April 19, 2016. Clinton spoke of “the awesome responsibilities” of the presidency, and how “you have to explain how you’ll solve problems”; she then laid out a bold set of priorities for herself and Congress, including significant regulations of the economy that are “backed up by real plans” in an effort to be “actually helping people.”⁷⁶ Put another way, Clinton advocated that Congress and the president have and exercise a great amount of power because of her belief that it will have positive outcomes. One of the songs that was played that evening at the rally was Bachman-Turner Overdrive’s “Takin’ Care of Business,”⁷⁷ a nod to her view that the federal government needs to be empowered to be effective.

Used much more frequently by Clinton while campaigning was Rachel Platten’s “Fight Song,” a song with lyrics that are primarily about being a “strong” person who is ready for a “fight.”⁷⁸ It speaks of someone who has faced adversity but has resolved to succeed nevertheless; playing the song at a campaign event suggests that it is the job of the federal government to “fight” for people who cannot fight for themselves, a rather active understanding constitutionally of the roles of Congress and the president. When Clinton first used the song to walk on stage at a rally in Iowa, she went on to speak of the need to “do our part to build” a better future and “improve the lives of Americans” by creating more good-paying jobs, instituting universal health care coverage, combatting climate change, making college more affordable, and promoting a host of other priorities.⁷⁹ This would require an active Congress to regulate extensively the economy under the Interstate Commerce Clause and spend a large amount of money under the Taxing and Spending Clause.

BERNIE SANDERS: LIVING CONSTITUTIONALISM

Similar to pragmatism, living constitutionalism has a more contemporary focus than originalism and some other forms of interpretation. Living constitutionalism, though, understands the meaning of the Constitution to be ever evolving and growing, making it perhaps the most politically progressive form of interpretation. Indeed, living constitutionalism as a method of interpretation was born during the Progressive Era as an alternative to originalism.⁸⁰ It often sees the original Constitution as a flawed document needing to be updated to a more current understanding of what is morally just. Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, an advocate of living constitutionalism, explained it as follows in 1987:

[W]e must be careful, when focusing on the events which took place in Philadelphia two centuries ago, that we not overlook the momentous events which followed, and thereby lose our proper sense of perspective... If we seek, instead, a sensitive understanding of the Constitution's inherent defects, and its promising evolution through 200 years of history, the celebration of the "Miracle at Philadelphia" will, in my view, be a far more meaningful and humbling experience. We will see that the true miracle was not the birth of the Constitution, but its life, a life nurtured through two turbulent centuries of our own making, and a life embodying much good fortune that was not.⁸¹

Although pragmatism can often yield similar answers to living constitutionalism on the Constitution's meaning, its focus is on function and instrumentalism, not a more systematic philosophical theory of how to interpret the document.⁸² Thus, pragmatism is not theoretically committed to a more progressive interpretation of the document in the way that advocates of living constitutionalism promote,⁸³ although living constitutionalism could theoretically interpret the document to achieve politically conservative outcomes as well.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, living constitutionalism today is almost exclusively advocated by those on the political left.⁸⁵

Senator Bernie Sanders exemplified a living constitutionalist approach during his campaign speeches and in the music he used to accompany them. He classified himself as a Democratic Socialist candidate, advocating for various programs that promoted economic equality of result and required extensive government intervention in the economy—much more than the pragmatist Clinton supported—including providing free tuition at public universities and universal health care.⁸⁶ At his first campaign rally on May 26, 2015, Senator Sanders proposed extensive government spending for progressive programs, including not only universal health coverage but also a \$1 trillion public works program and a minimum wage of \$15 per hour.⁸⁷ Such spending requires an interpretation of the Article I, Section 8 Taxing and Spending Clause and Interstate Commerce Clause that would permit Congress to engage in funding and regulating beyond what other methods of constitutional interpretation would bear. Nevertheless, a progressive living constitutionalist approach permits this because it advocates that we now live in a society in which government involvement in the economy to promote equality and maintain a welfare state is accepted and even necessary, especially since the New Deal.⁸⁸ Once he finished his speech, Sanders concluded his rally with a singing of Woody Guthrie’s “This Land Is Your Land,” a frequent song at Sanders’s rallies throughout his presidential campaign.⁸⁹ “This Land Is Your Land” is, in some respects a perfect one for a candidate with a progressive living constitutionalist approach; indeed, Guthrie’s Depression Era song promoted the public ownership of land and advocated for an active federal government to stamp out poverty and hunger.⁹⁰ In a similar vein, Sanders repeatedly used at his rallies Bruce Springsteen’s “We Take Care of Our Own,”⁹¹ a song that contemplates an energetic government to take care of the American people’s needs,⁹² suggesting the promotion of a welfare state that goes well beyond what the Framers envisioned.

While campaigning, Senator Sanders also endorsed a progressive living constitutional approach to the rights of the criminally accused. On his campaign website where Sanders addressed racial justice (a topic that also relates to the Fourteenth Amendment’s Equal Protection

Clause, discussed below), Sanders advocated for more oversight of police regarding the use of violence, sentencing reform, avoiding the use of fines as a steady source of government income, and turning away from the War on Drugs.⁹³ Such issues raise questions about the Fourth Amendment's right against unreasonable searches and seizures as well as the Eighth Amendment's rights against excessive fines and against cruel and unusual punishment. These were not simply policy positions for Sanders, as he has advocated a progressive living constitutional approach about government surveillance and the Fourth Amendment specifically⁹⁴ as well linking from his senatorial website an editorial critical of the death penalty as violating the Eighth Amendment.⁹⁵ These types of issues were also raised at the "Rockin' the Bern" rally on October 23, 2015, in Davenport, Iowa, where Wayne Kramer sang The Clash's "Jail Guitar Doors," which the Sanders campaign then posted online.⁹⁶ The song describes the legal plights of three musical artists, including Kramer,⁹⁷ and the lyrics show disdain for a system that arrests, processes, and convicts people for drug crimes as well as imposing hefty bail amounts. Given Sanders's statements during the campaign and before, it helps signal to voters that Sanders takes a progressive, living Constitution approach to the rights of persons accused of crime.

Regarding the Second Amendment right to keep and bear arms, Senator Sanders faced pushback during the campaign from Secretary Clinton due to previous votes he had taken in Congress against the Brady Bill in 1993 and in favor of a 2005 law to limit firearm manufacturers' liability.⁹⁸ In January 2016, however, Sanders clarified his position on these matters, and he claimed to be more supportive of strengthening gun control measures.⁹⁹ This change in tone reflects Sanders's more collective approach to interpreting the Second Amendment, which is very much a progressive, living constitutional view that permits the federal government to engage in significant regulation of firearms because of how the capacity of firearms has dramatically increased since the Founding (although there is an argument that a collective approach to the Second Amendment is also an originalist position).¹⁰⁰ Such a tonal shift

was reflected in rallies associated with the campaign as well, including, most notably, Jamie Kilstein's performance of "Fuck the NRA" at the "Brooklyn Is Berning" rally on January 5, 2016.¹⁰¹

For a final example of Senator Sanders's living constitutional approach via music, one can look to his stances on civil rights as they relate to the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. As noted above, the Sanders campaign held several progressive stances on matters related to racial justice, and this was coupled with similar views on the rights of women, LGBT persons, and the poor. He spoke about these and similar issues at a rally in Iowa City, Iowa, on January 30, 2016, particularly promoting equality and the joining together of "working people, black people, white people, Latino people, gay people, straight people, women, men. When all of us stand together... this government belongs to all of us, not just a handful of billionaires."¹⁰² He went on to discuss what he saw as the problems of income inequality, the need for fairness, putting an end to institutional racism, protecting women's rights to control their own bodies, and ensuring marriage equality.¹⁰³ These positions require an interpretation of the Equal Protection Clause that sees the provision protecting more rights than when it was ratified in 1868 and that allows for a more active Congress aggressively using its amendment enforcement power to protect civil rights. At the same rally, Jill Sobule performed "When They Say They Want Their America Back,"¹⁰⁴ a song she originally wrote to attack Tea Party positions on various issues, especially on civil rights regarding race, sex, and sexual orientation.¹⁰⁵ The song promotes the same vision of constitutional rights advocated by Sanders at the rally and throughout his campaign, which may help to explain why Sobule performed this and other songs at various Sanders campaign events in 2015 and 2016.¹⁰⁶

CONCLUSIONS

There is no doubt that American presidential candidates express their visions of the U.S. Constitution to voters in an attempt to convince those

voters to elect them. This chapter has explored how candidates make use of recorded music and songs played live by artists to convey methods of constitutional interpretation on the campaign trail. In many ways, these songs help reinforce for voters what the constitutional beliefs are of these candidates, but they do more than that, as sometimes music can convey ideas and emotions that the spoken word cannot. The fact that nearly every contemporary presidential rally incorporates music in some way is evidence in itself that this is true.

The use of music to express views about what the Constitution requires, permits, and prohibits is nothing new. Indeed, what the Constitution means regarding the exercise of government power and the protection of rights has a long history in American music. One of the earliest campaign songs, John Adams's "Adams and Liberty" in 1800, not only referenced the idea of liberty but also specifically referred to how "peace" would "find an ark of abode in our mild constitution,"¹⁰⁷ due to what the song was portraying as a properly constructed government. This was followed by "Jefferson and Liberty," used in 1804 for Thomas Jefferson's reelection campaign. The song alluded to what many saw as the Adams administration's unconstitutional Alien and Seditions Acts by stating that under Jefferson the "reign of terror [was] now over"; the song's lyrics also described the freedom of religion protected under the Constitution.¹⁰⁸ Similar song references to the Constitution have occurred throughout American history.

What has changed in recent decades is the now wholesale use of popular music by presidential campaigns, as opposed to their use of largely existing tunes with lyrics written specifically for the campaign. Beginning primarily in the 1980s and 1990s—with examples like the Ronald Reagan campaign's use in 1984 of Lee Greenwood's "God Bless the U.S.A." and the Bill Clinton campaigns of 1992 and 1996 playing Fleetwood Mac's "Don't Stop"—a modern trend was solidified to use pop songs, note for note and lyric for lyric, to express campaign messages.¹⁰⁹ In more recent years, the number of pop songs used by these campaigns

has exploded, with party nominees, and candidates who are in the race for their party's nomination for any significant length of time, using dozens of songs or more.¹¹⁰ This contrasts with those campaigns of the 1980s and 1990s, which tended to have one main song or a small number of pop songs, and, thus, could not express as much about the Constitution musically. Today's campaigns, with their varied use of songs, permit many more chances to play music referencing constitutional themes, therefore giving candidates an opportunity to express a more comprehensive view about the Constitution compared to just a few decades ago. This trend ramped up in 2012 with greater use of songs about the Constitution, including Barack Obama's playing of Springsteen's "We Take Care of Our Own" (in a living constitutional approach similar to Sanders's use of the same song in 2016) and Mitt Romney's reliance on Kid Rock's "Born Free" (trying to associate the campaign with the Tea Party's originalist interpretation of constitutional rights).¹¹¹

But even the use of Constitution-focused music in 2012 paled in comparison to its greater use in 2016. This is probably due largely to two factors, one ongoing and one contextual. The use of campaign songs grew generally in 2016, continuing a trend for several election cycles, meaning that the number of songs referencing the Constitution could also increase. At the same time, the death of Justice Antonin Scalia in early 2016 brought the Supreme Court and constitutional interpretation to the fore in the last nine months of the election, particularly on the Republican side,¹¹² making it more likely to be emphasized in campaign music.

The 2016 presidential election reached a new zenith with regard to campaign pop music about the Constitution. Although there is no guarantee that songs emphasizing the Constitution will have the same level of salience in near-term presidential elections in the absence of a Supreme Court vacancy during an election year, it is clear that candidate use of a multitude of songs while running is a trend that is here to stay for the foreseeable future because presidential candidates continue to have easy access to pop music that they can play at their rallies. This means it

is certain that at least some songs with constitutional themes will persist in 2020 and beyond. Indeed, as long as Americans continue to value the U.S. Constitution, this trend of playing music to stress constitutional values will be a part of presidential campaigning.

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CHAPTER SIX

AMERITUDE

FRAMING AND CONVERGENCE CULTURE IN THE AMERICAN POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

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INTRODUCTION

The Donald Trump rally, on January 13, 2016, began with the type of routine political rhetoric one would expect to see at a political gathering, especially at a conservative campaign event.¹ There was an explicitly Christian prayer given in the name of Jesus Christ; there were the “Gun Girls of Trump,” a group of adult women who led the audience in the Pledge of Allegiance, and there was a reference to the virtue and intelligence of the candidate, whom the master of ceremonies had met. But then this rather typical campaign rally transformed into something historic with the introduction of The USA Freedom Kids, three pre-teen girls draped in red, white, and blue outfits, who began by singing the National Anthem. It was not the song that made them newsworthy, though. It was a few minutes later that they captured the imaginations of

Americans who read about their performance or watched it on YouTube the next day. When they returned onstage, they performed “Freedom’s Call,” a parody of George M. Cohan’s 1917 song “Over There” but with lyrics that were an encomium to Donald Trump.²

The parody that evening received routine audience participation (standing and clapping) and polite applause afterward, but the media response showed that the song had hit a nerve. It was either a reboot of a patriotic song for a new era or a disturbing call to militant action abroad, depending on one’s point of view. The girls were either exemplary Americans who loved their country or unfortunate victims whom Trump and their manager unnecessarily politicized. The song was either a symbol of what it meant to “Make America Great Again” or a sign that a dangerous demagogue with an authoritarian streak was threatening this country’s values. These girls had said more than they realized, and their lyrics carried more meaning than they had intended.

The USA Freedom Kids might seem like the kind of popular cultural artifact that will exist forever, if only in a forgotten dusty corner of the imagination of those who lived through the 2016 presidential election. Like “Obama Girl”³ in 2008, it was the kind of phenomenon that might be tempting to place on a mental shelf, counting it as of marginal importance. But this small group of child singers unwittingly became a major media sensation. The group performed just once for Donald Trump in Pensacola, Florida, but for months afterward their performance and their subsequent troubled relationship with the Trump campaign sustained their presence in the news. Their initial performance received millions of views on YouTube.⁴ There were viral videos, parodies, and campaign reporting on the group’s origins and troubles. Their song’s apparent simplicity disguises why it resonated with the public. The musical group and their performance unintentionally tapped into deep divisions concerning how conservatives and liberals frame their respective moral universes. In this sense, the group became a performative Rorschach test that reflects people’s beliefs more than expressing them. By analyzing this

group's song, we can better understand the deep political divisions that contributed to a raucous 2016 presidential election. More specifically, my analysis of this song will illustrate how Americans can view the same texts, people, and ideas, and not only see different things but also be baffled at others' interpretations. The responses and parodies of the song create a wealth of participatory remix culture that shows how political framing divides our country among fault lines that make mutual understanding increasingly hard.

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE GROUP AND FOUNDER

The formation of USA Freedom Kids speaks to the entrepreneurial spirit of their founder. The group was formed by a retired Hollywood stuntman, Jeff Popick, who moved to Florida to start a real estate career. The entertainment bug never left Popick's blood stream, and when he started a family, he created a kids' musical group, in part to spend time with his daughter. The musical group is not exclusively political, but Popick has an affinity for Trump, and by the description of his biography in a *Washington Post* article, one can sense connections between the two.⁵ Indeed, both Popick and Trump have an interest and background in show business and both have been involved in real estate. Though five female children comprise the group, only three performed that day in Pensacola, Florida. With critical receptions ranging from fascination, support, horror, disgust, and humor, to say that the reactions to their support was mixed would be an understatement.⁶ This interest was only compounded when the group's manager, Popick, had a disagreement with the Trump campaign, which resulted in a lawsuit, pitting the three girls against the New York real estate mogul. The lawsuit stemmed from Popick's claim that the Trump campaign promised them additional opportunities to perform and sell their merchandise, but those promises were not honored.⁷ As a result, a firestorm erupted, where Trump's detractors used the controversy to reinforce critical narratives of him. But this controversy also produced parodies, commentaries, and opinions

that speak to America's divisions and reflected the moral frames people use to think about politics.

LAKOFF'S CONCEPT OF FRAMING IN POLITICS

To understand how the USA Freedom Kids are a type of Rorschach Test for the American electorate, one needs to first understand how framing works in American politics. George Lakoff, a cognitive scientist, uses the term "framing" to explain how metaphors control not just our language, but how people process information and fit it within their sense of morality. The term framing can be thought of as a type of subconscious lens. Scholars often speak of looking at issues through lenses: for example, one could analyze a poem through a feminist lens, a Marxist lens, a reader response lens, or a psychoanalytic lens. But whereas scholars put on conscious theoretical lenses in order to interpret a text, Lakoff argues that everyone has a frame that is mostly subconscious, and that these frames organize and provide meaning to the symbols, texts, and ideas that people encounter.⁸ This concept of framing contrasts the more intuitive belief that ideas exist independent of people's minds, and that those ideas can at least, in theory, be transmitted without complication from sender to receiver.⁹ However, that concept does not fit current research in neuroscience or linguistics according to Lakoff:

Neuroscience tells us that each of the concepts we have—the long term concepts that structure how we think—is instantiated in the synapses of our brain. Concepts are not things that can be changed by someone telling us a fact. We may be presented with facts, but for us to make sense of them, they have to fit what is already in the synapses of our brain. Otherwise, facts go in and then they go right back out. They are not heard, or they are not accepted as facts, or they mystify us: Why would anyone have said that?¹⁰

One implication of framing is that people can experience the same event, hear the same person, read the same book, or witness the same musical performance, and interpret what is happening completely differently.

What is more astonishing is that they would not be aware that they are interpreting it differently because the process of framing happens within “structures of our brains that we cannot consciously access”; we mistake the semiotically laden text that is filtered through minds with the thing itself.¹¹ What is really a subjective interpretation of information based on our moral framework looks like perfect objectivity, which consequently makes us wonder about the sanity or at least honesty of those who claim to see something different.

Another effect of framing is that the text can be used as a type of dog whistle, revealing what side each audience member is on. Unlike most literal and figurative dog whistles though, the sound is not so much inaudible for people outside the intended audience, as it is just heard a different way: the same tune, figuratively speaking, can be heard as two different songs. This dual dog whistle explains what is happening with “Freedom’s Call,” and a more detailed look at two of Lakoff’s frames explains how. When most people refer to a political dog whistle, it is with the assumption that the sender of the message intends for there to be different reactions. However, with “Freedom’s Call,” it is more of an unintentional effect, a type of accidental Rorschach test.

Lakoff posits two different types of frames in his book, *Don’t Think of an Elephant*, both of them with the premise that people think of the nation as a family. He suggests that conservatives and liberals have different understandings for how families work, and they draw subconscious connections between these competing ideas of family dynamics and what type of social contract we should have nationally.¹² Conservatives follow a “strict father model.” This model posits that those in power have the moral obligation to direct the behavior of others. The father—or parent, more generally—has knowledge earned with experience and needs to impart that knowledge onto the children in the family. To the extent that the children ignore or reject the parent’s advice, the most loving and ethical thing the strict father can do is enforce discipline. This familial model valorizes self-discipline and self-sufficiency, and it sees both of

those qualities as interdependent. Without self-discipline, one will not have the work ethic, thriftiness, or ingenuity to remain independent; self-sufficiency is a necessary component of freedom, the ability to make one's own choices, and not be disciplined by others. In the strict father model paradigm, danger lurks behind every corner, and there are people who want to destroy, defile, or take what others have. Self-discipline is important for additional reasons as well. Even if one could remove all of these dangers, there is still the assumption that the world operates according to a Darwinian ethic of survival of the fittest. Rather than being seen as amoral, there is the assumption that this Darwinian sorting is based on some kind of moral sorting of winners and losers, and those with a proper work ethic, moral compass, and sense of self-discipline have earned their place as winners.¹³ The implication of such a moral framework is that strict fathers “protect the family in the dangerous world,” “support the family in the difficult world,” and “teach [their] children right from wrong.”¹⁴

In contrast to the strict father model, the more progressive vision involves the “nurturant parent model,” an approach that also seeks to protect children and teach them necessary life skills but that does so through emphasizing empathy and social action. One of the key differences between these two frames is that the conservative frame recognizes how harsh and unforgiving society can be; depending on one's bias, this could be described as either realism or pessimism. The progressive frame, in contrast, assumes that the “world can be made a better place, and [a progressive's] job is to work on that.”¹⁵ The progressive parent empathizes with others, according to Lakoff, because it is only through imagining the struggles that others have and their needs, that the nurturant parent can know what to do. In the strict father model, “[c]ommunication is one-way” because those in power have superior wisdom—there's no need to listen to those subservient to one's self.¹⁶ However, in the nurturant parent model of communication, “you have to know what every cry means.”¹⁷ This focus on empathy means that the nurturant parent tries to create a better community for their child—

meaning working on social justice, community organizing, environmental protection, and ensuring everyone has an opportunity for success. Part of what is meant to be successful is to be well-adjusted and enjoy life. Nurturant parents strive to help their children find happiness while modeling for them what living a fulfilling life looks like by searching for happiness themselves.¹⁸ These two frames are both ethical systems, but operate based on almost inversely separate premises.

Before moving on to the song and performance itself, more needs to be said about how the strict father model applies to foreign policy, since “Freedom’s Call” addresses the role of America on the international stage. According to Lakoff, from the perspective of this frame, the United States, the most powerful nation in the world, relates to the Third World in an analogous way to the relationship between a strict father and his children. As Lakoff describes it, just as the strict father has the duty to order his children about, the United States, as the most powerful nation, has the duty to exercise its authority over the international community.¹⁹ These two frames operate fundamentally on a moral level; they are ways of seeing how the world works and how it should work. As an outgrowth of each moral perspective comes certain assumptions about how families, children, and politics, both domestic and foreign, should work.

Other scholars and journalists have applied Lakoff’s ideas to better understand how the nurturant parent and strict father frames influence different forms of political communication. For instance, multiple studies have evaluated whether the more abstract description of moral frames can be borne out through quantitative studies. Jennifer Filson Moses and Marti Hope Gonzales review presidential campaign advertisements between 1980 and 2012. Their study concluded that the nurturant parent and strict father paradigms were used by Democrats and Republicans, respectively, mostly as Lakoff had predicted.²⁰ A similar study measured the prevalence of both moral frames in presidential advertisements from 1952-2012.²¹ This study also confirmed Lakoff’s findings but found an asymmetrical reliance on the frames between the two ideological groups.

They found that “[n]ot only do Republicans use Strict Father language more extensively on more issues, Republicans also use Nurturant Parent reasoning on specific issues where Democrats in theory should but do not.”²²

It would be a mistake to assume that Lakoff’s ideas apply only to explicitly political speech or that they can be applied only through quantitative analysis. Scholars have used the nurturant parent and strict father models to understand the semiotics of marches, books, and videogames. Sara Hayden shows how maternal rhetoric in our society has the potential to advocate for feminist and progressive political change but can also be used to reinforce a more traditional paternalistic paradigm.²³ By carefully reviewing the rhetoric of the Million Mom March, Hayden shows how Lakoff’s two moral frames reveal the complexities of maternal political appeals. Her argument demonstrates the saliency of Lakoff’s ideas and their ability to reveal layers of meaning in rhetorical speech. Joseph M. Palacios uses Lakoff’s paradigm to discuss the values espoused by Rick Santorum’s *It Takes a Family: Conservatism and the Common Good*.²⁴ These moral frames have even been used to show how videogames function through a metaphorical understanding of morality. Using Lakoff’s ideas, Ian Bogost analyzes the procedural rhetoric of videogames.²⁵ Just as Lakoff suggests voters are unaware of the frames that influence their thinking, Bogost suggests that “[f]or better or worse, it is much more likely that [game designers] are unaware that the procedural interaction in the game can imply a particular stance.”²⁶ These examples of quantitative and qualitative analysis illustrate the reach Lakoff’s ideas have had and how they offer a lens into understanding both the literal and figurative texts that we are immersed in. That takes us to three precocious young girls who performed in Pensacola.

“FREEDOM’S CALL” AND THE STRICT FATHER

When you examine the lyrics of “Freedom’s Call,” they resonate with the strict father framework. By examining the song from a viral

YouTube version, the connections between the lyrics and Lakoff's work emerge. There are "enemies of freedom" in this harsh world—incorrigible international children—and we must "take them down." They must "face the music" of their punishment. The world this song envisions is a cold one, where strength prevails and weakness is not respected. That is why one must "deal from strength or get crushed every time." A president who acts like a father figure must lead the country, and everyone knows that, to recall a 1950s paternalistic television sitcom, *Father Knows Best*. That father is their candidate, whom they preemptively refer to as "President Donald Trump," and he "knows how to make America great." The key word here in this line is "knows," rather than the phrase "make America great." The strict father model is all about trust in a paternalistic source of knowledge. He "knows," and the trust in him is part of the point. This explains why a "good person—a moral person—is someone who is disciplined enough to be obedient to legitimate authority," according to Lakoff.²⁷ This speaks to another point that Lakoff makes about the strict father model: that there is a hierarchical structure to a "well-ordered world," and that in part implies a paternalistic society and a U.S.-centric global order.²⁸ This paternalistic orientation adds a new layer of meaning to the phrase "come on boys, take them down" in the song.²⁹ There is a gendered subtext to this song, one that privileges the role of the wise father and brave sons who stand up for the family.

Notice that the sense of obligation in the song echoes Lakoff's insistence that a sense of morality undergirds both of these frames. The very title of the song, "Freedom's Call," is a directive, a command. This is not a pleasant call; it is a call to sacrifice, a call to uphold the burden of the USA to be a "shining city on a hill."³⁰ "When freedom rings," we must "answer the call." From the perspective of the song, one might imagine someone who would let the phone ring, and balk at America's responsibility. But those with that mindset need to know that "freedom's on our shoulders." Some of the lyrics sound like depictions of an old Western: "it's not so easy / but we have to stand up tall." These lines, viewed within the gendered subtext previously described, evoke self-sufficiency and strength, perhaps

something from an episode of *Bonanza*, with Ben Cartwright and his boys standing up against whatever is threatening the Ponderosa. This self-sufficiency means that the listeners need to be “on your feet” and ever vigilant to defend the heartland.³¹

From a grammatical lens, it is telling how many of the statements are in the imperative mood. The imperative mood gives commands, whereas the declarative mood makes statements, and the interrogative mood inquires and asks questions. If a song or poem has a predominance of imperative or interrogative statements, then it behooves the listener or reader to ask what if anything that pattern signifies. Here I think the pattern of commands reinforces the authoritarian motif in the lyrics. How one interprets the line breaks in the song will determine how many commands the lyrics have, but by my count, there are eight different imperative mood statements in the song, including six before the first verse is over. This is not a song that—like a nurturing parent—helps the listeners to arrive at a conclusion themselves. This song orders you about and expects you to obey. There is no room for ambiguity. Even some lines that are not technically commands still have that same effect: “[b]ut we have to stand up tall and answer freedom’s call.”³²

The song does not just speak from a strict father frame; it also provides its take on the failures of the nurturer model. If Lakoff is right that the nurturer model explains a more progressive vision for American governance, then it is not a stretch to see Obama as the metaphorical nurturer-in-chief. The lyrics of “Freedom’s Call” begin with a veiled critique of Obama’s “cowardice” and his “apologies for freedom.”³³ The criticism that Obama has apologized for America go back to his first term. In the summer of 2009, the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank, criticized Obama’s conciliatory approach by arguing that it weakened America’s standing in the world: “The Obama Administration’s strategy of unconditional engagement with America’s enemies combined with a relentless penchant for apology-making is a dangerous recipe for failure.”³⁴ The song’s treatment of Obama speaks to a key point

that Lakoff makes about frames. Not only do the conservative and progressive frames fundamentally see the world differently; each frame mediates through its own lens the value system of the other frame. This process of interpretation can easily lead to either astonishment or a harsh condemnation.³⁵ From the perspective of the nurturant parent frame, Obama's conciliatory rhetoric acknowledged America's mistakes and recognized the validity of other global perspectives. However, if we take Lakoff's ideas about the strict father frame seriously and apply it to critiques of Obama, then he was abdicating his responsibility as the leader of the most powerful nation. As Lakoff summarizes this position, "[t]he United States, being the best and most powerful country in the world—a moral authority—should not be asking anybody else what to do."³⁶ From this perspective, Obama was a coward for failing to take ownership of the responsibility vested in him and a coward for not speaking out against evil that can be understood in terms of "an absolute right and an absolute wrong."³⁷ From a progressive perspective, this moral indictment might seem bizarre and unjustified, but from the strict father model, it is a natural interpretation. Much like a Rorschach test, what one sees says more about the viewer than the perceived object.

There is no way to analyze this song without acknowledging the motif of freedom as well. The lyrics of the song mention the word "freedom" seven different times, with the word appearing in the title, in both verses, and in the chorus. The use of the word throughout the song is mostly devoid of context, so there are no obvious cues about how to interpret it. However, two observations that Lakoff makes about "freedom," when synthesized with each other, open up an interpretation about the concept in this song. In his book, *Thinking Points: Communicating our American Values and Vision*, Lakoff provides a helpful working definition of freedom: "[u]ncontested freedom is (very roughly) defined as *being able to do what you want to do, providing you don't interfere with the freedom of others.*"³⁸ There are two salient points to this definition. First, that freedom is a give-and-take game of expectations between an individual and the community. If one is free to do what they want so long as they do not

interfere with others, then community expectations bind one's ethical choices. For instance, if a woman has a right to have an abortion, then is she infringing on the fetus's rights? If the fetus has a right to life, is it constraining a woman's right to make choices over her own body? Each right contests with the other. Second, when community expectations conflict with individual choices, freedom loses its uncontested definition, and specific values must fill in the gaps about what the word means.

This concept of contested freedom takes more specific linguistic shape in Lakoff's book, *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think*. In this book, he observes that the word "freedom" bears relationship to metaphors of movement. Lakoff thinks carefully about how moral abstractions are linguistically associated to the physical world in which we live: "It is common to conceptualize action as a form of self-propelled motion and purposes as destinations that we are trying to reach."³⁹ For example, the phrases "we're making progress," "we must climb to the summit," and "we must find our own path in life" are three examples of how travelling can be seen as a representation of abstract good. In contrast, a phrase like "we've wandered off" indicates something has gone wrong. These metaphors of movement are a way of conceptualizing how freedom can have two mutually exclusive meanings for two different groups discussing the same issue. For instance, what happens when someone decides to choose their own walk rather than follow the path laid out for them? A positive perspective on this would be that someone is "forging their own path." However, if a community disapproved of someone's path they might consider it—to use Lakoff's wording—a "deviant" approach that keeps them from the "straight and narrow."⁴⁰ The traveler who goes his or her own way disrupts everyone else's sense of security because "[m]etaphorically, someone who deviates from a tried and true path is creating a new path that others will feel safe to travel on."⁴¹ The implication of this is that both the person deviating and the community that witnesses the deviation can claim their freedoms are being curtailed. From the perspective of the person forging a new path, any type of impediment limits the choices one can make, whereas

the community sees those going their own way as threatening their sense of identity and, consequently, their ability to freely choose that identity.⁴² However, if we combine this spatial understanding of freedom with Lakoff's description of contested freedoms, it is clear that the person deviating from the community's path imperils their freedom as well. For instance, "[d]o I have a right to say what I want, even if it's obscene, or do you have a right not to be offended (interfered with)?"⁴³

A few useful ideas emerge from this analysis of freedom that can be used to better understand this song. First, when people speak of the word "freedom," they think of it in spatial terms. Second, freedom, ironically, is not just something that applies to the individual but to the community, and third, freedom as an uncontested abstraction does not account for the tension between the individual and the community in any specific discussion of what liberties people have. These three observations help us to understand how the song treats "freedom" as a concept. First, the song's sense of freedom is that it emanates from the U.S. It is not just that the U.S. is a free country, but rather that we have a special claim on it as "the land of the free and the home of the brave." The song proposes that freedom should be "everywhere," and that Americans should "inspire proudly freedom to the world." The fact that this song is a parody of Cohan's song, "Over There," only reinforces this sense of evangelizing freedom. We have freedom, and we must forge a path—every path needed—to spread it where it does not already exist. The song's point is not so much to define what freedom is or what it entails, but rather to insist on who has a special relationship with it, and by implication who defines it: the USA. Those who suggest otherwise, are giving "apologies for freedom." They fail to recognize that "Freedom's on our shoulders."⁴⁴ By blocking America's access to everything and everyone, they are limiting our freedom.

In this sense, freedom is attitudinal in the song—it is not so much about naming specific liberties as it is about insisting that Americans have a special claim on spreading it. The linguistic coinage, "Ameritude," in the

song then is more than just a cute blend of America and attitude. In a way, it is the very soul of the song: “it’s attitude; it’s who we are, stand up tall.”⁴⁵ The Ameritude is reinforced by the defiant tone in the second half of the second verse: this country is “fiercely free” and “our colors don’t run, no sir-e” because “we’re the red, white, and blue.”⁴⁶ If we compare this to Lakoff’s understanding that freedom is described in spatial terms, then the song is suggesting that America is the pathfinder, a nation that has the right and obligation to travel anywhere and everywhere to spread freedom. Lakoff describes how spatial metaphors also extend to how people think of rights; he points out that “via the metaphor that action is motion, a right is a right-of-way, a region in which one can act freely without constraint.”⁴⁷ In “Freedom’s Call,” the spread of freedom throughout the world should face no constraints, and America has the moral authority and the right to connect the world via roads of freedom.

The costumes used by the USA Freedom Kids employ an unapologetic patriotism that echoes symbolism in past GOP presidential rhetoric.⁴⁸ One could describe the skirts and shirts of the girls as remixes of the American flag—red, white, and blue, with stars on the shirt. But that description does not do their costumes justice; the brightness and intensity of the outfits reinforce this brashly proud patriotism. Since the costumes are exclusively flag-like, rather than just adorned with flag-like imagery, these girls are almost literally wrapped up in the flag. This proud display of patriotism is synonymous with a celebration of freedom.

If Lakoff’s ideas about framing are accurate, then this campaign song should not exist in isolation. It should be part of a matrix of ideas, symbols, and texts that reinforce the strict father model, and a brief review of conservative rhetoric will show how “Freedom’s Call” emerges out of such a network of thought. Compare this song to Mitt Romney’s insistence on an American, right or wrong, foreign policy in 2012. In his acceptance speech for the GOP nomination, Romney contrasted himself with Obama: “I will begin my presidency with a jobs tour. President

Obama began with an apology tour.”⁴⁹ In Romney’s speech, we see the same rhetoric employed about apologies as in the song.

Alternatively, consider Ronald Reagan’s farewell speech in 1988 where he spoke reminiscently of an “informed patriotism,” where schools, films, television, and families created a systematized cultural matrix on proud unapologetic nationalism. This speech carries with it many of the undertones of the strict father model ethos. Reagan’s speech warns of the ending of “unambivalent patriotism” and encourages the belief that history should prioritize nationalistic pride without inhibitions.⁵⁰ From his perspective, the telling of American history should connect disparate historical figures, each of whom advanced the causes of freedom. Reagan’s speech did not specifically name what should not be part of American history, but he implies that the inflection point where historiography went askew was sometime in the mid-1960s: up until that point television and “[t]he movies celebrated democratic values and implicitly reinforced the idea that America was special.”⁵¹ The 1960s is remembered—justifiably or not—as a time when social hierarchies were being turned on their head, and the legitimacy of the government was being questioned.⁵² It was, in short, a moment when the strict father model, both on a familial and national level, was explicitly and openly challenged.

The symbiotic relationship between family and nationhood is made clear in this farewell address when Reagan argued that “[a]ll great change in America begins at the dinner table.”⁵³ The importance of the dinner table means that parents should direct their children’s understanding of history, and if parents are derelict in their responsibility, then children should “let ’em know and nail ’em on it.”⁵⁴ Reagan’s directive to parents and children reinforces the strict father model authoritarian view of families. Finally, this speech is replete with references to freedom because Reagan does not want us to forget that “America is freedom: freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of enterprise. And freedom is special and rare.”⁵⁵ In fact, freedom is perhaps the most dominant motif in his speech, and he connects freedom with American exceptionalism,

describing the United States as inspiring others in the world.⁵⁶ This interpretation of Reagan's farewell address, just one of many that are possible, interrogates its sub-textual meaning. The point of this textual analysis is not to suggest that Reagan's speech directly inspired the song, "Freedom's Call," but rather to show how both are part of a larger worldview, one based on the strict father model.

"FREEDOM'S CALL" FROM THE NURTURING PARENT'S PERSPECTIVE

"Freedom's Call" does not simply exemplify the strict father model; the reception of the song reinforces what Lakoff writes about framing. Since each side filters information through its frame, when someone with an alternative frame receives incompatible data, they either reject the information or conceptualize it to fit their understanding. This process explains what happened when progressive America heard "Freedom's Call" for the first time. With that in mind, it would be helpful to review some reactions from left-of-center periodicals. The liberal magazine *Mother Jones* used the words "horrifying" and "creepy" to refer to the group's song, and said sardonically that the performance would land the group on the "military's torture playlist."⁵⁷ *Rolling Stone* referred to it as a "terrifying campaign song" and implied the children were being manipulated. From this article's description, the song is a "surreal" presentation of "boot-in-your ass jingoism."⁵⁸ The reaction in both of these publications contains disbelief at the performance and disgust—or at least concern—at the way the children were used. The point of focusing on these critiques is not so much to adjudicate between them and Jeff Popick, the group's founder. Rather it is an observation that the group's performance can be seen as either an educational opportunity or exploitative, depending on which of the two moral frames is used. From the nurturant frame, parents need to try to protect their children from a dangerous world by trying to make the world a better place. It might follow from this argument, that if one cannot change the world then one

should at least insulate the child from its harshness. The song represents a world that the nurturant parent model rejects, and to the extent that it acknowledges its existence seeks to reverse. As Lakoff writes, “The parents’ job is to nurture their children and to raise their children to be nurturers of others.”⁵⁹ From this vantage point, one perceives Popick’s behavior as negligent and immoral. However, from Popick’s perspective, it is an opportunity to spend quality time with his daughter because the girls “live for [performing],” and the message his group is sending is making America more patriotic.⁶⁰

One of the more sustained criticisms came from Chauncey Devaga of *The Daily Kos*, who acknowledged that the ideological vision of the “Freedom’s Call” is a “coherent” one, but is nonetheless frightening. He wrote a scathing critique, in which he argues that the song’s “superficial embrace of empty ‘Americana’ is easily mocked by liberals and progressives (beyond any questions of personal taste) because it signals to a vacuous myth-making about the past and present that they have rejected.”⁶¹ However, this mocking, in his opinion, is a mistake because it glosses over a much more dangerous ideology. In some ways, Devaga’s analysis is not far from the basic logic of the strict father frame. His analysis of the song captures the importance of authoritarianism, nationalism, militarism, and jingoism to the efficacy of the lyrics. But his analysis does not focus on how such a framework can have an ethical underpinning or to see how family can be functioning as a microcosm for nationhood. Of course, this could represent just a rhetorical choice by Devaga rather than a blind spot, but either way the difference between his position and Popick’s is illustrative of how each frame constructs its own reality.

Interestingly, the public’s image of this group became distinctively more positive when it became clear that they had had a falling out with the Trump campaign. Jeff Popick claimed that the Trump campaign promised the musical group opportunities to sell merchandise during their first performance and offered other chances to perform for the

campaign. Nevertheless, after he made significant financial investments to travel to rallies, the campaign did not honor any of those promises. For instance, at a campaign rally in Ohio, they were told they could not perform, even after they were asked to make a last minute arduous and expensive trip to be there. Consequently, Popick publicly complained about the Trump campaign and threatened to file a lawsuit.⁶² With this sudden reversal of fortune, the narrative of the group went from being a dangerous omen of rising nationalism into a story of victimized children at the hands of a dishonest and double-dealing political candidate.

Jonathan Chait's representation of this turn of events is illustrative of this tonal change. The title of his essay, "Trump Deals from Strength with 'USA Freedom Kids,' Crushes Them," has a caustic tone, but compared to the earlier cited articles, the critique is almost exclusively directed at Trump. He levels some of his criticism at Popick as well, if only for being foolish enough to trust Trump: "He didn't deal with Trump from strength, and he got crushed."⁶³ The group became more sympathetic because they could be used to reinforce the nurturant frame and castigate the strict father frame. For those operating with a nurturant parent frame perspective, as the story developed, the performing group became a cautionary tale of why cooperation is more important than strength and how one should always be careful about who one trusts.

The *Late Show with Stephen Colbert* commented on the lawsuit and parodied the song in order to criticize Trump and to a lesser extent Popick. Colbert's critique of Trump frames the kids as "little girls" who need protection: "because I don't think children should be involved in the dirty world of politics, here with a brand new song for Donald Trump, please welcome the USA Freedom Grown Ups."⁶⁴ After these words four adult women and an adult man walk on stage and sing a parody of "Freedom's Call" in similar costuming to the original group. Their lyrics highlight the difference between Trump as an adult and the youth and innocence of the girls: "Tiny Hearts, Tiny Hands / What Kind of Monster Will Not Pay a Children's Band."⁶⁵

Compare this to two other YouTube video parodies that appeared days after the group's first performance in January. The *Huffington Post* published the first one. This parody imagines an alternative set of lyrics that express the girls' unspoken thoughts. While the song trashes Trump as "the devil" and speaks about how he manipulates the children and their parents, it also unsparingly refers to the children as "puppets" and "robots" and imagines the children wishing their parents were divorced.⁶⁶ Another YouTuber, Randy Rainbow, parodied "Freedom's Call" just days after their performance. His parody has him annotating the song while the girls perform—interjecting with sardonic comments. He uses a machine gun, gives a nazi salute, and admonishes one of the girls to "keep up" and another for lip-syncing. The song does not personally attack the children, but they are the butt of several of his jokes.⁶⁷ While there are plenty of reasons for the tonal difference between the parodies (intended audience and institutional expectations, for instance), one difference is certainly the timing. The *Huffington Post* and *Randy Rainbow* videos were published before the narrative around the girls reframed them as victims and made their complaints compatible with a nurturant parent frame of morality.

To be sure the USA Freedom Kids were not the first group of children to sing at the behest of adults for a presidential candidate. Another such instance would have been the Obama Kids Music Video from 2008. This video featured kids singing lyrics that they could not fully understand and that therefore made their performance seem exploitative.⁶⁸ And when one hears the lyrics of the Obama song, which emphasize a community ethos, echoes of the nurturant parent frame unmistakably emerge. However, I would argue that the USA Freedom Kids performance stands out for a number of reasons. They were well rehearsed, enjoyed the publicity of sharing a stage at a Trump rally, and came into conflict with the candidate, all of which heightened attention on them. It was part of a campaign, if only briefly, that by anyone's measure grabbed people's attention in a unique way. Perhaps most importantly, the fact that the group had existed well before engaging with Trump meant that they

and their manager had time to formulate a worldview that reinforced the strict father frame. In other words, there was something purposeful and intentional about their message, even if the girls performing it were not fully aware of what that was.

The race and gender of the USA Freedom Kids—white and female—feeds into a strict-father frame of America, especially in terms of foreign policy, and this patriarchal frame reinforces some of the ideological assumptions undergirding the Trump campaign. Lakoff observes that the strict-father frame may sometimes include an implicit assumption that Westernized and white populations are preferential to non-Western and non-white populations.⁶⁹ There has been abundant discussion about how ethnonationalist ideological beliefs—at least partially—explain the political success of Donald Trump’s political campaign. For instance, Vanessa Williamson, Theda Skocpol, and John Coggin analyze the rise of the Tea Party in order to discern which stereotypes about that political movement were true.⁷⁰ They note that when the Tea Party first emerged, its origins were debated. Was it a product of libertarian beliefs, bipartisan outrage, or constitutional concern? From their analysis, they concluded that “Tea Party concerns exist within the context of anxieties about racial, ethnic, and generational changes in American society.”⁷¹ Namely, it was a retrenchment of white America against the growing multi-racial and multi-cultural demography of the country. While this political movement precedes Trump’s election, his outspokenness concerning President Obama’s birth certificate endeared him to the movement.⁷² Trump can be seen as the inheritor of the Tea Party movement and his candidacy its latest iteration. The racial composition of the USA Freedom Kids feeds this ethnocentric frame, not just for Trump’s supporters but for the Freedom Kids’ detractors as well. Devaga claims that the race and gender of the young girls feeds into the xenophobic fears of Trump supporters: “It is no coincidence that they are also young girls. Trump’s brand of nativism and racism has repeatedly returned to the idea that white women are imperiled by ‘illegal immigrants’ who only come to the United States to rob, steal, and rape (white) women.”⁷³ In other words, the

presence of the girls puts Trump in the protector role, similar to that of a hero in a movie, one where the villains are represented as a racial other.

We can speculate what this song would have sounded like and how it would have been received had different performers comprised the group. If the song had been performed by a grown white man it might have been construed differently. Instead of the synthesized child-pop version that we know, the music could have evoked patriarchal connotations. In some sense, it is not that hard to imagine what the song would have sounded like or how people would have reacted; it would have fit into a genre of any number of patriotic songs dripping with machismo, such as Toby Keith's post-9/11 country music hit, "Courtesy of the Red, White, and Blue."⁷⁴ Indeed, the noteworthiness of "Freedom's Call" and one of the reasons it garnered such a reaction was because the militarism of the strict father frame is not usually expressed by small children in the way it was in this performance.

In terms of the sonic implications of the song, the rhythm and drumbeats evoke the steady feeling of military marching music. For instance, the sound of the drumbeats in "Freedom's Call" recalls the drumbeats of more familiar tunes like "Yankee Doodle," "When Johnny Comes Marching Home," or the "Colonel Bogey March."⁷⁵ These songs arouse a militaristic attitude—among other emotions—and call to mind the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, and the World Wars, respectively. The militarism of the drumbeats of "Freedom's Call" reinforces the strict-father frame, the rhythm calling to mind discipline, order, and strength. The synthesized quality of the music softens these drumbeats, though, and makes the song reminiscent of popular songs that have been remixed for children's albums. This quality softens the edges of the notes, diluting them, making them sound less harsh and stern. The overall effect is to express the ideology of the strict-father frame but from a childlike perspective. The choice to cover Cohan's "Over There" harnesses a beloved song of the past, one that immediately calls to mind military readiness.⁷⁶ The selection of this song evokes the strict-father frame—and World War I

—but it also softens the edges of the lyrics, since the tune calls to mind Cohan’s song and dance career and the film *Yankee Doodle Dandy* as much as it does war.⁷⁷ In other words, the choice of music dilutes the bitter taste of the strict-father frame, making it more palatable.

CONVERGENCE CULTURE AND MORAL FRAMES

One way to view these multiple parodies is as the product of participatory culture. Henry Jenkins, author of *Convergence Culture*, argues that we have entered an age that blurs the lines between those who create content and those who receive it.⁷⁸ We no longer live in a world where television is simply absorbed, films are just watched, or books are just read. Those who receive content participate in it by reproducing it, reinventing it, and framing it differently to express their own creative instincts and advance their own ideas. Corporate creation of content—for instance, television sit-coms—still exists, and such organizations still dominate public discourse, but they no longer have as tight a grip on what can be said or how. This convergence of corporate creation with consumer remixes is more than just the aggregation of different technologies, such as computers, televisions, radios, and cell phones. Instead of existing within wires and tubes, convergence culture exists within and between minds: “Each of us constructs our own personal mythology from bits and fragments of information extracted from the media flow and transformed into resources through which we make sense of our everyday lives.”⁷⁹

One can see the effects of participatory culture happening with America’s grappling with the USA Freedom Kids. There is an ideological wrestling for what the girls signify for our country and its values. Do they signify freedom, and if so, what kind of freedom? Is it a simple and pure uncontested freedom to match the innocence of their age? Is it a militaristic freedom about dominating other countries and claiming any space as ours to tread? Or does that miss the point? Is it really about the relationship between strength and freedom, and an affirmation that with

a strict father in charge we will remain independent and self-sufficient? Is Popick manipulative or ingenious? Is Trump a trusted patriarch or a scandalous cheat? These contested definitions are occurring because people had access to see the group on YouTube, where they became a viral sensation, and because they had the ability to create and watch parodies. But the rhetorical arena where this wrestling is taking place is not in people's screens; it is in their minds, and it is governed by their subconscious associations. This is where Jenkins and Lakoff meet. Lakoff's argument about frames is based in the practical, helping people to rhetorically persuade others by understanding and using frames to express ideas. But what we can learn from this story is that the sense of disbelief that so many voters felt during the 2016 election (how could anyone vote for the other candidate?) was not an anomaly. It was grounded in how our minds work and in how convergence culture has given everyone a voice to amplify their message. We may not be able to agree with each other politically, but we can surely understand what causes our disagreements.

CONCLUSION

The USA Freedom Kids generated controversy because their song captured the core disagreement of the presidential election. At its foundation, the 2016 race was not about particular issues (immigration, war, or the fate of the Supreme Court), but rather about differing visions on what kind of America we should have, how it should be organized, and how we should think of ourselves. It was about identity, and Lakoff's theory of a familial and social moral paradigm illustrates that our sense of national identity is inextricably connected to our understanding of how a family should operate. Lakoff's two moral frames—strict father and nurturant parent—come into conflict with the song, "Freedom's Call." The presence of the strict father frame in the song is as bold as the girls' costumes. It cannot be ignored, and the fact that the group consists of children calls to mind the nurturant parent frame as well. By

unpacking the lyrics of this song and reviewing the media reaction to their performance and later legal trouble, we can see how powerfully these two moral frames govern our interpretation of the world around us.

Though Lakoff's ideas could apply to presidential elections going back to at least 1952 (as noted above), the story of the USA Freedom Kids suggests that this election year might indicate an inflection point in how we interpret the world around us. At its core, these frames filter our perceptions. They tell us what to pay attention to and what to ignore. They tell us what is real and what is fake news. If we do not try to see the world from each other's frames and empathize with each other (or at least understand how the same event can be perceived radically differently by others), then political disagreements will be increasingly seen through epistemic bubbles, where it is seemingly impossible to communicate with our political adversaries because we have different filters through which we frame our facts. For instance, are NFL players who kneel during the national anthem heroes who stand up for those who cannot speak for themselves or are they disrespectful exhibitionists?⁸⁰ The answer is in the frame. The story of the USA Freedom Kids controversy suggests then that we should understand how frames control ourselves and others, so that we can better communicate and empathize with each other.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

THIS IS OUR FIGHT SONG

THE RHETORICAL (IN)VISIBILITY OF HILLARY CLINTON SUPPORTERS

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INTRODUCTION

On July 26, 2016, actor and producer Elizabeth Banks, well known for her work in *Pitch Perfect* and *Pitch Perfect 2*, took to the stage to host the second night of the Democratic National Convention (DNC). To demonstrate her support for Hillary Clinton, Banks produced and participated in a musical cover of Rachel Platten's "Fight Song." In the video, easily recognizable actors and musicians join average citizens to perform Platten's song a cappella before concluding with Clinton's campaign logo over the image of an American flag. The flag itself is constructed out of smaller images of those who performed in the video, which conveys a metonymic message: Clinton's campaign is our (i.e., her constituencies') campaign; she does not represent her supporters, because she *is* her supporters.

While the music video received mixed reviews, it nevertheless points to a new trend in the use of music in presidential campaigns. Beginning with George Washington, campaigns have authored or adapted songs to represent the policy and identity of the candidate.¹ Now, advances in technology enable supporters (such as Elizabeth Banks) and detractors to publicize candidates via user-generated websites, such as YouTube.com. As explained by Saffle, “new-media users have produced parodies of existing music, covered familiar songs, and created mashups of materials drawn from a variety of audiovisual sources.”² The videos reflect the millennial generation’s multi-modal style of political participation and blunt the authority of the campaigns themselves. Now, citizens are generating and publicizing their own messages about candidates using the music video format.

This move raises important questions regarding the rhetorical force of music videos in political campaigns, particularly in terms of the candidate’s identity. In the past, music has largely been used *by* campaigns *for* the candidate. User-generated videos, however, speak from and to the general public. Campaigns no longer hold primary control over the image and message of the political candidates. Further, the videos themselves empower the average citizen (perhaps not “average,” but the computer-savvy millennial and iGeneration) to participate in the mass-mediated public political conversation in ways that were not possible in the past.³ This means that citizens are empowered to develop and circulate their own perception of the candidate’s identity, which could have significant impact on voting practices. As a user-generated video endorsed by the Clinton campaign, “Fight Song” emerges at a critical juncture of this media transition.

In this chapter I will argue that, as a citizen-generated campaign message, “Fight Song” signals a transformative identification between Clinton and her constituency. The video and song serve not so much as Clinton’s campaign anthem, but that of her constituency; however, because “Fight Song” was professionally produced and then appropriated

by Clinton's campaign, the video's authenticity is problematized. In my rhetorical analysis, I will blend scholarship of political campaign rhetoric with public sphere studies to advance our understanding of the role that music videos play in political participation and public subjectivity. In particular, I will build from the research by Kasper and Schoening to consider how music videos reflect the civic identity of a candidate's supporters, thus demonstrating the value of music as a form of political participation. My analysis and conclusion reflect the rhetorical tradition, which is an interpretive endeavor seeking to recognize the rhetorical forces of public discourse in order to better understand the public itself. To do this, I first outline the historical trajectory that led to "Fight Song" becoming part of Clinton's campaign. I expand further on the context of the campaign, with special consideration to the role of identity politics. I then conclude by demonstrating that "Fight Song" served not so much as Hillary Clinton's anthem, but as the anthem of her supporters.

(EN)GENDERING THE FIGHT

Hillary Rodham Clinton was not the first woman to run for president. In 1872, forty-eight years before women would have their right to vote recognized by the Nineteenth Amendment, Victoria Woodhull ran for president. In the next 144 years, eleven more women would take up the challenge.⁴ Yet, it wasn't until 2016 that a woman would win the nomination of a major political party and have a realistic chance at becoming the next president. When Clinton took the stage on June 7, 2016, to acknowledge that she would become the nominee for the Democratic Party, she wore a white pantsuit as an allusion to the women's suffrage movement.⁵

In her analysis of the 2016 presidential campaign, rhetorical scholar Bonnie Dow confesses that, as a feminist scholar, she "was excited by the prospect of a woman president."⁶ Similarly, Angela Gist explains, "as a woman, I was finally able to see a candidate on my ballot with whom I identified during this election."⁷ As Anderson points out, "Clinton's

gender was a foundational and formative constraint that impacted her primary and general election bids for the presidency.”⁸ In her study of voting behavior, Gist explains that, because “individuals tend to favorably evaluate their own in-group,” “it is likely that people who vote, vote for someone they perceive to be part of their in-group.”⁹ True to Gist’s assessment, exit polls suggest that the majority of women voted for Clinton. That more women of color voted for Clinton as compared to white women demonstrates further that race was less of an identifier (in this election) than was gender.¹⁰ For better or worse, identity politics is intrinsic to elections in the United States.

The significance of gender in the 2016 election is further evidenced in the theme of Clinton’s campaign, the animosity towards Clinton, and the public’s response to Clinton’s loss. To begin, Clinton’s campaign emphasized her identity as a woman, and regularly referenced her breaking the glass ceiling, a metaphor often used to describe women’s advancement (or lack thereof) in their career tracks. On the second night of the convention, Clinton appeared via video and greeted her audience, “What an incredible honor you have given me, and I cannot believe we just put the biggest crack in that glass ceiling yet.”¹¹ In response to Republican candidate Donald Trump accusing Clinton of playing the “woman card,” the Clinton campaign offered “woman cards” in the shape and form of credit cards to those who donated a minimum of five dollars.¹² As with her reference to the glass ceiling, Clinton followed up with criticisms of her playing the “woman card” in her convention speech: “And you know what, if fighting for affordable child care and paid family leave is playing the ‘woman card,’ then deal me in!”¹³ Clinton’s remark was met with applause.

Clinton’s speech at the DNC was preceded by a parade of noteworthy speakers who emphasized the importance that gender played in the election. For example, on the first night of the convention, Michelle Obama delivered an eloquent recommendation of Clinton, setting the convention tone. She concluded her speech with a nod to Clinton’s gender and the

historical relevance of the election: “And because of Hillary Clinton, my daughters and all our sons and daughters now take for granted that a woman can be president of the United States.”¹⁴ The speeches and campaign messages support Gist’s conclusion that “Clinton’s campaign pushed the boundaries of the presidential in-group not because of her race or social class status but because of her gender.”¹⁵

Although gender was presented in a positive light by Clinton’s campaign, it remained a point of discord within the Democratic Party. Some of Bernie Sanders’s supporters evoked gender in their enthusiastic animosity towards Clinton and her supporters, coming to be known as “Bernie Bros.” As described by Albrecht:

The Bernie Bro represents a particular version of a political citizen whose investment in the campaign of Bernie Sanders straddled or crossed the line into misogynist hatred towards... Hillary Clinton. The defining feature of the Bernie Bro is his gender identity; he has come to stand in for a loud, fervent millennial male supporter tainted by misogyny, unable to accept Sanders’s defeat by Clinton while maintaining that the system is rigged and that Hillary should be imprisoned.¹⁶

Albrecht explains that the discord within the Democratic Party that was made obvious by the Bernie Bro “reflected a broader divide on the left between those for whom gender is important and salient component of the contemporary political landscape and those who claim gender is a secondary issue or distraction from the ‘real issues.’”¹⁷ Albrecht’s point is further confirmed by comparing Clinton’s campaign to Obama’s 2008 presidential campaign. In 2008, Obama’s identity as the first African American to run for president became a point of pride that Democrats collectively celebrated. As concluded by Gist, the American public in 2008 believed that race was a real issue; yet eight years later, many believed that gender was *not*.¹⁸ This conclusion may be explained by recognizing that millennial voters made up a significant block of Sanders’s supporters. Many millennials have grown up in communities where

programs supporting gender equality were the norm. Sheryl Sandberg advised them to *Lean In*.¹⁹ The Obama administration developed national and international programs to address gendered issues, like rape culture.²⁰ In contrast, the Black Lives Matter Movement energized civil rights, drawing national attention to on-going issues like police violence and the school to prison pipeline. In addition to race, a recent Pew survey found that economic inequality and financial instability have been immediate, pressing concerns for millennials.²¹ The role that gender plays in these issues is not explicit, and thus, may not have been considered of great importance to some Democrats (and many Republicans).

However, while many believed that gender was not a significant political issue, it still characterized prevalent criticisms against Clinton (or, in contrast, advocacy of Sanders). As Anderson points out:

despite Clinton's extensive list of qualifications, her carefully crafted policy proposals, and the broad political coalition she amassed, the characteristic that defined her in Sanders' mind was her gender. It should not be a surprise that the woman whose political resume far exceeded those of her political opponents in 2016 was repudiated most forcefully by those whose most important campaign tool may have been their effortless conformity to White, heteronormative, cisgender, masculine presidency.²²

The Center for American Women in Politics similarly found news coverage criticized Clinton for the same characteristics they praised in Sanders: "Strong voices from women candidates also appeared to irk men in election 2016. While Bernie Sanders' 'shouting' was a staple of his style on the stump, it was Hillary Clinton who was repeatedly accused by male journalists and commentators of 'shouting,' yielding direct admonishments from them and reprisals of the 'shrill' claims made against her in 2008."²³ Thus, although many commentators asserted gender was not a key issue of the election, commentary and criticism of Clinton was grounded in her identity as a woman.

Finally, the role that gender played in the election is evidenced by some of the public's shock and anger following her loss to Trump. Experienced statisticians, like Nate Silver who accurately predicted the 2012 Presidential election, had slated Clinton as the probable winner.²⁴ Yet on November 9, 2016, U.S. citizens would wake to the news that Donald Trump, not Hillary Clinton, won the election. The final vote tally added controversy to the surprise. While Trump won the Electoral College vote, Clinton bested Trump by nearly three million in the popular vote.²⁵ Clinton's supporters were recognizably upset. While issues of concern were healthcare, immigration, education, and climate change, of particular concern was Trump's demonstrated disdain towards women. As Griffin concludes, "while Trump is not the first, only, or last U.S. president to engage in sexually violent behavior, he is the first to be elected with a viral video of patriarchal, sexist, and misogynistic commentary. He is also the first to blatantly capitalize on anti-intellectualism... to decry survivors of sexual violence, women, feminists, and protestors."²⁶ What would his presidency mean for the country, but most particularly, for women?

On the night following the election, "thousands of people protested in several cities, including Chicago, Philadelphia, Seattle, and New York, where demonstrators converged in Midtown Manhattan in front of Trump Tower, the home of the president-elect."²⁷ Continuing with this momentum, the Women's March took place the day after Trump was sworn into office. Originally, the march was to take place only in Washington, D.C., yet faced with some logistical challenges, cities across the country organized sister marches. To date, this was the most attended march in U.S. history. Crowd scientists estimate that nearly a half million demonstrators gathered on the Mall in Washington DC.²⁸ Marchers donned knitted pink "pussy hats," in reference to Trump's brag that he could "grab [her] by the pussy" without facing consequences, as they protested the new president whom they branded the "groper in chief."²⁹ The hats brought a visual consistency to the marches, as aerial images of the marches portray pink flowing through city streets.

Certainly, Trump was not the first presidential candidate to project hyper-masculinity. But the fact that Clinton was the first woman to be nominated by a major political party to run for president highlighted Trump's misogynistic speech acts. Similarly, Trump's absence of political experience emphasized Clinton's credentials. On paper, Clinton appeared to be one of the most prepared presidential candidates in U.S. history. Beginning her public service in the 1970s, Clinton worked with the Children's Defense Fund, served as First Lady, U.S. Senator, and finally, Secretary of State. In his endorsement, then President Obama stated, "In fact, I don't think there's ever been someone so qualified to hold this office."³⁰ She appeared to be prepared, polished, and near perfection. Then she lost to a man who had no political experience and refused to conform to presidential conventions. This is an experience with which many women can directly relate. In their study examining how gender shapes the way effort and success are recognized, Gorman and Kmec find that "across five surveys and three decades, women report greater required work effort in both Britain and the United States."³¹ Their study supported previous conclusions that women have to both work more and better in order to get the same recognition as men (if they get recognized at all).³²

Compounding personal experience, a prevalent political issue in 2016 was the wage gap. The wage gap reflected how women's earnings were 80 percent of men's earnings over the course of women's career.³³ This means that women had to work an additional 44 days in 2016 to earn the same as men. Compounded over the lifetime of a woman's 45-year professional career, she would have to work more than seven additional years to equal the earnings of her male counterpart. Thus, in addition to rising concerns over the effects Trump's administration would have on public and foreign policy, many women related personally with Clinton as she conceded the contest. Her struggle had been their struggle; her loss was their loss.

While advocates of gender equality would argue that gender is always an issue in political contests, the role of gender in the 2016 presidential election was explicit. As described above, Clinton's campaign emphasized the historical significance of her candidacy while Sanders's supporters, including the Bernie Bros, capitalized on Clinton's gender as a foundation for their criticism. The conclusion of the election reflected what Anderson has termed, the "female presidentiality paradox": "To be taken seriously as presidential candidates, women politicians must amass significant political experience, party support, and campaign funds. Once they do that, their political strength is portrayed as anti-democratic entitlement and their presidential aspirations as a manic desire for power."³⁴ In order for her candidacy to be seriously considered, Clinton had to demonstrate that she was beyond prepared for the position. Yet, her political preparation proved problematic. The female presidentiality paradox reflects women's experience for the past three decades: experience and expertise matter less than reproductive genitalia. Rachel Platten's "Fight Song," speaks of, and from, these conditions.

THIS IS OUR FIGHT SONG

Elizabeth Banks and producer/political activist Bruce Cohen began brainstorming about how they could work together to support Clinton when they crossed paths at a fundraiser in June 2016. In the 2008 presidential campaign, Cohen had produced with Jack Nicholson a Clinton endorsement video that had gone viral.³⁵ Together Banks and Cohen came up with the idea for a new video, based on Banks's recent projects, *Pitch Perfect* and *Pitch Perfect 2*.³⁶ As the convention drew closer, they decided on Rachel Platten's "Fight Song," as it "had become an unofficial anthem of the campaign in conjunction with the slogan 'Fighting for Us.'"³⁷

"Fight Song" had a full life before being adapted by Banks and Cohen. The song was not originally written about politics when it was released in 2015. Instead, Platten explains, "I wrote it 'cause I needed it. And I wrote it 'cause I needed that reminder and I needed hope. And maybe there was

this tiny place in my heart that I believed this could still happen. And the fact that it did is crazy.”³⁸ The song has been similarly therapeutic to people diagnosed with terminal illnesses. As reported by Newsweek, “With the hashtag #MyFightSong, fans post photos, videos and messages about their struggles, and Platten curates them online.”³⁹ Because the song had been so meaningful for many, Platten was nervous because she “knew the song meant a lot to a lot of people — and politics, no matter how important, divide us.”⁴⁰ However, she felt proud that the song could be used to contribute to Clinton’s run for the presidency: “I love that the song helped her. I feel like she’s a fighter, and I love that she got to take those words and make them feel like her own.”⁴¹

Banks introduced the video when she was hosting during the second night of the DNC. Cohen, who was also at the convention that night, reports that there was an “electric” response to the video.⁴² As described by opinion writer Kevin O’Keefe, the song met the emotional needs of the audience. It did not present a complex, nuanced recommendation for Clinton, but it did reflect the emotional state of her supporters. O’Keefe explains: “Yet the bold blandness that makes ‘Fight Song’ a perfect punchline also makes it ideal for Clinton’s campaign. The end of a political rally isn’t a time for nuance. It’s a time for pure emotion — in this case, enthusiasm with a knowing wink at the historical context of Clinton’s candidacy.”⁴³

The video was met with mixed reviews, however. Gerrick Kennedy, *Los Angeles Times* music writer, reported that he hated the song, characterizing it as “schmaltzy” and “forgettable.”⁴⁴ Others seem to not be able to forget how much they dislike the song, finding it boring, bland, or downright objectionable.⁴⁵ And, a review of the comments on YouTube.com reflect an impassioned hatred of both the song and Clinton.⁴⁶ As these critiques suggest, the success of the video has been mediocre. It certainly did not reach the viral status of previous campaign support videos like will.i.am.’s 2008 “Yes We Can,” musical adaptation of Obama’s concession speech in Nashua, New Hampshire. “Yes We Can,” earned a daytime Emmy and

Webby Award and has been viewed over twenty-one million times.⁴⁷ At the time of writing this chapter, “Fight Song,” has only been viewed three million times. The discrepancy between the two videos reflects a complicated relationship between user-generated videos and political campaign support.

PITCH PERFECT: MUSIC IN POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

As Schoening and Kasper explain in the Introduction to this book, music plays a pivotal role in political campaigns. It is an elixir that coalesces an audience into an entity who experiences a campaign message not so much as a rational argument, but through the senses. It is in this collective experience that the audience becomes a cohesive whole.⁴⁸ Vernallis expands on the sensorial nature of music by discussing the role that video plays in transforming an audience’s experience. She explains, “watching music video with a moving, charismatic body, I might experience changeable sentiment, kinesthetic expansion and contradiction, a dynamic sense of embodiment... a link forms between my body, the performer’s body, and the music coursing through them.”⁴⁹ With the transition to video, then, the music expands our corporeality. The rhetor and audience are no longer two separate entities, but rather, the rhetor is subsumed into the audience.

Kephart and Rafferty further examine how music videos generate identification. Evoking Burke in their analysis of will.i.am.’s 2008 “Yes We Can” music video, they argue that “visually and aurally, the video establishes consubstantiality between the crowd in New Hampshire, those in the studio, Obama himself, and by extension the American demos as they are distinct yet speak the same words.”⁵⁰ Echoing Vernallis, they suggest that the music video generates a transcendent identity where the rhetor(s) and the audience blend into each other. One of the ways that “Yes We Can” achieves this is through performative polyphony. Polyphony reflects music that is “composed or arranged for several voices or parts, each having a melody of its own.”⁵¹ Together with will.i.am.

and Obama, thirty-two celebrities combine to represent a singular choral performance. Obama's person as a singular leader dissolves, as the "we" generates the unified voice of the audience. Kephart and Rafferty conclude that while Obama becomes the voice of the people, the people become Obama's voice.⁵² As this research suggests, then, music videos have the rhetorical force to not only circulate a vision of a candidate's identity; but may fashion a powerful connection between the candidate and the citizenry via identification.

Michael Warner relates the phenomenal experience of consubstantiality (identification) as the generative function of public(ity). He states, "a public is a space of discourse organized by nothing other than discourse itself... it exists by *virtue of being addressed*."⁵³ Warner conceptualizes publics as being both personal and impersonal. They are impersonal in that a person may relate with the personae of the greater collective because there is an inherent and intuitive common relation between the members of the public. In so doing, a person casts off the uniqueness of their own person, and becomes a stranger amongst strangers. Yet, the experience is also personal. While we identify with the collective public, the experience resonates with us on the personal level. It is the personal that becomes the common characteristic that binds the public together.

Warner also points to the power of publicity in the circulation of discourse that constitutes us as public(s). This particularly resonates with the medium of music video. With the development of social media platforms that enable both the introduction of user-generated media and the continued circulation of that media, members of publics simultaneously address and are addressed. The sovereignty of the rhetor is absolved; instead, the public becomes the conduit. Thus, what matters is not the audience's identification with the speaker, per se, but the audience's identification with itself.

Kephart and Rafferty advise scholars to "recognize that the casting and recasting of campaign argument stabilizes at times but remains dynamic over the course of campaigns, and not simply within campaign

events.”⁵⁴ In other words, a public’s experience is not limited to a campaign event. The meaning may temporarily stabilize and be experienced as the punctuated event, but the discourse may not be tamed. It becomes integrated into the network and re-presented; and in its re-presentation, it evolves. Similarly, a public is not a static entity. It is the personal experience of stranger sociability that is perpetually advancing.

In sum, music, but particularly music videos, create the conditions for revolutionizing the message of political campaigns. They engender transformative consubstantiality that brings the rhetor and audience into one singular public. The candidate is no longer the voice of the people, because the candidate *is* the people. This development absolves the sovereignty of the rhetor, who in this case is the political campaign, for developing and publicizing the candidate’s message. The music video thus democratizes the political rhetoric.

FIGHT NIGHT

“Fight Song” begins with Elizabeth Banks, alluding to Clinton’s iconic pantsuit by wearing a blazer. Standing in front of a green screen she fixes her Clinton 2016 campaign lapel pin and states, “this is for Hillary.” In line with both the campaign’s central message and in the public vernacular, Banks identifies Clinton by her first instead of her last name (as is common in political campaigns). This immediately orients the relationship between Clinton and the audience as being more personal than political. Further, we are brought into the apparent relationship between Banks and Clinton. We are all on a first-name basis with Clinton because she is not just the Democratic nominee for president, she is our friend, our confidant; she is us.

The video continues in an a cappella style, establishing beat and rhythm, before Rachel Platten herself begins to sing. Seconds after Platten begins, the screen splits into three, bringing in the video of voices providing background. Each frame is in a color block, with the presenter in close up

facing the camera. The connection with the audience is both immediate and intimate. We are face to face with the singers, and as the screens split and slide, it is difficult to distinguish one from the next. The voices multiply but the tune remains singular as many voices converge into one. Platten herself contributes to this transition, as she is presented as beat boxing. She relinquishes her centrality to become one of many.⁵⁵ The conversion from one individual into the chorus of singers invites the audience to understand themselves not as singular persons, but as a collective public in sync with the performers. The audience is thus invited to draw on their collective gendered experience as they participate in the song's meaning making.

The video continues, as recognizable actors and musicians sing in chorus with everyday citizens, each taking up their own "block" on the screen. In contrast, the chorus begins with Hana Mae Lee of *Pitch Perfect* taking up the entire screen. She does not have the same color block as the others, so we read her as presenting from outside the studio, likely having recorded her contribution from home. As she begins the chorus we are presented with the revised lyrics: "this is *our* fight song." Exchanging "my" for "our" culminates the transformative moment for the audience. The audience's identification with the video is intensified until they are interpellated into the discourse. Indeed, this is *their* fight song.⁵⁶ The sovereignty of Rachel Platten as the song's author and the multitude of celebrities as performers fades as the audience mutates into the position of rhetor.

Contemporary women's issues during the campaign—such as sexism in politics, the wage gap, and sexual violence—are called forth in this interpellation. In the pop-like enthusiasm of the chorus, the audience recognizes their own publicized voice. The cultural conditions that reinforce women's oppression become embodied and palpable (rhythmic, even). It is not Clinton who is looking to take back her life, but rather, her audience, who have synchronously played their "woman card." The chorus's major key conveys not only the rightness of the audience's

emotional connection, but the belief that they can now, more than ever before, take back their life that has been held hostage by sexism.

Breaking into the middle of the video, Ester Dean (also of *Pitch Perfect*) presents us with the second revision to the song. In her rap, she connects the emotion of “Fight Song” with the present moment:

It take a village to raise a child,
 Prepare 'em to run the nation.
 We got some hard choices but
 Together we gonna make it.
 We livin' in history,
 America take a bow.
 We 'bout to show the world, ya,
 Women are equal now.⁵⁷

The verse connects the audience to the historical relevance of the campaign. While the first line alludes to Clinton's book *It Takes a Village* that was published in 1996 during her tenure as First Lady, it transcends the reference. The child here is not any child, but Clinton herself. And the village reflects her audience. In this relationship, Clinton is not a representative of the electorate; it is meant to signify that the electorate is Clinton. This is not her fight; this is our fight.

As the video continues, the audience is presented with their collective narrative that resonates particularly with women. In this verse, the collective me/we instantiates the audience as a public, one that shares a common experience:

Losing friends and I'm chasing sleep
 Everybody's worried about me
 In too deep
 Say I'm in too deep (in too deep)
 And it's been two years I miss my home
 But there's a fire burning in my bones
 Still believe
 Yeah, I still believe⁵⁸

This verse vocalizes women's experience. In the context of the convention, the lyrics express the effort and emotion involved in the battle for acknowledgment and recognition waged by women. As reflected by one convention attendee, Wanda Francis, it is "very hard to describe what it means. But yesterday when she was nominated I never, ever thought I'd see the day. It was very emotional. We women have worked so hard to get where we are today. Once she gets to the White House, the doors will be wide open for us." Working towards a goal that is always just out of reach, as men are lauded for doing less. It reflects the commitment and sacrifice of eschewing the traditional role of womanhood by exchanging relationships for personal success. While we lose friends and chase sleep, we believe that the purpose of our work justifies the sacrifice. And we believe that this work is revolutionary; it will produce real change. If Clinton is elected president, then we, too, may realize our own agency.

Importantly, the video is composed of diverse participants. A spectrum of gender, sexuality, and different races and nationalities identify with this fight (song). This visual representation impresses upon us that identifying with gender is not limited to women. As strangers in this public, we are called to recognize our collective struggle towards equality and justice for all. Gender thus serves as a synecdoche of oppression.

The video continues with a brief presentation of singular singers, reminding us that this collective impersonal experience is our personal experience. The use of polyphony here invites audience members to relate the song to their experiences. As described by Beausoleil, polyphony engenders an emancipatory style of multiplicity.⁵⁹ Because meaning is not fixed or exhaustive, audience members may find the song reflecting their personal, yet varied, stories. It matters less that the characters, antagonists, or arcs are different; what matters is that individual audience members find a communal truth in the song's expression. The multiplication of meaning is enhanced as a young boy wearing a Clinton T-shirt is presented with a black frame surrounding the expanding image as he sings, "sending big waves, into motion."⁶⁰ Instead of being sung by

multiple voices, this phrase reflects multiple meanings. Historically, the feminist movement has been described through the metaphor of “wave.” Yet the plurality of waves again calls us to read this as a collective endeavor of a public, and not limited to a singular movement. And, curiously, the song itself combines the metaphors of both water and fire (elements that have the power to create or destroy). What effect will these waves bring? Lastly, the waves symbolically represent the many as one. Not as a movement, but as persons of a public.

Finally, the video concludes with the symphony of voices, singing the collective fight song. Their faces lose focus as they blend with each other into an image of the U.S. flag, signaling once more that the audience belongs to this greater public whose narrative is that of struggle.⁶¹ It is also worth noting that the singers’ performances become increasingly expressive. Rather than composed articulations, the singers dance and clap. As Vernallis reminds us, with this “dynamic sense of embodiment... a link forms between my body, the performer’s body, and the music coursing through them.”⁶² There is no longer any distinction between audience and speaker, we are one, singular sensational public.

Although the video concludes, the fight song has the capacity to continue in social media. Yet, unlike will.i.am.’s “Yes We Can,” our fight song fizzles into more of a mild disagreement. Its circulation is sluggish, at best. One of the important differences between “Yes We Can,” and “Fight Song” is the apparent connection to the political campaign itself. While Banks and Cohen produced the video, it was presented at the DNC and then published by the DNC on YouTube.com. It is difficult to distinguish if this was an official campaign message, or one generated and circulated by a public. Coincidentally, the video is imbued with the same limitations as Clinton’s campaign. It is professionally prepared, too polished, too perfect. While will.i.am. also professionally produced his video, it remained by and of the public—not part of the political aristocracy.

CONCLUSIONS

“Fight Song” reflects a critical transition in the use of music and music videos in political campaigns. The song itself constitutes a public whose narrative of struggle is evidenced by gender oppression. It balances the personal and impersonal in the generation of a collective identity. Its kinesthetic presentation envelops the audience with emotion. The experience becomes transformative because, while the rationality of facts and issues matter much for any presidential election, it is the emotional identification with the candidate that resonates with the electorate. “Fight Song,” thus demonstrates the visceral force of the music video. It fuses the audience with the speaker, resulting in a collective embodied expression. If done well, this approach has the potential to carry a campaign’s message to listeners. More importantly, user-generated websites like YouTube.com empower citizens to participate in this public conversation in new ways. As technology advances and the populace becomes more savvy in video production, the average individual may take on a new role in shaping a candidate’s identity, engendering a powerful and consequential identification between the candidate and their constituency.

However, the video also demonstrates its own limitations. As it was appropriated by the Clinton campaign, it was no longer the voice of the public *by* the public. Campaigns should register this experience, and recognize that user-generated music videos must be just that, user-generated. While the “Yes We Can” anthem of Obama’s campaign may have worked, it worked because it did not carry the ghost of the establishment. When “Fight Song” was appropriated by the Clinton campaign, it reaffirmed the sovereignty of the campaign’s message.

Perhaps this is a final casualty of Clinton’s gender. An overriding issue for Clinton during this campaign was her carefully constructed public personae. Having been in the public eye for the majority of her life, Clinton became expert at navigating the gendered land mines in public discourse. To avoid all risk, Clinton’s presentation of herself was

calculated and controlled. Arguably, her campaign could not risk a user-generated message taking center stage in the convention or in public discourse in the way that Obama's campaign could.

In its entirety, this experience is one that would most resonate with older generations of women like Generation X or baby boomers, who have similarly faced scrutiny in their personal lives. As Richardson points out, "'Fight Song' has its strongest appeal in women's struggle for equality."⁶³ For these groups, the professional polish of the video reflects their need to be perfect, polished, and over prepared for any professional experience in order to be taken seriously. Yet, while these generations may be skilled at navigating technology, it is not an extension of their person in the way that it is with millennials and the iGeneration. As a result, the medium, the message, and the public are too dissonant for the full force of this music video to be realized.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

“WEAPONS OF MASS DISTRACTION”

MUSIC, TRUMP, AND DEMOCRACY

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INTRODUCTION

In early October 2015, excited fans lined up outside the Mystère Theater to attend presidential candidate Donald Trump’s rally in Las Vegas. As if at a concert, would-be bouncers stood guard as those lucky to make it in had their hands stamped. Music blared inside—an eclectic mix of classic rock, show tunes, and the aria “Nessun Dorma,” from the opera *Turandot*. The spectacle ramped up with the arrival of Robert Ensler, a Trump impersonator. And then at noon, surrounded by cameras, Trump appeared. A female attendee in the crowd waved an edition of *People* magazine, the cover emblazoned with the man himself. Like a rock star, Trump called the woman to the stage. She yelled, “I’m Hispanic, and I vote for Mr. Trump!” As the event came to a close, Trump air-drummed, accompanied by Aerosmith’s “Dream On.”¹

During Trump's campaign, music and politics collided in a myriad of ways. His campaign stops, as in Las Vegas, could resemble any other hot-ticket entertainment extravaganza, and he himself seemed a star, behaving like a celebrity-performer. But Trump, in unique ways, also found himself at odds with music. During his campaign, many in the musical world protested Trump in various ways for a variety of reasons. And the candidate, at times, seemingly fanned the flames. In this chapter, I argue that these high-profile feuds ultimately served to distract the masses from key political issues and policy discussion. With reference to Kathleen Hall Jamieson's *Dirty Politics*² as well as Henry A. Giroux's *The Violence of Organized Forgetting*,³ I expose the ways in which music became a distracting side-show, pulling attention away from substantive political policy and, on a larger level, the democratic process. Music in some ways allowed for its role as such. Music frustrates attempts of ownership, resisting control. In the 2016 election, music then played both sides—as opposition against Trump and, in the end, support of his strategy (intentioned or otherwise) of distraction.

TRUMP AND MUSIC BEFORE THE CAMPAIGN

Never has a candidate for the U.S. presidency had such a controversial relationship to music, even from his formative years. In Trump's origin story, recorded in his *The Art of the Deal*, Trump cites an early confrontation with music: "Even in elementary school, I was a very assertive, aggressive kid. In the second grade I actually gave a teacher a black eye—I punched my music teacher because I didn't think he knew anything about music and I almost got expelled."⁴ (The supposed recipient of Trump's violence has since said the incident never happened.⁵) Trump's unique positioning of music continued into adulthood. But, in his *Trump: Think Like a Billionaire*, Trump cast music in another role—that of symbol alone, a stand-in for wealth—with a picture of Trump sitting at a white grand piano, his wife, Melania, in a tight black dress,

perched atop the instrument, on display. The caption: “Life at the top is exactly as it seems—wonderful!”

Trump’s interpretation of song further complicates this musical relationship. For example, in tapes released by the *New York Times*, with interviews by journalist Michael D’Antonio for the 2014 biography *The Truth About Trump*, Trump indicates some interest in music when he names his favorite song, “Is That All There Is”: “It’s a great song because I’ve had these tremendous successes and then I’m off to the next one. Because, it’s like, ‘Oh, is that all there is?’”⁶ His understanding of the song is arguably far from the mark. The lyrics, penned by Jerry Leiber, concern disillusionment and existential crisis. As such, the song’s composer Mike Stoller was inspired to set the text to music in the spirit of Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht—recognizing a link between the text and “the bittersweet irony of the German cabaret.”⁷ Perhaps Trump’s misinterpretation of music is unsurprising, given how some musical artists have viewed him. Bruce Springsteen, among others, has called him “unreflective,” hinting that deeper rumination would be impossible.⁸ And Trump also seems to be as literally tone deaf as he is metaphorically, as evidenced by his recorded mangling of the song “Take Me Out to the Ballgame.”⁹ Still, Trump, in his *Trump: Think Like a Billionaire*, makes it clear that music is personal: “If you love a certain kind of music, don’t let other people’s tastes influence your own. Whatever’s the best for you is the best. Never forget that.”¹⁰ Perhaps such sentiment extends to other people’s version and interpretation of music as well.

MUSICIANS AND THE TRUMP PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

During the campaign itself, Trump’s often tense relationship with musicians became decidedly confrontational. There was Nipsey Hussle’s “F*** Donald Trump”¹¹ and *The Daily Show*’s “Black Trump,” which highlighted the parallels between rap and Trump’s bragging and perceived disrespect for women.¹² Then, there was a seemingly never-ending parade of protests from musicians taking issue with the candidate’s use

of their music on the campaign trail. The opposition included R.E.M., who challenged Trump's broadcast of "It's the End of the World As We Know It (And I Feel Fine)." As CNN reporter Holly Yan quipped, "Donald Trump has been blaring R.E.M. on the campaign trail, and the band doesn't feel fine about it."¹³ Singer Adele objected to use of both her "Rolling in the Deep" and "Skyfall," also the theme for the 2012 James Bond film. In October 2016, she told fans on stage at Miami's American Airlines Arena that she supported Trump's rival, Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, then in the audience, "100 percent." She said, "I do know what to do—don't vote for him, that's all I'm saying."¹⁴ Neil Young likewise made clear his political preferences, noting his support of Bernie Sanders after Trump announced his candidacy with the singer's "Rockin' in the Free World." Aerosmith's lead singer Steven Tyler sought legal counsel to counter Trump's reliance on "Dream On." But he did so in part to support a musician's right to fair compensation. He wrote, "My intent was not to make a political statement, but to make one about the rights of my fellow music creators."¹⁵

This fight, in the summer of 2016, grew quite noisy in Cleveland, the home of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, during the Republican National Convention, which took place in the city alongside the Hall's exhibit "Louder Than Words: Rock, Power and Politics." While the group Third Eye Blind issued a concert call "for tolerance and science"—a sonic bomb directed on site at Trump¹⁶—the candidate put together his own musical arsenal, to the dismay of the featured artists. On July 20, 2016, Trump arrived via helicopter to broadcast music from the movie *Air Force One*. Producer Gail Katz shot back: "The music for *Air Force One* was composed and conducted by the legendary Oscar-winning film composer Jerry Goldsmith. Jerry's music was hijacked in a misguided attempt to associate Trump with the film and the President in that film."¹⁷ Goldsmith's former agent, Richard Kraft, added, "Goldsmith composed music to underscore a make-believe, heroic president in [*Air Force One*], not to help create a phony soundtrack for Trump. He would have been appalled to have his music selling a product he would greatly dislike."¹⁸ Adding to the throng,

The Rolling Stones, who were particularly popular on the Trump playlist —“Sympathy for the Devil,” “You Can’t Always Get What You Want,” “Brown Sugar,” and “Start Me Up”—protested their convention use: “The Rolling Stones do not endorse Donald Trump. ‘You Can’t Always Get What You Want’ was used without permission.” Leaving the stage after his victory speech, Trump would again use the Stones’ classic, “as if to rub salt in the wounds of Democrats.”¹⁹ Trump also ignored the wishes of the group Queen after guitarist Brian May, in June 2016, explained that the band would “never give permission” to Trump to use the popular “We Are the Champions.” At the convention, Trump took the stage to the song’s strains, surrounded by a cloud of dry ice. The band posted on Twitter: “An unauthorized use at the Republican Convention against our wishes.”²⁰ The family of the Beatles’ George Harrison focused attention on Trump’s daughter, denouncing Ivanka Trump’s “Here Comes the Sun” convention appearance. Singer Elton John, quite popular at Trump events in Indiana, was perhaps the only artist to offer Trump a few alternatives: the candidate, he said, should use “one of those f*cking country stars” instead of his “Tiny Dancer.”²¹ Though Trump had some musicians on his side, including Ted Nugent and Kid Rock, Benjamin S. Schoening and Eric T. Kaspar were more than right when they predicted in 2012, “Celebrities will... continue to fight back against candidates who would use their songs without permission...”²² Perhaps more than any other presidential candidate in history, Donald Trump faced a deluge of musical artists countering his use of their music on the campaign trail.

Even at the very start of his campaign, in June 2015, Trump found himself embroiled in a musical fight. After announcing his presidential bid, and in the direct aftermath of Trump’s characterization of Mexican immigrants as drug dealers and rapists, Colombian singer J Balvin bailed on a performance at the Trump-owned Miss USA pageant.²³ The following summer, singer The Weeknd and rapper Belly reacted similarly. After learning Trump would also appear that evening, they pulled out of *Jimmy Kimmel Live!*, citing what they saw as Trump’s bigotry.²⁴

In some ways, these latter musicians protested in a rather simple way. They were able to use their physical presence, or absence, as protest. But, for musicians on Trump's campaign playlist, such direct opposition was not always an option. Trump still had the recording or a cover band. For their boycott to work—and to disassociate themselves from Trump and his ideas—musicians then needed Trump to cooperate with them and stop playing their music.

In the past, candidates have typically done just that. Republicans are no stranger to musical resistance, so much so that there is a particular, assumed connection between music and the Democratic Party. Max Espinosa, the curator of the exhibit in Cleveland, explained, "Rock and roll is a lefty medium."²⁵ Journalist Jazz Shaw counted only two instances of musicians countering a Democratic candidate's use of their music.²⁶ In one, Singer Sam Moore opposed Barack Obama's 2008 use of "Hold On, I'm Comin'," explaining, "I have not agreed to endorse you for the highest office in our land... My vote is a very private matter between myself and the ballot box."²⁷ When faced with the negative public relations, candidates, Democratic and Republican, have traditionally acquiesced to the musicians. After Moore's objection, Obama stopped using the song; Mitt Romney, to name but one Republican example, pulled the song "Eye of the Tiger" after outcry from one of its composers, Frankie Sullivan, a former member of Survivor.²⁸ Due to swift action by these past presidential candidates, it can easily be argued that no real damage was done to the musical artists. As Lawrence Iser, a copyright lawyer in Los Angeles, explained, "What did you get? You got some publicity. You got a takedown letter. Typically, the campaigns would stop using the piece."²⁹ Trump, defiant, took a different route; he ignored the objection or, at other times, dove directly into the fray—insulting the artists. Responding to Steven Tyler, Trump fired, "Steven Tyler got more publicity on his song request than he's gotten in ten years."³⁰ Trump also made it clear that he didn't need "Dream On": he had found a "better one to take its place."³¹ "Didn't love it anyway," he tweeted of Neil Young's "Rockin' in the Free World."³² Faced with a perceived slight, he launched his own

attack. The musical world was experiencing Trump’s style of “never backing down or apologizing”— part of the Trump “brand,” according to civil rights attorney Alan Dershowitz.³³

The most common legal recourse for musicians in such a situation is a charge of copyright infringement. Many articles have discussed this most obvious option in light of Trump.³⁴ Did Trump’s people purchase the rights to have this music played at his event? If not, the musician has a strong legal case against the candidate for copyright violation.

Still, if Trump did hold the rights, a second legal strategy existed, though it is typically seen as less fruitful: a charge of trademark infringement. The charge implies that the performer of an iconic song leaves an aural mark—the song thereby becomes a symbol of the performer’s identity. This logic makes some sense. We often connect a song to the performer as some sort of honest confession by that performer (whether or not he or she wrote the song or has legal ownership of the song). The performer is then equated with the song. In a campaign, the playing of such an iconic song can then do more than fire up the crowd. It can imply a false endorsement, as if the performer were somehow there explicitly offering the song as an implied approval of the proceedings. Dee Snider, of Twisted Sister, recognized this effect and called Trump directly: “Man, you’ve gotta stop using the song. People think I’m endorsing you here. I can’t get behind a lot of what you’re saying.”³⁵ The trademark issue was also part of a cease-and-desist letter sent to counter Trump’s use of Aerosmith’s song “Dream On.” In it, lawyers for the group’s lead singer Steven Tyler insisted that the playing of the song “gives a false impression” that Tyler endorses Trump for president.³⁶

For Jazz Shaw, however, the trademark claim was “dubious at best.”³⁷ Kimberlianne Podlas, in the *Fordham Intellectual Property, Media and Entertainment Law Journal*, clarifies the problem, arguing that the charge of trademark infringement would not work in the political realm for a very basic reason. The charge itself depends on commerce: “First and fundamentally, since a politician is not engaged in commerce, there is no

commercial matter and no consumers involved.” But this Podlas wrote in 2013, before Trump’s full political ascendancy. With Trump, politics is arguably big business. He, by his own account, is a maverick businessman. His presidential run was in many ways built on his supposed business acumen.³⁸ And on the campaign trail, he managed to easily mix politics and commerce, even plugging his brand—from Trump wine to Trump steaks.³⁹ Potentially then, the charge of trademark infringement could have had some merit in a case against Trump, more merit than would be typical for a traditional candidate for public office.

Nevertheless, a more common means of protest during the 2016 election ignored the rule of law entirely, instead appealing to emotion alone. After Trump (and Texas Senator Ted Cruz) used at a rally R.E.M.’s “It’s the End of the World...”, the group’s Michael Stipe said in a statement tweeted by the band’s bassist Mike Mills, “Go fuck yourselves, you sad, attention-grabbing, power-hungry little men.”⁴⁰ No argument, just outrage and insult. Another emotional response accompanied the family of Luciano Pavarotti’s denunciation of Trump’s playing of the singer’s iconic rendition of the aria “Nessun Dorma” (“None Shall Sleep”), from the opera *Turandot*. The family had explained that Trump’s call for a temporary ban on immigration was at odds with Pavarotti’s work, before his death in 2007, on behalf of refugees.⁴¹ As the campaign wore on, classically trained musician Steven Krage could hold his tongue no longer. On August 2, in *Chicago Now*, he wrote the following:

I am moved to tears because this music, which is my very life’s blood, is being used to bolster the image of a monster. He has defiled the sanctity of art, as he has defiled the rights of women, minorities, and the disabled. The fact that this aria could be playing while Trump ridiculed a handicapped reporter with a nerve condition or telling another to “go back to *Telemundo!*” is almost too much for me to bear.⁴²

Though he cited an insightful piece on Slate.com—one that ties *Turandot* to fascism⁴³—Krage nonetheless barreled forward: “I believe it’s time for

the opera community, and the artistic community in general, to speak out as much as we can about Trump glomming onto our life’s work and using it for his smear campaign.”⁴⁴

Krage, reacting emotionally to Trump, may have sought to protect his lofty sense of self, his virtue, by distancing his art from Trump. But such a technique is based on faulty logic. Opera is not above Trump, and, more than that, may have significant relevance in the context of Trump’s presidential campaign. Despite ideas from the nineteenth century that classical music is somehow transcendent, exalted, and exalting, classical music can in fact function in many ways, including negative ones. As Catherine Clément has chronicled, women are especially vulnerable to violence in opera—often dying, killed off, in music.⁴⁵ In a recent conference panel of the American Musicological Society, several scholars, including Suzanne Cusick, recognized the specific place of rape in this staged mistreatment of women.⁴⁶ With Trump’s taped admission of sexual aggression toward women,⁴⁷ musicologist Bonnie Gordon highlighted opera’s then particular connection to Trump in “What *Don Giovanni*, an Opera About a Charismatic Rapist, Can Teach Us About Don Trump.”⁴⁸ I did so as well in the article “Why Opera Is the Perfect Soundtrack for Donald Trump’s Campaign.”⁴⁹ In *The Washington Post*, I drew parallels between the opulence of opera and the perceived luxury of the Trump brand. I also highlighted a similar focus in Trump and the opera *Turandot* on winning at all costs, violence no exception. Despite Krage’s outcry, Trump is in these ways arguably operatic.⁵⁰

A METHOD TO THE MADNESS?: MUSIC AS DISTRACTION

But the musical outcry against Trump had greater ills than a misplaced defense of music or this overlooked affinity between music and Trump. Music may have in fact had a dual and dueling role during the campaign—as a tool of Trump’s opposition but also a tool in Trump’s own election arsenal. Opposition like Krage’s worked for Krage, but also for Trump.

It was, in short, a distraction, undermining full engagement with the democratic process.

The term “democracy” resists singular definition. Political scientist Charles Hersch, however, recognizes “core values” “at the center of all conceptions of democracy”: “popular control of government; respect for individuality; civil rights and liberties; and dialogue about ideas.”⁵¹ In *Democratic Artworks*, Hersch examines examples of works that support these aspects of democracy (music as well as other types of art).⁵² A recent symposium at the University of Huddersfield in Great Britain entitled “Finding Democracy in Music” similarly explored the connections between music and democracy based on a premise: “For a century and more musicians have sought to relate their practice to the value of democracy.” Musicians have indeed long identified a connection between music and democracy. The very playing of music in choirs and orchestras has been assumed democratic. As Jere T. Humphreys writes, the “participatory practices in music reflect increasing egalitarianism in society.”⁵³ Music can also enhance that egalitarianism, addressing in education “particular cultural blind spots.”⁵⁴ Likewise, practitioners of specific genres—such as protest song or free jazz—have hoped to effect positive change through music, change reflective of democratic values.⁵⁵ In short, as Hersch argues, music can participate in democracy—as comment, a voice in the democratic dialogue, as well as in the promotion of engagement with these ideals and ideas. The latter can be influenced by representations in music of a current reality, allowing “people to more fully experience social and political conditions as they are.”⁵⁶ The communal aspect of music only enhances this awareness as a mass experience or movement.

But the element of group participation in music can also work toward opposite ends, drawing its audiences away from productive engagement and toward destructive ends. Music may then reinforce anti-democratic values, or promote general passivity.⁵⁷ Plato in this way recognized a connection between musical order and political order. The wrong

music, musical disorder, could then undermine a functioning, ordered democracy.⁵⁸ More recently, Hersch observed, “what gives artworks a unique capacity for democratic political education is their engagement of the senses. Yet this engagement carries the potential to undermine democracy as well, encouraging the submergence of the individual into the collective at the expense of democratic values, or pulling citizens away from politics, leaving the political realm to an elite.”⁵⁹ Referencing Leni Riefenstahl’s infamous film *Triumph of the Will*, he continued, “Ironically, artworks may undermine democracy precisely because of their ability to create shared experience.”⁶⁰

During the 2016 election, Trump’s musical feuds ultimately worked in this way—as a unique example of music’s potential to undermine democracy—distracting the media and voters alike. In addition to the examples above, there is evidence post-election that this strategy continued, likely in an effort to position President-elect Trump to govern. Indeed, even after his surprise presidential win, Trump feuded with the cast of the musical *Hamilton*. After the cast read a message directly to Vice President-elect Mike Pence, Trump tweeted on November 19, 2016: “The Theater must always be a safe and special place. The cast of Hamilton was very rude last night to a very good man, Mike Pence. Apologize!”⁶¹ With the weight of the world set for his shoulders, he took on music once again. Why?

In a telling interview several days later on CNN with Richard Quest, Seth Grossman, who looked at the election through his experience as a reality television producer, connected this new feud to a specific role: distraction. He had previously explained that “Donald Trump is the presidential candidate that reality TV made” and, vice versa: Trump had turned the presidential election into good reality television—with chaos and obvious friction.⁶² With the *Hamilton* feud as well as an ongoing battle with *Saturday Night Live*, Trump had found a way, according to Grossman, to create “a big distraction... from the policy implication” of his recent cabinet picks. He had found a way to “control the discourse.”⁶³ As CNN’s Jake Tapper insisted, the *Hamilton* tweets were “weapons of mass

distraction.” Paul Farhi picked up the story, asking in *The Washington Post*, “Were Tump’s ‘Hamilton’ tweets ‘weapons of mass distraction’?”⁶⁴ Farhi offered his own evidence in affirmation, “Just as questions were mounting about Trump’s appointments, his business conflicts, his \$25 million fraud-case settlement—bam!—Trump had everyone talking about something else.”⁶⁵

The same point can be made of Trump’s meeting with rapper Kanye West the following month, on December 13, 2016. While the press may not have categorized earlier musical feuds as distraction, Kanye arguably worked as the proverbial last straw. Katie Rogers, in the *New York Times*, explained, “Mr. West’s visit was probably a welcome one for the president-elect. It came hours after Mr. Trump’s late-night announcement on Monday that he would refrain from any new business deals with his real estate company while in the Oval Office.” She continued, “In addition, the focus this past week has been on Mr. Trump’s potential conflicts of interest as president, which would include the growing cadre of billionaires and multimillionaires he wants to install in his cabinet. There is also substantial interest around his choice for secretary of state: Rex W. Tillerson, the chief executive of Exxon Mobil, who has friendly ties with the Russians.”⁶⁶ Musician John Legend viewed the meeting similarly: “I think Kanye was a publicity stunt.” He ultimately expressed disappointment in Kanye for allowing himself to be used as such.⁶⁷ This distraction was especially effective as it played with high-profile contemporaneous news about Kanye himself, a public meltdown, and issues regarding his very public Kardashian wife/life.

On January 15, 2017, Amanda Hess observed, “A few weeks after the election of Donald J. Trump, pundits with their eyes glued to Twitter believed they’d finally deciphered the master plan behind the president-elect’s tweeting. Every time he detonated a culture-war bomb on Twitter, they suspected, it was a sly bid to divert the public eye from more serious news about his impending administration.”⁶⁸ While the press was in this way a bit late in outing Trump’s ongoing strategy of

distraction, there were some who seemed aware of music’s use to this end during the campaign. Though band member Mills reacted emotionally to Trump, R.E.M. as a whole issued the following statement:

While we do not authorize or condone the use of our music at this political event, and do ask that these candidates cease and desist from doing so, let us remember that there are things of greater importance at stake here. The media and the American voter should focus on the bigger picture, and not allow grandstanding politicians to distract us from the pressing issues of the day and of the current Presidential campaign.⁶⁹

Distraction through music has arguably been one of the few consistencies in the era of Trump—one that endured in stories concerning his trouble finding musicians to perform at the inauguration (although he did eventually find some⁷⁰). But the general strategy for political candidates is not new. As Kathleen Hall Jamieson wrote in 1992 in *Dirty Politics*, amazingly prescient of political trends, “Candidates divert public and press attention from legitimate issues by calculated strategies of distraction.”⁷¹ She further wrote, “Increasingly, campaigns have become narcotics that blur our awareness of problems long enough to elect the lawmakers who must deal with them.”⁷² In “The Art of Distraction,” Thomas J. Cottle too identified the power of distraction within American culture more generally, including presidential elections: “It is generally acknowledged that powerful American industries—the government, public relations, the communications media, and various entertainment businesses—depend in part on satisfying our need to be distracted. We need only look to presidential elections to see how politicians, campaign managers, and so-called spin-doctors work to distract us from the issues that ought to be the substance of our political ruminations.”⁷³ Many candidates in the modern era use this technique to some extent. Reporter Jack Shafer even accused Hillary Clinton of a similar ploy, citing her condemnation of distraction as her own means of distraction.⁷⁴ Another reporter, Jonathan Chait, connected Trump’s tweeting to past, conservative attempts to distract. When Trump announced on Twitter that those who burn the

flag should suffer “loss of citizenship or year in jail,” Chait dubbed it a “strange fight,” a “classic right-wing nationalist distraction.”⁷⁵ More recently, cultural critic Henry A. Giroux folded the strategy into a general trend and described it in far harsher terms, “Undermining life-affirming social solidarities and any viable notion of the public good, politicians trade in forms of idiocy and superstition that seem to mesmerize the undereducated and render the thoughtful cynical and disengaged.”⁷⁶

Some wonder how strategic Trump has been in this regard,⁷⁷ the suggestion being that a seeming strategy may just be a result of Trump’s deep-seated need and narcissism. Obsessed with his television ratings, like “a Hollywood social climber,”⁷⁸ he may simply enjoy the attention and recognition—something hard to sidestep in the aftermath of the widespread notice paid “covfefe,” his apparent Twitter typo.⁷⁹ Or, as others suggest, Trump may also lack impulse control: Instead of following a given plan, Trump just has trouble controlling himself, responding via Twitter as he watches television.⁸⁰

Still, the effect has been the same. Discussing the “covfefe” tweet, Callum Borchers observes, “Every minute spent dissecting ‘covfefe’ is a minute not spent talking about the Russia investigation or the resignation of the White House communications director or why the heck the president would want to pick a fight with Germany.”⁸¹ There has been disproportionate news coverage of Trump in general. Reflecting on the election, David Folkenflik wrote, “From pretty much the very start of this election season, Donald Trump grabbed the media by the press pass. He didn’t even wait.”⁸² And within that, musical feuds or musical controversy involving Trump have been especially prominent, often overshadowing weightier pieces about policy and governance. As Jamieson explained, “Visual, dramatic moments are more likely than talking heads to get news play.”⁸³ Some news coverage of Trump’s use of music focused on the particulars of the music involved—how it was used or the choice itself. Of “Rockin’ in the Free World,” Adam B. Lerner wrote, “The song was an odd choice for a Republican campaign. Released in

1989, Young’s lyrics touch on downtrodden and impoverished Americans disaffected after the election of Ronald Reagan’s vice president, George H.W. Bush, to the presidency in 1988.”⁸⁴ But the majority concentrated on conflict—the musician’s outrage of Trump’s counter-attack. As Matthew Yglesias, with Vox, observed, “The *Hamilton* blow-up—because it’s easy to understand, bizarre, and connects with a pop culture phenomenon—has naturally ended up getting the bulk of the news pickup.”⁸⁵ This dominance has repercussions, influencing the import citizens assign world events; greater coverage correlates in many minds with greater import. Jamieson wrote, “When asked to identify the most important problems facing the country, respondents usually report those things recently featured in the news.”⁸⁶ In this way, readers are, in Giroux’s words, “mesmerized.” Rather than engagement that matters, the masses are taken in by musical issues of little consequence to governance. According to Yglesias, controversies such as the *Hamilton* feud are in no “way important to how he runs the country.”⁸⁷

CONCLUSIONS

To be sure, music has played important roles in the democratic process, even during the 2016 election. Lin-Manuel Miranda and other stars from *Hamilton*, for example, created a song urging Americans to vote. Lyrics include: “There’s nothing Americans love more than posting online who you should vote for. You tweet and you snap and you gawk, but if you don’t show up and vote, it’s all just talk.”⁸⁸ But, at the same time, music—Trump’s feuds and the insults involved—has worked to distract, as a means of disconnection. Rather than fostering engagement with democratic values, music, during the 2016 election, arguably pulled people’s attention elsewhere. And it continues to do so post-election. After Trump spent a weekend admonishing NFL players who protest during the singing of the national anthem, reporter James Pindell, in September 2017, called out the approach: “It’s a tried and true strategy for President Trump — and candidate Trump before that: When the news

gets bad it's time to find a distraction."⁸⁹ In 1992, Jamieson sounded the alarm, "The public and the body politic are ill-served if discourse is driven by drama rather than data..."⁹⁰ We should all rise up—holding tight to hope as a "subversive force."⁹¹

But, for Trump, the strategy succeeded; Trump was able to use music to his benefit. At campaign events, music united and inspired his supporters while the related feuds worked to help Trump control the public discourse.

In this way, Trump has had an increasingly fraught relationship with music. Alongside the unprecedented musical opposition, Trump has somehow found a way to exploit music toward his own ends. In *The New Yorker*, Adam Gopnik surveyed Trump's difficulty finding musicians who would perform at his inauguration. He concluded, "There is no music in this man."⁹² But perhaps the picture is more complicated. Perhaps Trump is in some way musical, or at least sensitive to music's use and exploitation.

Then again, Trump's relationship with music may yet yield other results. As the investigation into Trump's possible Russian collusion continues, some have brought to light a music video in which Trump appeared. The 2013 video, by Russian pop star Emin Agalarov, calls attention to Agalarov's music publicist Rob Goldstone, a man who allegedly set up the meeting between Donald Trump Jr. and a group of high-profile Russian players.⁹³ This musical tie therefore further connects Trump to a controversy that may be his future downfall. To make a music-related variation on an old proverb, if one lives by musical distraction, one can also perish from musical distraction.

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CHAPTER NINE

TRUMP THE MUSICAL PROPHET

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I will be the greatest jobs producer that God ever created.

—Donald J. Trump, first press conference as President-elect, 2017

We don't really create, but we assemble what has been created for us. Be a great assembler—no matter what your interests may be—and you'll be on your way to inventiveness. A big mind requires a variety of thoughts and impulses to keep it well occupied, so make sure you keep your mind engaged in the best ways possible. It could very well be your calling card for success.

—Donald J. Trump, *Think Like a Champion*, 2009

Trump's performances grab the world's attention. Not only the attention of his supporters and detractors, but also of the formerly disinterested and ambivalent public, far beyond the electorate. With Trump, apathy and neutral posturing are often equated with acceptance and support.¹

People are expected to have opinions, and adults are expected to act on these opinions. With this combined attention and pressure, individuals reassemble the very digital media through which they consume Trump —his words and actions— to invent their relationship with the man and the myth. By means of old and new forms of media, and by means of his consumers, Trump has emerged as a triple threat performer. Trump’s musicality is assembled collectively. Across geopolitical boundaries “billions and billions” of listeners and viewers revel in, and are reviled by, the music that is discovered in every fiber of Trump’s public, gestural performances.

There are three primary types of gestures in which media users discover Trump’s musicality: Trump’s lexical gestures, kinesthetic gestures, and auditory gestures. A fourth type —mythic gestures— emerges when any of the three primary gestures is abstracted beyond representations of Trump’s own body. These four distinctions allow us to appreciate both the scope of Trump’s musicality and the implications of our role as co-creators of this music.

Mythic gestures are perhaps more commonly explored by his supporters than his detractors since the latter often focus on, question, or shame the very materiality of his body (e.g., unnatural hair, tiny hands, “Emperor Has No Balls” statues), and the immorality of its actions. Their hope is to emasculate the mythical, and to reciprocate Trump’s own habit of issuing dehumanizing objectifications.² Trump apologizes with exceeding rarity, however, and why should he when he knows himself to be “the greatest jobs president that God ever created”?³ Trump’s gestures are unscripted and spontaneous, and yet, as campaign playlist analyses and revelations about the use of big data indicate, there is order in Trump’s apparent chaos.⁴ Trump’s musical gestures are improvised (un-fore-seen) and prophetic (fore-speak).

How do creative media users come to grips with the triply threatening Trump? Some of their assemblages focus on one or two types of gestures while others combine or juxtapose a wider variety. One

gesture metonymically indexes another gesture (e.g., where a picture of Trump's "pistol hands" ideasthetically conjures the tone of his voice), and synecdochically indexes a broader phenomenon (e.g., American values as a whole). Such gestural significations are integral to celebrity branding.⁵ By parsing and reassembling Trump's gestural fragments, media users read, hear, and see beyond the surface presentations (e.g., of Trump the salesman through partisan media) and develop a creative, and thus personal, position amidst systematic pressures to conform to binaries. Are you for or against Trump?

While we are glued to screens showing Trump's gestures, he is no less fixated on how we receive and reconstruct them. The notion that "Trump is actually a very good listener" provokes "laughter," and "cynical chuckles,"⁶ but it is precisely by attending to our reactions— however selectively— that he has learned to mesmerize and misdirect us with gestures that are "newsworthy."⁷ He grabs our attention just the way we allow it to be grabbed, reflecting our weaknesses and fears.⁸ Consequently, we are left to contend with a practically indistinguishable accumulation of actual threats, fake news, and alternative facts. "Online, all clicks were equal" gauged Emily Nussbaum. "By the campaign's final days, the race felt driven less by policy disputes than by an ugly war of disinformation, one played for laughs. How do you fight an enemy who's just kidding?"⁹

A popular way to contend with this accumulation is to parse and catalog it (divide and conquer) according to one's skill and imagination. Thus, we find Trump's lexical gestures stitched together as lyrics to songs; his auditory gestures layered as musique concrète compositions, or stitched into melodies composed out of his prosodic patterns; and his kinesthetic gestures stitched into dances. Carol Vernallis observes that "like the laundry list, the catalog [music video] is not a narrative; events or settings simply fall one after another."¹⁰ Finding and then stitching together a theme and its variations is a way to navigate and grapple with the influx of information. A list feels objective: "here are the facts, you draw your own conclusions" it implies, and can support different

and even conflicting narratives. Recognizing what a list lacks allows us to understand what we yearn. And sometimes, in the process, we find humor, humor to transcend the chaos (“drain the swamp”). Lists, such as of Trump’s “billions and billions” utterances,¹¹ often lack a beginning or ending, they only start and finish, inviting users to join an endless meme and its variations.

Inspired by these precedents, I too, began this examination by compiling lists of Trump’s lists, to navigate through, grapple with, and find insight, humor, and something beautiful in the influx of Trumpian gestures processed by media users. One of these lists that I have compiled is a YouTube playlist which includes most of the videos cited in this chapter. Together with additional online resources, this video playlist is available at: dani.oore.ca/trump/.

The catalog that begins below distinguishes the four gestures and their incarnations. Following this catalog, I discuss what these gestures reveal about Trump and about us, his consumers. I examine how Trump orchestrates power through these gestures and how we reorchestrate this power through our mediated interactions with these gestures. I close on the morality of these gestures, their improvised and prophetic dimensions.

LEXICAL GESTURE

The word “Trump” is now ubiquitous in Western and global media and culture. Its sonic and musical connotations extend from contemporary American, back through medieval European, and ancient Greek usage. Across this usage, “trump” reveals a consistent and closely interconnected cluster of meanings. These meanings index one another as a semantic network.¹² Trump is the living embodiment of “trump,” the musical word that he signs, sings, and sells to the world with his every gesture.

“Trump” as the sound of air moving through a tube or pipe, e.g., (1300) trumpet, (1724) trombone, or (1560s) (elephant) trunk or (1440) proboscis and (1550) Jew’s harp as (*tongue of the trump*),¹³ but also intestines (tube)

as (1772) anal flatulence or (1660) vaginal flatulence during or after sexual intercourse.¹⁴ These musical and auditory aspects relate straightforwardly to other “trump” connotations, e.g., loud, proclamatory, and (overly) promotional; empty or full of content, meaning, or worth (trumpery); martial and aggressive; imposing or vulgar; and sexual or lewd.¹⁵

Trump’s family name is of German origin; onomastic Middle English cognates refer to “trumpet” and Middle High German to “drum,” both as “metonymic occupational names.”¹⁶ Both trumpet and drum are linked to martial music, and “trump” has a variety of authoritarian connotations (e.g., slang for an officer, boss, higher-ranking playing card).¹⁷ In English and German (as in other languages), the drum’s integral connection to the verb “to beat” (German *schlagen*) or “to strike,” creates a semantic interrelationship between “to drum” and “to defeat” or “to dominate.” This is consistent with “to trump” in the sense of “to triumph over,” whether by imposition, obstruction, or through deceit, surprise, or resourceful inventiveness.¹⁸ “Triumph” from the Latin *triumphus*, is the source of the “trump” suit in playing cards and cartomancy; the tarot draws on Qabalistic prophecy by aligning trumps with Hebrew alphabet sounds.¹⁹ *Triumphus* originates from the Greek *thriambos*, the hymn sung in honour of Dionysus.²⁰ *Thriambos* is, in turn, traced to pre-Hellenic origins in Asia Minor deriving from a cry of ritual exclamation, later coming to signify prophetic rapture and rebirth through sound, song, and dance.²¹ This connects with “to trump” in the sense of “to proclaim, celebrate, or extol by, or as by, the sound of a trumpet.”²² The sense of prophetic music is also found in the English term *last trump*, for the trumpeting that heralds the Last Judgment,²³ the imagery of which is depicted on the “Judgment” tarot trump. This trump card is often paired with the Hebrew letter Resh²⁴ (“head,” “first”), a letter symbolizing a leader or someone whose “speech and intellect... are for his own gratification—they can even degenerate and become corrupt and evil... because he doesn’t believe in the ultimate Day of Judgment.”²⁵

The “#MakeDonaldDrumpfAgain” meme—a call for Trump to adopt the alleged ancestral spelling of his name—went viral precisely because it subverts the sonic potency of “trump.” As the meme’s instigator explained: “Drumpf is much less magical. It’s the sound produced when a morbidly obese pigeon flies into the window of a foreclosed Old Navy. Drumpf! It’s the sound of...” anything mundanely pathetic.²⁶

Trump’s own life and values have influenced our understanding of the word “trump” without so much altering earlier connotations, as by embodying them in the flesh of a particular individual. An African-American slang adjectival entry for “trump,” supports the familiar semantic connotation, “rich and successful, with overtones of flashiness,”²⁷ with a musical example, when, in 1999, Donald Trump “boasted...‘It was Puffy who told me there are four major rap songs that use the word ‘Trump’ in the sense of ‘very Trump’.”²⁸ The numerous auditory, musical, and creative connotations of the word “Trump” assume added significance when users assemble Donald Trump’s frequent third-person self-references into song.²⁹

What do users make of Trump’s other lexical gestures? A common conclusion is that he uses simple words—the most common and with the fewest syllables—repetitively.³⁰ Detractors deride Trump’s language, intelligence, and morals, accusing him of either “barely speaking” even one language, or being fluent in “bullshit.”³¹ An interview with Trump from 1980 shows him speaking with a comparatively measured cadence and fewer repeating superlatives³²; his new degraded language pleases the disaffected.³³ Trump’s simple and repetitive use of short words (e.g., “China,” “Trump,” “Billions and Billions,” “very,” “many”) seems to be a populist strategy, appealing to and transfixing the masses with sound bites that project an unpretentious and straight-talking “blue-collar” persona.³⁴ Simple words strung together with unexpected or “incoherent” grammar draw attention to the repeating concepts and their rhythmic delivery; “like a volley of jabs ending in one of his buzzwords,”³⁵ or his epistrophic “believe me.”³⁶ The repetition breeds familiarity and

the rhythm generates excitement, translating into support (consumers' attention). Trump's hypnotizing (or dumbfounding) lexical gestures invite extrapolation into lists of pithy word chunks with distinct musical or auditory qualities.³⁷

Composers and performers stress the values they read in Trump's written and spoken phrases by setting them as song lyrics. The unequivocal emotionalism of his tweets (and one rambling run-on sentence) fits "early 2000s emo" and Broadway interpretations.³⁸ The ambiguous intentions of Trump's "covfefe" are probed in a many-faced medley.³⁹ Pop songs of historical or contemporary eras frame the populist "Make America Great Again" slogan as backward- or forward-looking, respectively.⁴⁰ An R&B barbershop quartet questions the intimacy of his lewd "locker room" words, "grab them by the pussy."⁴¹ As a forward-looking slogan, "Make America Great Again" points to broad values beyond Trump the individual (as a mythic gesture, discussed later). When this slogan is lampooned as backward-looking, however, one singer purses her mouth to parody Trump's lips.⁴² Indeed, Trump's tweets are so informal and conversational we are virtually forced to hear him speaking through his text.⁴³ Lampoons use any such traces of his body to shame him. We hear the *grain* of Trump's pouting lips in the emo song settings,⁴⁴ or witness the accompanying grabbing gesture in the R&B performance, which, notably, is recorded in a trailer to mimic the space where Trump uttered those words. The physical is specified and localized, and the lexical gestures are supportively combined with auditory and kinesthetic gestures which together draw attention to particular values and judgments.

Media users employ different musical approaches to condemn the vanity, corruption, and stupidity that they find in Trump's real and imagined lexical gestures. Trump quotations are superimposed on a caricature of his body accompanied by a soundtrack meme that signifies his presidency.⁴⁵ User videos offer new lyrics to familiar songs as a means of parodying what is seen as the disingenuous populism in Trump's own lyric choice ("Green Acres" at the 2006 Emmy Awards),⁴⁶ and in his alleged

inability to remember the national anthem.⁴⁷ Memes of Trump showing-off immature drawings riff on campaign speculations that both he and many of his supporters are illiterate (and that his improvised speech is a consequence of this).⁴⁸ These memes are accompanied by soundtracks that parody his childlike egotism and bravado.⁴⁹ Further control over Trump's lexical gestures is exercised by digitally manipulating his speech into new lyrics (e.g., where two audio recordings are digitally edited together to sound like "I love" "doing the raping"),⁵⁰ or by theatrical representation of his vain machismo (e.g., a German first-person operatic aria describes the length and beauty of his bodily appendages).⁵¹

"Trump" is an ancient term packed with musical, kinesthetic, auditory, and prophetic significations that live on through the gestures of Trump the man. Trump's real and imagined lexical gestures are scrutinized and celebrated in acts of lexical agency, and their values satirized and glorified, and the body of the man behind them, revealed and reviled. As we will later examine, the capacity and use of words to point to that which is not perceptible here and now, bridges lexical and mythic gestures.

KINESTHETIC GESTURE

Sound is caused by motion, and so music is, perhaps above all, the sound of humans (and their technologies) in motion.⁵² An examination of Trump's musicality necessarily demands consideration of his kinesthetic gestures, and how these gestures are captured by, reinterpreted, and disseminated through different media.

Trump understands the power of his kinesthetic gestures and he attempts to control the cameras that mediate the reach and scope of these gestures through intimidation. "I'd fire his ass right now," Trump repeats to his hooting ralliers, threatening the news camera operators that are refusing to pan their cameras off of Trump in order for Trump to show the world the size of his crowd.⁵³

Trump's attempts to increase the reach and scope of his kinesthetic gestures may be compared with his alleged attempts to be out of view. The large windscreen on Trump's newer microphones, for example,⁵⁴ has made it difficult for camera operators to gain a clear sightline to his face, and Trump is said to hide behind this microphone,⁵⁵ recalling the mythic, acousmatic voice of the Great (Wizard of) Oz.⁵⁶

Trump's social, moral, and presidential fitness is appraised on the basis of his observed kinesthetic responsiveness to sound and rhythm.⁵⁷ Trump's dancing at his inauguration ball, for example, is widely mocked for being rhythmically inept, "cringe" inducing, and "painfully awkward."⁵⁸ Public viewers and body language experts alike, discern in these motions Trump's sexual objectification of his wife, the animosity and power imbalance between the couple, a lack of "any warmth or true love and compassion," and a concern over what policies toward women this portends.⁵⁹ Some wonder what his inability to lead a dance (or to slow dance at all) bodes for his presidential leadership, while another jokes "When do Trump and Putin have their first dance?"⁶⁰

Trump's moral corruption is also articulated by digitally resynchronizing his kinesthetic gestures to music. In one remix, Trump's eyebrow, mouth, and other exaggerated facial expressions, are further amplified by their rhythmic synchronization to a relentless electro dance beat.⁶¹ At the same time, we hear a digitally edited recording of him saying: "I love," "doing the raping."⁶² The audiovisual editing throws us into ethical conundrums: which element is false, Trump's original facial gestures, their parody, both, or neither?

The corruption discernible in Trump's other kinesthetic musical gestures is also exposed in digitally edited videos. Huw Parkinson's "Life Accordion to Trump" video series features a toy accordion animated between Trump's hands. The accordion sounds consist of crude back-and-forth chord repetitions that are precisely synchronized to Trump's constant in-and-out gesticulations.⁶³ Trump is known for accompanying his speech with two-handed symmetrical gestures, often at chest or head

height, with open palms and spread fingers, “to mark prosodic beats.”⁶⁴ These gestures reinforce impressions that Trump is thinking in bold and big-picture terms, addressing broad or amorphous issues (with his hands’ unpredictably changing points of destination), and that he is attempting to “unsnarl” a chaotic situation (with his spread fingers).⁶⁵ The accordion subverts all of these impressions: it exploits his hand gestures so plausibly and with such convincing sonification, that we see and hear Trump’s dramatic words and cadence patterns as those of a blowhard full of hot air.

Trump’s kinesthetic gestures are also incorporated into impersonations and digital animations of him moving to music or dictating the creation of music, in ways that embody, caricaturize, and fantasize his physicality and his psychology. The kinesthetic element may be the primary focus of the live action or animation,⁶⁶ in an equal dialectic relation to another gestural element,⁶⁷ or in a subordinate relation to another gestural element.⁶⁸ Portrayals of Trump dancing,⁶⁹ or conducting an orchestra,⁷⁰ may be interpreted in different ways. Blundering awkward motion may seem incompetent or playful, and nimble and rhythmically graceful motion may either satirize or celebrate his guile.

In addition to revealing his motivations, experiencing the musicality of Trump’s kinesthetic gestures also engenders excitement as we predict when and how he will or will not move on the next beat. Videos where Trump’s mouth movements are synchronized to familiar music recordings allow us to predict when or what he will sing. A video of Trump singing Ulmiliani’s “Mah Nà Mah Nà,” features musical gestures analysed as “predictable,” chauvinistically “interrupting,” “(premature) ejaculatory,” and “impotently...improvisational.”⁷¹

Trump’s body, and its kinesthetic gestures, lie at the root of his musicality, or perceived lack thereof. The musicality of his kinesthetic gestures is explored to reveal his drives and his morality, and to arouse a feeling that one can predict precisely when and how Trump will act, and to prophesy more broadly how Trump will behave in a reality that is

still conditional on our present course.⁷² Trump keeps everyone guessing about his next move, and we do not always know whether the remixes, impersonations, and animations that are placed at Trump's media altars are effigies or idols.⁷³ Sometimes they may be both.

AUDITORY GESTURE

Trump's power is often perceived as a potential threat or a potential opportunity. We consume his gestures with urgency, and have developed ideas about how he sounds to us. We interpret and reimagine his auditory gestures in a range of ways, and respond to these gestures with our own bodies, technologies, skills, and values. Through the sound of Trump, we explore the relationship between chaos and order, freedom and control, Trump's unknown potential and the material reality of his action. We may even hear the fragile human behind the furious sound.

Microphones, whether they are part of a public address system or a recording device, play an integral role in the dissemination of Trump's auditory gestures (and thus, many of his lexical gestures, as well). Just as Trump attempts to control the cameras that capture his kinesthetic gestures, he also attempts to control the microphones that capture his auditory gestures. Trump speaks out against his "defective" microphones and the sound engineers responsible for their operation.⁷⁴ One video reimagines Trump's opening statements at a presidential debate, as nothing but stitched together fragments of Trump continually adjusting his lectern microphone, producing chaotic and unexpected creaks, squeaks, and amplification feedback.⁷⁵ We see and hear that Trump's struggle with the medium consumes him completely; it is his message. The significance of Trump's struggle may be lost on his opponent in this video; Clinton has been accused of "using too much force when she talks into a microphone during big speeches."⁷⁶ Securing the presidency seems to have emboldened Trump to circumvent his microphone frustrations with more decisive control. Since his inauguration ball, he has broken

from the traditional dual-bracketed microphones by switching to a new twenty-inch gooseneck lectern microphone:

that extends to within an inch or two of his mouth [and] that gives him about twenty one decibels of gain over prior presidents... this is four times the power of his voice than Obama, Bush, and Clinton before him, so those purrs, murmurs, and asides end up emanating all the way back to any room that he's in. This goes back to the performer in him, he really wants to project that voice.⁷⁷

Trump's acts of control over the fidelity and reach of his auditory gestures has only facilitated and contributed to media users' closer scrutiny and manipulation of those very auditory gestures. He courts attention at a cost he willingly pays.

Among Trump's different auditory gestures explored by media users, his speech sounds are the primary focus. The prosody formed by patterns of intonation, pitch range, rhythm, pace, pause, and volume are explored, and their auditory qualities and musical possibilities exploited. Excerpts of Trump actually singing are edited by media users into derivative assemblages.⁷⁸ Some media users match the pitch and rhythm of Trump's speech patterns on traditional musical instruments, revealing the seemingly inherent rhythmic and melodic structures in Trump's speech.⁷⁹ These prosodic tracings demonstrate users' commitment to hear Trump in dispassionate and painstaking precision.

Users performing prosodic tracings frequently capitalize on assemblages that have already been stitched together by mainstream media or other users.⁸⁰ A single word (or word chunk, e.g., "China," "billions and billions," or "Trump"), is extracted from its utterances in the many recordings of Trump speaking, and is edited into a continuous list-like video.⁸¹ These endlessly repeating utterances already elicit degrees of speech-to-song illusion or heighten attention to other paralinguistic or sonic qualities (i.e., even before prosodic tracing or other musical additions).⁸² Users appreciate how recontextualizing Trump's gestures

shapes the meaning of his message. In doing so, agency is exercised, or perhaps reclaimed.

Ready-made assemblages may evolve as musical memes, viral then mutating. The earliest “China” video, for example, seems to have been assembled by Huffpost.⁸³ Later this Huffpost strain was traced prosodically into a new video by an electric bassist,⁸⁴ which was subsequently interpreted in two distinct videos: one with additional chording by a guitarist,⁸⁵ and another that re-edited earlier mutations and incorporated them into a band’s “metal” song performance.⁸⁶ All the while, other strains continued to evolve from the original Huffpost remix, into new mutations.⁸⁷ However, much of this music is assembled by solitary individuals in the quarantine-like conditions of their bedrooms, viral memes and their mutations constitute a collective and multi-layered conversation.

Such mutations also demonstrate how users explore musical possibilities beyond strict adherence to Trump’s prosody. Users add harmonies to fit or imply the pitch contours of Trump’s intonation, and add melodic and rhythmic ideas to counterpoint his cadence.⁸⁸ Some users superimpose samples of Trump’s speech onto a bare texture to stark effect.⁸⁹ Other users produce more chaotic interrelationships by mashing-up ready-made materials in a coarser manner.⁹⁰ Juxtaposition amplifies the threat. Still other users bend Trump’s prosody to their needs, modulating his timbre, pitch, and tempo into neat dance tracks.⁹¹ By going beyond the strict prosodic tracing of Trump’s voice, users discover how they can meaningfully interact with, and comment on, the man.

Voice actor Peter Serafinowicz re-dubs videos of Trump singing and speaking; Trump’s words are given brand new timbres and intonation patterns that lampoon the emotionalism of the original.⁹² Fragments of Trump’s original lexical speech sounds, ranging in duration from phonemes to whole words or phrases, are pitch-shifted, auto-tuned, time-stretched or -compressed, and edited together to produce new, or recreate familiar and popular, music and songs. Some of these videos feature fragments of speech that users stitched from multiple media sources

into musically nuanced and satirically clever rhyming patterns,⁹³ while other videos have a decidedly more lo-fi and camp approach.⁹⁴ Some videos exploit the self-evident musicality of Trump's onomatopoetic exclamations (e.g., "bing," "bong," "bah"), looping them as versatile accompanying ostinato figures,⁹⁵ or editing their pitch and rhythm into intricate scatting or mock instrumental performances;⁹⁶ users revel in the musical prophecies channeled through Trump's glossolalic tongues.

Trump's nonlexical sounds (e.g., including his vocable pause fillers like "uhhs," and "ahhs," or his sniffs, and heavy breathing) are also edited into musical or sonic arrangements;⁹⁷ and recontextualized as foley (simulated audio effects added to film) for familiar videos,⁹⁸ or for new animations.⁹⁹ In one tutorial video, Andrew Huang describes how he digitally transforms a single Trump sniff into an electro drum kit rhythm and synth bass line.¹⁰⁰ With these familiar timbres, Huang assembles a dance groove, overtop of which he superimposes audio recording fragments of Trump speaking (auditory and lexical gestures), and video fragments of Trump moving (kinesthetic gestures).

Bottom-up assemblages like Huang's demonstrate Trump's own definition of inventiveness: "We don't really create, but we assemble what has been created for us. Be a great assembler—no matter what your interests may be—and you'll be on your way to inventiveness."¹⁰¹ Other bottom-up approaches end in a darker creation than Huang's does: a brief auditory gesture produced by Trump is overdubbed with itself, producing a wall of flanging sound (and color).¹⁰² In these "brutalist" musique concrète compositions, users convey the massivity of Trump's media presence by virtually cloning a single Trump into a menacing mythic army, a wall, a meme of memes. Each clone symbolizes someone consuming Trump; we create this musical monster together.

Like the reassembly of his onomatopoetic sounds into scatting, Trump's speech and thought is reimaged as non-lexical, yet programmatically and semantically rich music. In one such video Trump's voice emerges through the sound of an animated tuba, compared to his interviewer's

trumpet.¹⁰³ Unseen impersonators parody Trump's intelligence and personality by caricaturizing his voice and singing,¹⁰⁴ while more passively disseminated (or transparently edited) singing Trump impersonations are performed in front of a live audience.¹⁰⁵ By reimagining Trump in these musical ways, users grapple with (or more rarely, celebrate) the meaning and ambiguity of his language. Users may aspire to self-agency through the very gestures that dominate them.

Avner Hanani cuts and weaves together audio-video recordings of Trump with remarkable sensitivity to natural prosodic patterns (i.e., without manipulating pitch or tempo).¹⁰⁶ Interwoven with this audio-video footage is the voice of Hanani's reassuringly repetitive piano. The result is a unified six-part sonata, a narrative of emotional contrasts unfolding breath by overlapping breath, from a beginning to an end. In the fifth movement, entitled "Apologize," Trump's chanting is superimposed with itself at a delay, a dog chasing its tail, a feat Trump cannot bring himself to do. The piano suddenly shifts to an unexpected bass note, a deceptive cadence. It sounds as though Trump has shifted his chanting by half a tone lower. In fact, Trump has not changed, but the listener has. It is a lesson in the power of context, perception, and co-creation. The sonata exposes Trump's inherent musicality, not merely in his auditory gestures, but beyond these gestures; the listener empathizes with the complex and faulted human being, beyond the politicized mythic preconceptions, to a reverberating musical soul.

In this section, I have examined how both Trump and his witnesses explore the relationship between chaos and order through different auditory gestures. Trump injects chaos when he threatens his audio engineers, introduces order with his new microphones, and continues to feed chaotic and ordered sounds into these microphones. Trump's witnesses, in turn, reimagine and reconstruct his auditory gestures into unpredictable chaotic sound and predictable auditory structure. From lawless sound to structured music, the complexity or simplicity of the relationships that users discover, assemble, and share, reveals a common

urge to make sense of a world in which Trump is in —or out of— control. In a rare instance, music seems to bring us closer to something deeper, to hear a reflection of the self.

MYTHIC GESTURE

In January 2017, at his first press conference as president-elect, Donald Trump proclaimed: “So there’s a great spirit going on right now. A spirit that many people have told me they’ve never seen before, ever. We’re going to create jobs. I said that I will be the greatest jobs producer that God ever created, and I mean that. I really— I’m going to work very hard on that.”¹⁰⁷ In this mythic lexical gesture, Trump establishes the collective and revelatory spiritual dimension of his prophecy; he is God’s messenger —brandishing his familiar pistol hand as he invokes “God”— and his service is a sacrifice offered with stammering earnestness. Trump then buffers, “We need to have certain amounts of other things, including a little bit of luck,” before appraising the “great talent, tremendous talent” of the “incredible” military musicians that will herald the inauguration not simply of his presidency but of “a movement like the world has never seen before.”¹⁰⁸

The mythic gesture exists beyond the space and time of the individual. The mythic gesture is abstracted —it pulls away from the individual’s here and now, away from the body— pointing to some collective or cosmic eternity. The Trumpian mythic gesture points to an archetype, essence, or spirit, that animates the body of Trump and all those possessed by or obsessed with him. The mythic gesture is often less dependent on representations of, or references to, the actual body.

The mythic gesture begins with the body’s lexical, auditory, and kinesthetic gestures, and then transcends them. In the paragraphs below, I explain how this takes place.

Lexical gestures —when not conveying the *grain* of the voice and body — have a well-documented capacity for abstraction,¹⁰⁹ pointing to things

not present, or not tangibly perceivable, here and now. The lexical—the Word—often forms a metaphorical bridge to mythic gesture.¹¹⁰ Trump’s frequent third-person reference to his own name¹¹¹ extends the scope and reach of his existence beyond his first-person here and now, toward his mythic brand. When the spirit or archetypal essence of his name is *in-corporated* (*em-bodied*) into others’ speech and action, this speech and action point to the mythic.

While the kinesthetic gesture is necessarily grounded in the body, Trump’s preoccupation with his visual representation in disembodied forms is obvious. His obsession with reality TV, his real estate empire, towers, and “great” wall, his steak and winery brand (as flesh and blood),¹¹² images of his crowds and attempts to control videographers, all betray his concern for the scope and reach of his gestures and for his representation on a mythic scale that transcends his own individual body. Many of Trump’s detractors desperately focus on his material body in an effort to counter or delegitimize his mythic scale. The mythic gesture is archetypal, however, so collective vilification of Trump’s kinesthetic gestures often, ironically, only fuels his mythic status.

In videos emphasizing mythic gestures, Trump’s spirit, power, and authority animate the motion of both sentient and insentient things (e.g., the Statue of Liberty, a mushroom cloud, jet fighter planes, and armies).¹¹³ Trump knows that people respond powerfully to myth and he characterizes his opponents as evil archetypes (e.g., “Crooked Hillary”);¹¹⁴ this common enemy forges his heroic identity and mobilizes his group’s action:¹¹⁵ “Lock her up!” chants a horde of Trump fans, in one user’s music video.¹¹⁶ Consequently, Trump is portrayed slaying Clinton the sea serpent and dragon, in such dramatic music videos as “Trump, Twilight of the Thundergod.”¹¹⁷

Auditory gesture conveys motion, and music in particular conveys motion of the human body; music is a series of gestural relationships unfolding here and now.¹¹⁸ The mythic here and now extends beyond our tangible kinesthetic experience, however, to include the “music of

the spheres.”¹¹⁹ Mythic auditory gesture conveys the poetic dance of the cosmos, spirit, and *e-motion*. One musique concrète composition clones a single Trump gesture into proportions “which,” the composer explains “causes a rupture in space/time and Trump to be sucked into a black hole.”¹²⁰ The concept of mythic music anciently predates the disembodied sonic world of recording technology; audio technology serves the mythic gesture, for instance, in memes where non-diegetic music symbolizes Trump’s omnipresent spirit.¹²¹

Lexical, auditory, and kinesthetic gestures may celebrate or deride the omnipotence of Trump’s spirit. Some gestures celebrate Trump’s spirit without portraying his body. Joy Villa’s “Make America Great Again” depicts the power of Trump’s slogan by representing individuals across ethnic and social differences united together under Trump’s vision.¹²² Villa *incorporates* Trump’s campaign slogan (lexical gesture) pointing beyond the faulted individual to the noble and truthful potential of his word.¹²³ The music is an example of what Josh Kun calls an *audiotopia*,¹²⁴ which I extend here to *kinesiotopia*, *videotopia*, and *lexitopia*. When Trump’s body is depicted in celebrations of his spirit, this body appears in iconoclastic, mythical, superhuman, and messianic incarnations, saving humanity—or (a specific sub-demographic of) America—from Jews, Muslims, blacks, Communists, liberals, Democrats, and social justice warriors.¹²⁵

Dywane Thomas Jr., aka MonoNeon, musicalizes the intense prosodic patterns heard in other users’ reactionary videos, thus revealing the mythic scale of Trump’s influence. One video features a young girl sobbing euphorically upon learning she will get to see and hear Trump in person;¹²⁶ while another video features actor Michael Rapaport’s colorful rebuke of white nationalist marchers (who have enjoyed Trump’s support).¹²⁷ MonoNeon draws on ecstatic soul and R&B elements to underscore a (comic sketch) video of a Christian woman at the stairs of a church fervently parading and chanting the words on her placard, “DUMP TRUMP!”¹²⁸ Trump’s spirit reaches far beyond his own body. We

can read, see, and hear the impact of Trump's spirit through the music of his supporters and detractors alike.

A mythic gesture is experienced as a "primordial motivational force,"¹²⁹ an eternal pattern (e.g., chaos and order, good and evil, feminine and masculine) that transcends chronological, historical temporality.¹³⁰ To witness a mythic gesture is to experience that which transcends linear time. To some, Trump's ambiguity and apparent contradictions signify his "existential coherence at another level."¹³¹ Trump's presidential identity is "a primordial mythical time made present;"¹³² "it is a narrative that, by connecting past, present and future events, posits itself as prophetic."¹³³ Lexical, kinesthetic, and auditory gestures that relate to prophesy, relate to mythic time. Some gestures are predictive and others are retrospective confirmations or falsifications of prior predictions.

We find media with lexical, kinesthetic, and auditory gestures prophesying the coming of a new spiritual leader and calling for the reverential reception of this spirit.¹³⁴ We also find media prophesying a spirit and calling for a revolt against this spirit. For example, "Sleep Now in the Fire," a Rage Against the Machine music video directed in 2000 by Michael Moore, references the specific values and nature of Trump's campaign without focusing on Trump, the individual.¹³⁵ The expression of values in this video is punctuated, however, with brief footage of a man holding a "DONALD J. TRUMP FOR PRESIDENT 2000" placard. Although Trump did briefly campaign in that year, the music video is nonetheless, retrospectively deemed prescient, or else, less demandingly, prophetic of a potential future. As such, this video depicts citizens as insightful and effectual, and retrospectively as omniscient, omniaudient, and omnipotent; achieved, not least, throughout Tom Morello's ecstatic electric guitar solo composed of feedback and subdivided snaps.¹³⁶ In his new project, Prophets of Rage, Morello continues to fight against Trump with the "Make America Rage Again" tour.¹³⁷

On one end of divinatory retrospections, Trump supporters exult in told-you-so montages that chronologically follow the trajectory of the

media's initial public ridicule of Trump's candidacy through to the public dismay at his win. This video sequence meme is often set to Edvard Grieg's "In the Hall of the Mountain King," where representations of Trump's body are sporadic,¹³⁸ yet are experienced continuously in the disembodied form of non-diegetic orchestral music. Trump's musical spirit steadily builds in volume, density, and speed—from a sparse pianissimo staccato at a march step to a pounding triple forte tutti with percussion, at nearly double tempo—to vanquish all his doubters and detractors.¹³⁹ In two rare exceptions where Grieg's music has been used to satirize Trump, Trump's body is featured prominently.¹⁴⁰

Toward the other end of the divinatory retrospections, Trump detractors express their feeling of betrayal by their own oracles: the media, pollsters, political analysts, and others whose predictions they trusted. A video made by Andrew Caldwell is recontextualized by MonoNeon.¹⁴¹ Caldwell's video exposes a certain preacher as "the devil...a lying prophet" because the preacher claimed that God told him that Trump would not win the presidency.¹⁴² Using a synthesized electric bass sound, MonoNeon traces Caldwell's stirring homiletic prosody, adding chords and fills before settling on Caldwell's pleading "What must I do to be saved?!" which MonoNeon edits into a hypnotic loop; invoking cyclic or eternal mythic time. Although the video and caption bear Trump's name, he is directly referenced in speech only once (roughly one out of eighty seconds of music). Trump is chaos itself, brought on by the false-prophet's betrayal of God. It is the *last trump*, after all, that heralds the Last Judgment; there may be no greater a mythic gesture.¹⁴³

Trump himself and those who deify or demonize him recreate and perpetuate the myth together. The mythic gesture points beyond an individual's space and time to the collective eternal one. The mythic gesture deifies or demonizes an individual, granting them omnipresence, and powers of omnipotence and omniscience. Together we create a monster, which then possesses us.

REPEATING REVERBERATIONS

In the preceding sections, I examined the cataloging of Trump's musical gestures. How unique is this cataloging to Trump? What does the creation and consumption of this content reveal about Trump and about us? Why do we listen to Trump the musical prophet?

Do media users find Trump's gestures more musical than the gestures of other politicians? Much content can be traced to precedents in political tone and technical approach.¹⁴⁴ Trump's campaign opponents were the objects of some similar treatments,¹⁴⁵ and in various cases a single media user or community of users is dedicated to producing a body of work that scrutinizes the entire system, regardless of potential partisan allegiances (e.g., the Gregory Brothers, MonoNeon, SNL).

Would Clinton, Sanders, and other candidates (or aspects of the political system) have been subjected to the same degree of creative interrogation had Trump not been running? Was everyone and anything else caught in Trump's "media swirl"?¹⁴⁶ The surging availability of digital tools and the early fluency with these tools has enabled unprecedented numbers of users to witness, develop, and redistribute such content.¹⁴⁷ Feeling dissatisfied with all candidates, many users sharpened their digital tool skills by satirizing the entire system. Journalistic and entertainment news media initiates certain processes (e.g., VICE's "Billions and billions and billions," or Huffpost's "China" catalog videos), and consumers replicate, reassemble, recontextualize, or reinvent these into memes. Trump often bypasses journalistic media, disseminating his gestures through Twitter and other platforms. The "contemporary conditions of the mediatisation and spectacularisation of politics...have indeed increased the potential of prophecy as a technique of government."¹⁴⁸ Trump's gestures stand out because of their unpredictable spontaneity. His unhinged improvising reveals truths about our society, truths that some find vile and others find valorous. His stuttering, stammering, misspelled music is prophetic.

Journalistic media finds itself choosing and blurring the distinctions between transparency and sensationalism,¹⁴⁹ and competitions for ratings and “views” have left media consumers contending with a deluge of disinformation. Creative DIY producers, however, make process-driven assemblages. Filled with reflexivity and intertextuality, the seams of their lists are conspicuous, or else disclosed in tutorial fashion.¹⁵⁰ Like Trump’s improvisations, assemblages are process-oriented: they invite others to reassemble the growing database of Trump’s gestures into meaningful anti/narratives.¹⁵¹

As a reality TV president, Trump continues to hone his instinct for grabbing the attention of otherwise indifferent channel surfers.¹⁵² Would any other candidate have continued to generate so much content well after the peacocking rituals were scored? Would any other candidate have continued to peacock?

What do Trump’s swaggering “braggadocious” gestures achieve and reflect?¹⁵³ “Shameless bravado [or] badass heroism”?¹⁵⁴ Robert Greene’s *The 48 Laws of Power* catalogs the “laws” by which humans vie for, control, gain, and lose social, material, and political power.¹⁵⁵ Trump’s words, behaviors, and actions are sometimes compared with Greene’s laws.¹⁵⁶ Such evaluations are perspective-dependent and reach conflicting conclusions. The disparity in these assessments may itself be a reflection of Trump’s abiding by Greene’s “Law 48: Assume Formlessness” and by “Law 17: Keep Others Suspended in Terror: Cultivate an Air of Unpredictability.” Greene himself, for example, criticizes Trump’s “impulsivity” and “inability to plan and think ahead.”¹⁵⁷ In Greene’s own book, however, the law of formlessness concludes that clear strategies are consistently trumped by unpredictably morphing ones.¹⁵⁸ “It’s not mental instability,” explains one admirer of Trump’s leadership. “It’s management by controlled and orchestrated chaos.”¹⁵⁹ Trump’s ambiguity “allows you to fill in the blank,” and ideally, through that process, “you help him persuade you that he agrees with you.”¹⁶⁰ Linguistic ambiguity and incoherence, however, can also shift a listener’s attention toward

musical patterns in Trump's gestures; filling-in-the-blank invites creative participation: "Law 32: Play to People's Fantasies." There is no doubt that Trump observes Greene's "Law 6: Court Attention at All Costs," and "Law 37: Create Compelling Spectacles." His spectacles demand our attention as much as his unpredictability commands it. The mythologizing of his musical (lexical, auditory, kinesthetic, mythic) gestures seems to observe "Law 27: Play on People's Need to Believe in a Cultlike Following." Trump frames himself as a populist, in direct opposition to corrupt elite and establishment insiders.¹⁶¹ This legitimizes and encourages process-driven content by DIY users, of all stripes.¹⁶²

As I began writing this chapter, I assembled a catalog of Trump's musical gestures and wrote lists of questions about his gestures. Lists are characteristic of content created by and about Trump, and this chapter contributes new lists to the growing list of lists about the man. Even before users edit his gestures into lists, Trump already spontaneously flows with polysyndeton lists: "billions and billions and billions..." Users also assemble his words into asyndeton lists: "China, China, China..." or "[sniff], [sniff], [sniff]..." Polysyndeton generates ecstatic momentum; its cyclic conjunctions convey infinitude. Asyndeton generates focus, conveying emphatic, spontaneous concision.¹⁶³ Each draws attention to the repeated sound. "Billions and" is spoken in a trochaic or iambic meter (an accented long-short or unaccented short-long rhythmic pattern) while "China" tends to be spoken as a reverse (or inverted) iambic (accented short-long) pattern.¹⁶⁴

As with many lists both by and about Trump, however, "billions and billions" or "China" are not individual lists of things, but of a single thing. An endless unpatterned list evokes eternal chaos, while endless repetition evokes eternal order. The strands of chaotic and ordered elements in repetitive lists by and about Trump could be further untangled using Rebecca Leydon's six tropes of musical repetition.¹⁶⁵ Leydon identifies repetition that evokes: mantric transcendence, kinetic dance, totalitarian unfreedom, indifferent mechanized process, aphasic cognitive impairment

or madness, and prelinguistic or maternal holding.¹⁶⁶ Some worry that Trump's repetition is pathological (impairment),¹⁶⁷ while others hear it as prophetic re-*petition* (mantric and prelinguistic).¹⁶⁸ The poetic list has a pragmatic purpose,¹⁶⁹ like the litany or triumphant concatenated praise, it is a mode of music, rite, and prophecy.¹⁷⁰

Perhaps, what is being listed in the "billions" or "China" repetitions is not a word or sound, but an endless accumulation of times and places where Trump uttered this thing. This repetitive list suggests mythic eternity. These are Umberto Eco's "mass media lists" of Warholian consumption, "chaotic enumeration," "vertigos," "coherent excess," or "freaks of nature," endlessly regenerated within "the mother of all lists... the world wide web,"¹⁷¹ Trump's oracular database.

Besides the endlessness of the lists about Trump, there is the story told by the very stitching of these postmodern quilts. Some edits are synchronized to new or pre-existing musical structures that provide a temporary relief from the chaotic (sensational) or monotonous (repetitive) editing. The stitching of some of the most popular videos is rough, lo-fi, and awkward; it disturbs. Vernallis's observations help us understand how such editing may generate a meaningful flow through both repetitive and sensational environments:

Music-video directors rely on the editing to maintain a sense of openness, a sense that any element can come to the fore at any time. The editing does so in part simply through being noticed. By demanding attention, it prevents powerful images from acquiring too much weight and stopping the flow of information. The editing thus preserves the video's momentum and keeps us in the present.¹⁷²

As discussed above, lo-fi stitching also flows meaningfully because its carefully fragmented temporality projects authenticity, and satirical amplification,¹⁷³ by subverting technocratic norms.¹⁷⁴ One example of this is in the lexically thorough but kinesthetically and auditorially glitchy "Donald Trump Singing The Pokemon Theme Song."¹⁷⁵ Users integrate

the technologically errant and unforeseen into their music,¹⁷⁶ echoing the volatile, uncensored, spontaneity of Trump's own gestures.¹⁷⁷ Like a computer program behaving unpredictably when it is asked to operate outside of its designed function,¹⁷⁸ Trump uses his business, finance, and entertainment knowledge to run political operations. Transparently shot and edited videos of scripted impersonations or satires rarely, if ever, match the sustained intrigue of the #realDonaldTrump. Digital editing that draws attention to itself, however, creates a compelling level of commentary about the structured media through which we typically consume the unscripted Trump.¹⁷⁹

Musical structure provides an organizing principle for catalog and non-catalog constructions alike. Umberto Eco contrasts list versus form;¹⁸⁰ Trump's formlessness (discussed with respect to Greene's laws of power, above) plays into this unpredictable balance between chaos and order. The musical elements transfigure list into form. Trump himself muses on the relationship between the mundane and the novel in music and in life:

I remember reading about a composer named Steve Reich who came up with a new idea called phasing, which is like windshield wipers going in and out of synch... I think he's a great example as an innovator. Sometimes new ideas can come from something as mundane and functional as your windshield wipers. The key is to pay attention and keep your brain and senses open to new stimuli. It also helps to be thinking of two things at once—multilevel focusing is what I call it. The intersecting of ideas is when innovation will follow—thinking in musical terms while listening to your windshield wipers, or thinking of a hotel tower and condominiums at one time... I employ both sides of my brain when I'm thinking and working.¹⁸¹

Trump's formlessness is a result of his pursuit of the ever-shifting balance of chaos and order; it seems his consumers follow suit.

"The Trump Sonata" by Avner Hanani recalls Reich's music, superimposing the sound and image of two or more Trump videos to expose the man's dialectic complexity, his humanness.¹⁸² The dependability of

Hanani's hypnotically repetitive language gains our trust; the listener is enveloped in what Leydon might describe as the repetition trope of the maternal holding pattern. Users pursue different balances to Trump's gestures. Trump attempts to exercise control over microphones, cameras, and their operators, as well as over the media companies which repackaging his lexical, kinesthetic and auditory gestures. This control is mirrored by the agency that DIY media users reclaim. The amplification of Trump's micro-gestures is a way of exposing him as a vulnerable human being, a bumbling buffoon, or both.

Trump's taste for monumental, dramatic, and triumphant music,¹⁸³ is exemplified in his campaign playlist,¹⁸⁴ and is reflected in media users' assemblages. His supporters, for example, create such mythic gestures as the "Make America Great Again" soundtracks or the video memes using Grieg's "In the Hall of the Mountain King" music. Although it satisfies the monumental, dramatic, and triumphant criteria, the use of "In the Hall of the Mountain King" is painfully ironic. The composition was commissioned as incidental music for Ibsen's satire of nationalistic hubris and materialism, *Peer Gynt*. The music's romanticism was conceived as ironic.¹⁸⁵ With the exception of two Trumpian videos that use this music as ironic dissent,¹⁸⁶ Grieg would be mortified. Are Trump's gloaters aware that the English title of Grieg's composition is missing a word, "In the Hall of the Mountain Troll King"? "Troll" being the popular embodiment of Trump's inflammatory "trolling" gestures.¹⁸⁷ Perhaps Grieg's sense of irony would be vindicated, after all. Is postmodern meaninglessness working for every agenda?¹⁸⁸ Or is Trump precisely demonstrating Robert Greene's "Law 48: Assume Formlessness"?¹⁸⁹ "To troll" is also to repeat, to sing in a round, and "in a full, rolling voice."¹⁹⁰ The monumentality of Grieg's orchestration builds triumphant mythos through dramatic repetition.

Grieg's music fulfils another nationalistic criterion. Wilson identifies the Trump playlist's focus on a golden past.¹⁹¹ This nostalgic orientation is both amplified by users' fantasies of a mythic past, and deconstructed

in their satires.¹⁹² Alternately it is balanced-out in their lo-fi DIY videos focussed squarely on a glitching present.¹⁹³ Trump's attitude of entitlement toward the musical gestures of celebrity musicians included in his playlist,¹⁹⁴ is mirrored in media users' reappropriation of Trump's public gestures. If Trump seeks naive media consumers,¹⁹⁵ he also gets critical media producers; they possess the "big mind" and "inventiveness" of the "great assembler" Trump describes in the quote at the beginning of this chapter.

While one user's pride may be another's joke, some humor appeals across partisan preferences. Satires celebrate the freedom to voice complex opinions and dissent. Searching for one's own voice becomes an invitation for others to do the same. A video by Henry Hey incorporates prosodic tracing techniques to find beauty in the very voices he satirizes—is it the order his music brings to their chaotic words?—and is marked with an appeal: "Please vote. It's really important. Get your friends to vote, get strangers to vote."¹⁹⁶

Hugh Atkin is an Australian lawyer known for "Lampooning society through its creative artifacts" —his Twitter tagline.¹⁹⁷ Among Atkin's works is one of the rare satires of Trump that uses Grieg's music: "In the Hall of the Mountain Trump—Classic Trump Vol. 3." In the case of "A Little Trump Music—Classic Trump Vol. 2,"¹⁹⁸ Atkin stitches together video excerpts of Trump saying "Trump" (along with a few other utterances) into a performance of Mozart's serenade No.13 for strings, K. 525 (popularly known as "Eine kleine Nachtmusik").¹⁹⁹ Trump popularized the video among his followers by favorably retweeting it, "Done by a real fan! #TRUMP." The YouTube comments on the video page indicate the wide range of ideologies to whom this repetitive and musical "Trump, Trump, Trump" gesture appeals.

Some Trump fans' comments indicate they appreciate the video's humor:

Paula Feese: “OMG brilliant! What a hoot & hes exactly what this country needs VOTE TRUMP!”

Linda Reyes: “We Love You Donald hahaha”

Paula Whalen: “HAAAA.A.. EXCELLENT!!!!!! DONALD J. TRUMP FOR PRESIDENT!!! SO MUCH HOPE FOR AMERICA!!!!!”

Linnie: “LOL I LOVE IT GO TRUMP.....”

Adam Tarr: “The perfect campaign ad for Trump! Hilarious! He should run it nationwide! Great job putting that together! The comic timing with the music is fantastic! Cracks me up every time!”²⁰⁰

The absence of an explicitly humorous reaction in some comments makes me wonder whether any humor is registered at all:

Laura Stone: “OMG. This is AWESOME!!!!!! And yes, Donald’s TWITTER brought me here too! And I’m SOOOO GLAD IT DID!! Now let me replay this!”

OSMON FRANCES: “FANTASTIC JOB. I THINK WE ALL WANT TRUMP. YOUR SUPPORTERS LOVE YOU MR. TRUMP. YOU WILL TAKE THIS WIN ALL THE WAY TO THE WHITE HOUSE... NEXT POTUS!!”²⁰¹

Notably from both sides of the political spectrum, some comments seem to betray a limited awareness of the satirical element:

Scubaduude: “Why [with] apologies to Mozart? This was good. VOTE TRUMP!”

Eunae Kim: “I love this video— and I voted for Clinton!”

Simon Kawasaki: “Hell, even democrats like me can like this.”²⁰²

Further confusion is expressed:

Luminee Luma Productions: “I don’t know whether to like this or not because I don’t like Trump, but this video was stupidly funny... :T”

Alexander Miller: “I cant believe this is all happening, but I cant look away. I dont even know what’s real anymore.”

Rick: “I hope this was done to mock. How ridiculous he is. Well done.”²⁰³

One comment indicates how the arrangement linking Trump and Mozart specifically satisfies the orientation towards a golden past (mentioned above):

Austendo: “This is real music, not the modern music...”²⁰⁴

Which in turn, receives a supportive response:

Evan Prest: “You got that right my brother!”²⁰⁵

While another comment (that could be a Trump detractor or supporter), indicates a lack of satisfaction in the temporal orientation:

Kirill Nielson: “That’s nice. but I was hoping for something more... contemporary, more offensive.”²⁰⁶

Another comment demonstrates that awareness of an intent that is at odds with one’s own values, does not limit appreciation:

John: “I know you made this as sort of a spoof, but as a Trump supporter I really enjoyed this.”²⁰⁷

To which the video’s creator responds:

Hugh Atkin: “Glad to hear it!”²⁰⁸

In this creative work, Atkin appropriates Trump’s use of the third-person to refer to himself, and then uses Mozart’s “enlightened” structure to

contrast Trump's apparent narcissism.²⁰⁹ Trump apologizes for nothing, however, since he reckons his mythic gestures to be divinely inspired. The association with Mozart receives Trump's retweeted endorsement, an act by which Trump reclaims his third-person voice with glowing historicism, reasserts his values, and dampens critical interpretations.

Trump's own ambiguity invites creative and sometimes equally ambiguous musical interpretations. Users recontextualize media content in ways that create dialogue, or "short-term tactical alliances" across simple partisan narratives, transcending what words alone cannot always accomplish.²¹⁰ This process cultivates both personal and communal ideals. The ambiguity again also plays to Greene's "Law 48: Assume Formlessness."²¹¹ Other gestures reflect less ambiguity and complexity in their interpretations: Trump as a more emphatically powerful, or power-hungry orchestral conductor (than in the Mozart video examined above), or as an emasculated singing-and-dancing puppet. The focus on and repetition of Trump's micro auditory gestures often suggest him as lacking intelligence (i.e., Leydon's aphasic or prelinguistic tropes of repetition),²¹² while his portrayal as kinesthetically awkward in musical contexts, raises questions about his morality.²¹³

In considering the morality of any Trump gesture we must reckon with his spontaneity. Trump is known for not only disregarding Teleprompters and scripts, but for mocking the opponent who is dependent on such aids.²¹⁴ When the stakes are high, Trump opts instead to read his audience in the moment and engage spontaneously; supporters feel heard. He often does not seem to know what gesture will come forth from his own self; he demonstrates a remarkable confidence and faith in his improvised gestures. When Trump prophesies himself as the "greatest jobs president that God ever created," do we find the bold spontaneity in his delivery reassuring or alarming? Trump's improvised gestures are unforeseen, and they claim to foretell, to prophesy. He hones his intuition by improvising, demonstrating trust and risk. But how responsible and vulnerable is he in this improvising?²¹⁵ While Trump reads his audiences,

we too read him, and we evaluate the truth of his every gesture according to musical principles. How responsible and vulnerable are we in our evaluation of these improvised gestures?

Trump's gestures grab our attention through the media we consume. We are compelled or pressured to have opinions about his gestures, and to act on these opinions, using, above all, the very media through which we consume his gestures. Through media, his gestures reach us, repeat with us, and replicate with us. We are passive. We assemble him, disassemble him, and reassemble him, inventing a man, a machine, a moron, a monster, a master, a myth. We are active. His gestures reflect our own collective and mythic patterns of media consumption; patterns of consumption that are a necessary condition for his rise to power. Through lexical, kinesthetic, and auditory gestures, we scrutinize and celebrate not just Trump's body, morality, and predictive power, but our own. His body is our body and his music is our music; we assemble order and chaos, and judge our omnipotence and omniscience through him. He is our prophet and his song is our prophecy. On Judgment Day, when the blast of the *last trump* blares, his sins are our sins.

NOTES

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186. These contribute, perhaps unknowingly, to a body of revisionist interpretations of Ibsen and Grieg’s work, recast in the context of America’s struggle for Civil Rights, including a Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn collaboration, “Peer Gynt Suites.” Anna Celenza, “Duke Ellington, Billy Strayhorn, and the Adventures of Peer Gynt in America,” *Music and Politics* 5, no. 2 (Summer 2011), <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/mp.9460447.0005.205>.
187. The Trump troll doll market and frequent media references, include: “Troll-in-Chief,” “Donald Trump the best troll in all of politics,” “Trump the Troll,” “Trolls for Trump,” and “Donald Trump Is The World’s Greatest Troll”: John Cassidy, “Donald Trump Will Go Down in History as the Troll-in-Chief,” *The New Yorker*, June 29, 2017, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/john-cassidy/donald-trump-will-go-down-in-history-as-the-troll-in-chief>; Chris Cillizza, “Donald Trump Is the Best Troll in All of Politics,” CNN, April 29, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2017/04/28/politics/donald-trump-nra/index.html>; Rich Lowry, “Trump the Troll,” *POLITICO Magazine*, May 24, 2017, <http://politi.co/2qlBmuV>; Stella Muir, “Someone Made A NSFW Trump Troll Doll, And Now They’re Running A Kickstarter Campaign to Mass Produce It,” *Bored Panda* (blog), March 2017, <https://www.boredpanda.com/trump-nude-troll-doll-chuck-williams/>; The Master Design, “Collectible President Donald Trump Troll Doll— Hair to the Chief,” Amazon.com, 2017, <https://www.amazon.com/Collectible-President-Donald-Trump-Troll/dp/B06XNXQQ6D>; Andrew Marantz, “Trolls for Trump,” *The New Yorker*, October 24, 2016, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/10/31/trolls-for-trump>; Nate Silver, “Donald Trump Is The World’s Greatest Troll,” *FiveThirtyEight* (blog), July 20, 2015, <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/donald-trump-is-the-worlds-greatest-troll/>. Videos dedicated to the subject, include: This Information, *The World’s Greatest Troll: The Humor of Donald Trump*, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fzkBfTfiXS0>. In the scene Grieg’s music serves, the trolls sing (in Norwegian) “*May I hack him on the fingers? May I tug him by the hair?*”

188. See Slavoj Žižek's analysis of Beethoven's "Ninth" as an empty container reused to suit every ideological need, in *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology* by Sophie Fiennes, Documentary, 2013, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2152198/>. See also disparate interpretations traced to Lakoff frames in Quentin Vieregge, "Ameritude, Framing and Convergence Culture in the American Political Landscape," Chapter 6 of this volume.
189. Greene, *The 48 Laws of Power*.
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196. sailingandmusic, *McCain and Palin Sing (by Henry Hey)*. See musicians encouraging voting in Hirsch, "Weapons of Mass Distraction."
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198. Hugh Atkin, *A Little Trump Music—Classic Trump Vol. 2*.
199. See examination of subdivided snaps in this and other compositions in Oore, "Snap, Twang, and Blue Note." Also noted earlier in this chapter, e.g., in Tom Morello's solo.
200. These user comments (and all those that immediately follow), are quoted from those posted below Hugh Atkin's video: Hugh Atkin, *A Little Trump Music – Classic Trump Vol. 2*.
201. Ibid.
202. Ibid.
203. Ibid.
204. Ibid.
205. Ibid.
206. Ibid.
207. Ibid.
208. Ibid.
209. See "Trump" as proclamatory and (overly) self-promoting in "Lexical Gesture."

210. Jonathan Gray, Jeffrey P. Jones, and Ethan Thompson, eds., *Satire TV: Politics and Comedy in the Post-Network Era* (New York: NYU Press, 2009). Jay-Z explains: “The great thing about Donald Trump being president is now we’re forced to have the dialogue” about racism. Dean Baquet, *Jay-Z and Dean Baquet, in Conversation* (The New York Times, 2017), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XbuQAbG2AZ0>.
211. Greene, *The 48 Laws of Power*.
212. Leydon, “Towards a Typology of Minimalist Tropes.”
213. Some different cultural correlations between different types of motion and immorality are discussed in Oore, “Snap, Twang, and Blue Note.” E.g., limping flat-footed Jew and black and gait comparisons between criminals and epileptics well into twentieth century Europe.
214. Hugh Atkin, *The Aria of Donald Trump (Aka “Trumpanera”) – Classic Trump Vol. 1*, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Goz0PJbdURM>.
215. See Daniel Fischlin, “Improvised Responsibility: (Call and) Responsibility: Improvisation, Ethics, Co-Creation,” in *The Improvisation Studies Reader: Spontaneous Acts*, ed. Rebecca Caines and Ajay Heble (New York: Routledge, 2015), 289–95; McMullen, “People Don’t Get Ready.” See vulnerability and democracy in Martha Craven Nussbaum, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, The Public Square Book Series (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010). See democracy and music in Hirsch, “Weapons of Mass Distraction.”

CHAPTER TEN

“PUB FIGHT” POLITICS

OF TRUMP, ANGER MANAGEMENT, AND MUSIC

David Wilson (Stanford University)

INTRODUCTION

Donald Trump’s inaugural address was the culmination of an election campaign that was often acrimonious and bitterly contested by partisans on both sides of the American political divide. It was a speech that reiterated many of the themes from his presidential campaign. He encouraged a renewal of national sentiment, stating, “when you open your heart to patriotism, there is no room for prejudice.” He vowed to fight for American workers who have struggled to find employment in America’s twenty-first century economy. And he promised that “a new national pride will stir our souls, lift our sights, and heal our divisions.”¹

But the inaugural address was also punctuated by darker themes from Trump’s campaign. Trump described a Washington establishment that had enriched itself while allowing “the wealth of our middle class [to be] ripped from their homes.” He painted a picture of “rusted-out factories scattered like tombstones across the landscape of our

nation,” and infamously vowed to end “this American carnage.”² These themes were continuations of many that had been prominent throughout Trump’s campaign: anger against the Washington establishment, against immigrants, against those who doubted his ability to win; fear of the fading of the American (white) working class, of alleged violence brought to this country by illegal immigrants, and of the diminishing of American hegemony within the world order. His campaign culminated in an inaugural speech that was characterized variously as “negative,”³ “dark,”⁴ and “remarkably pessimistic, remarkably despondent.”⁵ Even right-leaning media outlets such as Fox News commented on the “blunt and unvarnished language” Trump used to describe his vision of modern America.⁶

Many of these themes were captured and reflected in the recurring musical selections on Trump’s campaign playlist. Adele’s surprising (and unwilling) contributions, the darkly “funereal”⁷ Bond song “Skyfall,” and the breakup anthem “Rolling in the Deep,” in which the artist “sounds ready for a pub fight,”⁸ were perhaps most paradigmatic of these latter themes of anger, darkness, fear, and negativity. This affective content was coupled with a more positive nostalgia for a potentially unrecoverable past. These songs, along with several others in regular rotation on the Trump playlist, contributed to a grandiose, monumentalizing musical campaign soundscape.

Furthermore, musical selections alone were not the only elements that contributed to and amplified the more negative affective elements of Trump’s campaign. Rather, Trump rarely shied away from the controversy sparked when artists publicly asked him to cease using their materials. A large number of artists, including Adele,⁹ the Rolling Stones,¹⁰ Aerosmith’s Steven Tyler,¹¹ and Neil Young¹² requested to have their music withdrawn from Trump’s campaign. Despite and over artists’ objections, however, Trump continued to use many of these contested songs.

The antagonism cultivated between Trump and his artists would eventually come back to haunt him. Leading up to Trump’s inaugura-

tion on January 20, 2017, many artists refused to take part in the ceremonies surrounding the President-elect’s installment.¹³ Nor is Trump’s willingness to put himself at odds with the artistic community merely a historic artifact of his campaign. Indeed, contested songs that blared at rallies throughout the Trump campaign¹⁴ are still being heard during the President’s term at major events such as the signing of the proclamation reducing the size of Bears Ears National Monument.¹⁵ Thus, understanding Trump’s use of music is an issue of ongoing relevance in understanding America’s evolving political discourse during the Trump administration.

Thus, I ask, what did Adele’s readiness for a “pub fight” contribute to Trump’s campaign? How can the seemingly incommensurable musical voices of artists as varied as Adele, the Rolling Stones, and opera star Luciano Pavarotti all serve the messaging of Trump’s campaign and presidency? These questions, which are complicated by Trump’s fraught relationship with much of the artistic community, will be the focus of the remainder of this chapter. What follows below constitutes a reception history of both those elements that were consciously received, as well as those that may have been unconsciously received by Trump rally attendees and observers.

I argue that the apparent diversity of voices found on Trump’s campaign playlist in fact reveals a consistent narrative thread, one that is connected by what Barthes called “the grain of the voice when the latter is in a dual posture, a dual production—of language and of music.”¹⁶ By turning our attention alternately to the linguistic elements of the songs of Trump’s campaign playlist, and to the musical/timbral elements of his performers, we can see how artistic intention both rebelled against and created the narratives of Trump’s unprecedented presidential campaign.

Below, I explore Trump’s musical choices in three sections. I begin with an analysis of Trump’s personal tastes, in which I investigate his apparent liking for monumental displays of wealth. I subsequently connect these tastes to his musical choices on the campaign trail. In the

second section, I focus particularly on the music of Adele, discussing how she exemplifies Trump's musical ethos. Finally, I close with a brief discussion of the implications of Trump's antagonistic relationship with musicians as he moved beyond his campaign and into his presidential term. In taking Trump's playlist seriously, I place myself in opposition to journalistic coverage of his campaign, much of which reduced the "blue-collar billionaire's" musical choices to the merely "banal," notable only for their "quirkiness."¹⁷ Rather, I treat Trump's campaign playlist seriously as a comparatively stable bellwether underpinning Trump's quixotic and mercurial verbal campaign rhetoric.

ANGER MANAGEMENT: CULTIVATING AFFECT ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL

Campaign playlists are frequently given a great deal of thought and unveiled to great fanfare.¹⁸ This is partly because playlists or campaign songs are chosen to enhance or supplement the rhetoric of the campaign that they accompany, and are sometimes even seen as an indicator of party platforms.¹⁹ Donald Trump's playlist is no exception to this, although it is worth noting, as MTV's Doreen St. Félix does, "With Trump, it's not always obvious whether his moves are dictated by premeditated savvy or a rambling instinct for curation that occasionally lands on meaning."²⁰

Nonetheless, the fact that Trump personally selected his own rally music²¹ indicates that there was active curation of his campaign playlist. Quirky and eclectic, it incorporated repertoire ranging from Twisted Sister to *Turandot*, and from the musical *Cats* to Adele's 2012 Bond song, "Skyfall." Trump's playlist, however, did not reflect an outpouring of spontaneously generated music that accompanied Barack Obama's first campaign, most notably in the form of will.i.am's star-studded music video "Yes We Can."²² Rather, Trump's selections reveal both a nostalgia for the era when he first came to prominence as a high-end real estate developer,²³ and a willingness to cultivate a musical tone made up of equal parts melancholy and fury.

The privileging of the era in which Trump himself rose to prominence can be seen in the dates that many of the musical acts in frequent rotation on Trump’s playlist were most successful. For example, Twisted Sister’s “We’re Not Gonna Take It” peaked on the *Billboard* charts just one year after the opening of Trump Tower.²⁴ Similarly, *Phantom of the Opera* opened on Broadway in 1988, the same year in which it won six Tony Awards, including those for Best Actor in a musical, Best Actress in a musical, and Best Musical.²⁵ And the Rolling Stones, though remarkable for their longevity, last crested the *Billboard* Top 20 in the 1980s.²⁶ Some of this may be attributable to the simple fact that much of this is the music of Trump’s generation. Nevertheless, the average copyright year of Trump’s campaign playlist (even excluding “Nessun dorma”) is significantly earlier than that of other recent candidates such as Barak Obama, Hillary Clinton, and John McCain, suggesting less of an imperative to include more recent music on the Trump campaign playlist.²⁷

These musical tastes also mirror the physical settings Trump calls home: like his penthouse apartment, his musical tastes are sometimes gaudy, often grandiose, and always monumental. Alexander Rehding argues that monumentality is not just about hugeness. Monumental music must be a “‘grand, significant’ object that is worthy of ‘being permanently preserved in the remembrance of posterity.’”²⁸ Most of the music on Trump’s playlist meets these criteria: The Beatles have firmly entered a popular culture canon; the Rolling Stones have been called “the most definitional band rock & roll has produced;”²⁹ and Twisted Sister was the topic of a 2014 feature-length documentary. All meet Rehding’s criterion of being preservation-worthy.

Trump’s monumental musical choices are of a piece with his grandiloquent taste in interior design. Trump’s apartment, decked out in an excess of Louis Quatorze furniture,³⁰ with heavily gold-leafed architectural details, seems designed to imply taste and scream wealth. Similarly, Trump’s musical playlist suggests a certain level of cultivation. More important than cultivation, though, are musical products that

imply expense and, by connection, flaunt Trump's wealth. For example, Pavarotti's performance of "Nessun dorma" not only calls to mind the hyper-exaggerated musical sweep of grand opera, but also became an international bestseller in its own right.³¹ Furthermore, as arguably the most famous operatic star of recent decades, Pavarotti himself became a luxury commodity, most notably through his performances as a member of the Three Tenors. Thus, not only is the operatic repertoire performed by Pavarotti on Trump's playlist indexed to a wealthy class of consumers and patrons, Pavarotti himself contributed to a musical sensibility that combined expensive tastes and monumentality with accessibility.³²

Likewise, *The Phantom of the Opera* is famous in equal parts for its excess of sentiment, its crashing chandeliers, and its lush-sounding orchestrations, but also for being one of the most performed—and by extension most widely seen—musicals in history. Trump may indeed be a true fan of Pavarotti and *Phantom*. But his choices are also expensive ones—the cost of a single ticket to *Phantom* can crest \$200—and are associated in the public mind with the spectacle and razzle-dazzle of the opera and Broadway.

Musically, Trump's choices were not unified by a consistent aesthetic so much as by the anger and resentment of their affective content, a feature which was not new to 2016's campaign. As Justin Patch argues, "rage, violence, misogyny, and drive for aggressive dominance"³³ have been themes for several years on political playlists. Male-dominated rock acts such as the Rolling Stones' and Twisted Sister's perennial presence on the presumptive president's personally-selected populist playlist married lyrics rejecting the authority of "the establishment" with rock's aggressive sonic aesthetic, traditionally coded as masculine.³⁴

As has already been mentioned, this anger and resentment carried over into the relationships between Trump and many of the artists whose work he used. For example, Andrew Lloyd Webber cited having a good working relationship with Trump, but regretted being unable to force the campaign to cease using the famous composer's music.³⁵ The Rolling

Stones and Adele issued official requests through their publicists for Trump to stop using their media.³⁶ And some artists, such as former R.E.M. members Michael Stipe and Mike Mills, took to Twitter to issue far less judiciously worded objections to the use of their music by the Trump campaign than those issued by other artists’ publicity teams.³⁷

As Kimberlianne Podlas notes, however, “notwithstanding the proliferation of [artists’] complaints [against political campaigns], their legal foundation is uncertain.”³⁸ Though they may have been unwilling, the distribution framework of music in the United States ensured a legally submissive, though vocally outraged, artist base. Even in the cases where Trump did drop a song from his playlist, he often managed to couch this as an insult to the artist in question. Trump’s parting shots were then broadcast over platforms like Twitter to his many social media followers, further amplifying the acrimony between him and these artists.³⁹ This ultimately may have helped the cultivation of the angry affect communicated by the Trump campaign’s playlist, as the swirl of social media outrage on the part of artists and their fans at Trump’s ongoing use of their music only served to amplify the general tone of anger which characterized much of his campaign.

Trump’s relationship with creatives underscores another feature of his campaign, in addition to his wont to program the monumental and the expensive. The Republican candidate’s acquisitiveness of artists’ creations reflects an entitlement to get what he wants, and not to concern himself with the protestations of the other parties involved in the acquisition of his desires. Many of the artists already mentioned—Adele, Andrew Lloyd Webber, the Rolling Stones, and even Pavarotti’s estate—all asked Trump to refrain from using their music at his political rallies. In contrast to other recent politicians from both parties, however, Trump was apparently unfazed by artists’ protests, and in most cases chose to continue using their works. In this paradigm, people—and by extension, their work—become part of Trump’s imperial holdings. This is reflected in the photo tour of Trump’s home and physical possessions by *iDesignArch*. In the

final three photos, Melania becomes the focus of the camera lens, much as a few photos earlier a golden tray bearing a goblet of orange juice and a cup of tea are featured.⁴⁰ For the camera, Melania becomes simply another item acquired and installed in Trump's domain, displayed to the public when advantageous.

Trump's success at appropriating artists' music demonstrated that he was within his legal rights to continue using their works. Perhaps more troublingly, his unpunished poll numbers in the face of authorial outrage implies that his constituents were untroubled by the moral questions bound up in the use of artists' works against their will.⁴¹ And his willingness to use artists' work against their will reveals the complete immateriality of artistic compliance; willing artistic bodies might be useful, but submissive bodies would do. In short, he proved that authorial intent played no role in establishing the rhetoric of his campaign where it conflicted with his political ends.

But what of the music itself? What was the message implied by the soundtrack of the Trump campaign? How did artists as varied as Pavarotti, Andrew Lloyd Webber, and Adele contribute to a unified rhetoric? Glimmerings of answers to some of these questions can be seen in the more typical acts featured on Trump's playlist, such as the Rolling Stones and Twisted Sister. In these songs, attention to textual details (as suggested by Blankenship and Renard⁴²), reveals some of the ways in which preexisting musical texts can be brought into alignment with many of the Trump campaign's political themes.

To begin with the Rolling Stones, Trump made frequent use of their hit song "You Can't Always Get What You Want." This can be taken partly as a self-referential acknowledgment that Trump's candidacy caused serious and well-publicized hand-wringing within the Republican Party. However, Trump also used—and continues to use well into his presidency—the song as a jibe at his political opponents. Indeed, the song played following both his acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention, as well as his victory speech after his upset election

win.⁴³ Taken in these contexts, the song can be seen to indicate Trump’s willingness to embrace his self-aware outsider status. Furthermore, Trump’s plausibly self-conscious use of this song as a jibe against his opponents modeled a certain permissive quality for his followers who gravitated towards Trump’s rejection of the Republican mainstream establishment. This kind of self-consciously ironic deployment of music also implies that, at least some of the time, Trump was employing a degree of active musical selection, rather than simply “a rambling instinct for curation that occasionally lands on meaning.”⁴⁴

In the case of Twisted Sister, the title (and oft-repeated lyric) of the band’s most-played piece on Trump’s campaign soundtrack, “We’re Not Gonna Take It,” largely sums up the text of this extremely prominent playlist item. In the words of Twisted Sister’s lead singer Dee Snider, it is a song “about rebellion, speaking your mind and fighting the system.”⁴⁵ But the text, which is sung entirely from the perspective of “we” (i.e., the collective), and which is delivered in short, sharply emotive bursts, does not merely declare the singer’s repudiation of “the system.” It also explicitly defines in-group and out-group relations, as in the line “you don’t know us, you don’t belong.” Thus, from its opening word, the song constructs a collective which has reached an affective breaking point, and which defines itself in opposition to the outsiders who misunderstand the in-group embraced by the song’s lyrics.

In *Understanding Nationalism*, Patrick Colm Hogan makes the point that “the crucial factor for a patriot is not the position or practice of his or her country, nor the position or practice of the enemy. Rather, the crucial factor is the labels, the names attached to those positions and practices.”⁴⁶ In Twisted Sister’s piece, part of the song’s textual import is based on the definition of the labels “us” versus “you.” When grafted onto Trump’s (or, presumably, any) political campaign, the implication becomes clear: the song’s “we” become those who are in the sphere of this particular campaign rally, this particular political movement; “you” become those who would like to prevent the song’s “us” from succeeding.

Thus, by turning Twisted Sister's song into a campaign anthem, Trump created a space in which the musical content of his campaign playlist afforded the potential for the emergence of a collective label—Hogan's "crucial factor"—for his political supporters.⁴⁷

Twisted Sister's anthem not only provides a textual foundation for an emergent group label for Trump's supporters. It also provides a clear affect of anger and defiance to attach to that label. Furthermore, this affect, couched in the aggressively masculinist aesthetic that scholars such as Simon Frith, Angela McRobbie,⁴⁸ and John Shepherd have referred to as "cock rock," is clearly communicated through the raw, scream-like vocal timbre used throughout the piece. This mode of performance, argues John Shepherd, not only communicates a kind of hyper-exaggerated masculinity, but also may remind rockers "and their *male* audience, that these are traditional male characteristics that need to be adopted and internalized."⁴⁹ Given the frequent accusations against the Trump campaign of misogyny,⁵⁰ it is perhaps not surprising the campaign made such heavy use of an anthem that afforded the textual potentiality of group formation, and which was simultaneously indexed to a musical style associated with masculine aggression. In other words, it is not only the textual meanings, but also the timbral implications of "We're Not Gonna Take It" which suited it so well to Trump's political message.

There is good reason to regard holistically the ways that connotations of text, timbre, genre, and affect combine with one another in Barthes's "grain of the voice," or the "dual production—of language and of music."⁵¹ In doing so, we see how Twisted Sister's song can serve as an affective primer for the anger, violence, and sexism that were such prominent themes in the Republican candidate's political messaging. This music is not, as Chris Rogers of the *Washington Post* contends, "authoritarian hold music," and its function is not solely to "infuse the hateful atmosphere ... with an air of utter normalcy."⁵² Upon closer inspection, pieces like "You Can't Always Get What You Want" and "We're Not Gonna Take It" aptly

underscore many of the anti-establishment themes of disenfranchisement that were so salient in Trump’s campaign.

The fact that rock numbers like those discussed above reflect Trumpian anti-establishment ideology is perhaps not overly surprising; after all, rock itself has its roots in an anti-establishment musical movement. How, though, can the messaging of these songs be reconciled with the less typical musical fare on Trump’s campaign playlist such as a Bond song, or a ballad from *Cats*? The answer to this question reveals some further important facets of Trump’s musical ethos. First, analysis of Trump’s more unusual musical choices suggests an aesthetic that privileges affect over textual meaning. Take, for example, the presence of Puccini on Trump’s playlist. “Nessun dorma,” sung in Italian, and at times eliciting boos from rally attendees,⁵³ clearly did not communicate a specific textual message, though scholars have called for close readings of song texts.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, it remained in frequent rotation at Trump campaign rallies.

Thomas Turino’s theorizations on the interactions of text and music explain why freeing Trump’s playlist from the imperative of textual communication might have proven advantageous for the real estate tycoon’s campaign, writing,

Symbolic propositions, statements *about* other things, often call forth an analytical state of mind; that is, they readily inspire the listener to symbolically assess the truth or falsity of the claim being made ... Icons and especially indices partake *of* the things they signify, through either resemblance or cooccurrence, and thus seem more natural, real, and hence unquestionable.⁵⁵

In this paradigm, music can be and often is strongly indexed to other social phenomena and events. “Nessun dorma,” for example, is a musical selection that is already indexed to large-scale nationalist displays such as the Olympic Games,⁵⁶ and which rendered the emotive content of Trump’s campaign rhetoric of struggle and triumph truer, without having to go through the tedious business of proving every statement.

In Puccini's famous tenor aria, it is not the specifics of the text that are most important; indeed, it is safe to assume that most rally attendees would not have understood the text of "Nessun dorma." Rather, the aria's functionality is found, once again, in the grain of the voice that emerges in the interaction between organized language and music. The melodic arch of the aria effectively leverages the distinctive timbres of changing tenorial registers in a way that obviates some of the need for textual specificity. The aria opens in a low tessitura that robs the tenor voice of much of its ability to project powerfully. Even brief strivings above the upper passaggio, as when the tenor sings "No, no, sulla tua bocca," quickly return to the middle register. Thus, when the tenor finally succeeds in resisting the downward pull of earlier phrases, remaining instead on a high A until his final cutoff, the triumphant statement of "vincerò" is perfectly amplified by the more athletic timbre and vocal production of the male *bel canto* high register. This capacity of the singing voice's "dual posture" to timbrally enact the otherwise unintelligible text's progression from struggle to triumph, and to communicate affectively intense content made "Nessun dorma" so fitting for Trump's playlist.

Songs like "Memory" from *Cats* (one of Andrew Lloyd Webber's reluctant contributions to the campaign trail) also aptly display Barthes's "dual production," just as it provides affective reinforcement to Trump's campaign themes of disenfranchisement and anger. "Memory" is in some ways strikingly non-narrative; it is not a story told by a narrator so much as a meditation upon a story known only to the speaker herself. But it does not need to tell a concrete narrative. "Memory" provides just enough understandable soundbites at climactic moments—e.g., "I was beautiful then," "Another day is dawning," "It's so easy to leave me"—to convey a sense of triumph in the face of societal marginalization. Add to that Elaine Paige's bright, easily produced belt in the final verses, and it is easy to see how the music transforms Grizabella's (and the listener's) displacement and abandonment into a triumphant anthem of protestation, and a refusal to disappear quietly.

**“READY FOR A PUB FIGHT”: ADELE AND THE TRUMP
CAMPAIGN PLAYLIST**

In this affective Trumpian paradigm, Adele’s music is the contributor *par excellence*. Adele’s timbral and textual identity as a “soul singer” gives her the authority of “authentic” emotion.⁵⁷ Meanwhile, her identity as a white (working class) woman makes her safe for use at rallies for a party whose base is widely seen to have struggled to reconcile itself to the changing demographics of modern America.⁵⁸ And the content of Adele’s music, at least as it appeared most frequently on Trump’s playlist, is almost purely affective. Take “Skyfall,” from the eponymous James Bond film. This was an early track included on Trump’s playlist,⁵⁹ and remained a fixture throughout much of his campaign. Though musically very distinct from Twisted Sister or the Beatles, “Skyfall” displays the anger, nostalgia, and monumentality I consider to be representative of the real estate magnate’s more typical musical fare.

To start with, “Skyfall” is monumental on all counts. Its huge 77-piece orchestra⁶⁰ and full backing choir not only create musical depth and sonic richness, but also come at significant financial cost, turning it into another sonic display of wealth. Then there is Adele herself, routinely noted in the press for the size and power of her voice. This is combined with the dazzling success of the song as an independent piece of music, winning a Grammy, an Oscar, a Golden Globe, and a Brit Award, among many others. And finally, there is the place of “Skyfall” within the James Bond canon. As part of an iconic cinematic corpus which has given rise to its own genre of “the Bond song,” “Skyfall” is by definition worthy of preservation. Thus, like so much else on Trump’s playlist, “Skyfall” perpetuates the Trumpian taste for monumentality.

Musically, Adele’s Bond song also fulfills much of the affective and textual work described above. This is despite the fact that the song’s lyrics are almost completely unremarkable, a fact noted repeatedly by reviewers of the track.⁶¹ Even when the lyrics are mentioned, reviewers refer to them with striking vagueness, often avoiding specific references

beyond the title of the track.⁶² Todd Martens of the *Los Angeles Times* argues that “‘Skyfall’ doesn’t give [Adele] much in the way of memorable lyrics, but Adele doesn’t need them.”⁶³ Instead, writing mere hours after the song dropped, he argues, “To listen to Adele is to *surrender to the absolute delight* of her vocals ... There’s a slow build, *a giant orchestra and a hint of swagger*.”⁶⁴ Adele’s chart-topping Bond theme was never about understanding the text. It was about “surrender” to the song’s emotive content, the scale of its musical forces, and the hypermasculine “swagger” connoted by the womanizing spy Bond.

Adrian Daub and Charles Kronengold, in their recent monograph on Bond songs, concur with the journalistic sphere in their analysis of the decipherable meaning—or lack thereof—behind Adele’s lyrics. They write, “We don’t know what a ‘Skyfall’ is any more than we know what an ‘Octopussy’ or a ‘Moonraker’ are ... The song’s nonsensical lyrics resemble [a] word association game ...”⁶⁵ This word association game is primed by a soundscape that is “reassuringly retro,”⁶⁶ but also unremittingly “funereal.”⁶⁷ The song’s retro vibe can be indexed to ideas of making America great *again*, i.e., going back to a bygone era. Its funereal qualities admit to and lament the unlikeliness of success, even in the face of Trump’s unrelenting promises that America will return to the kind of mythical past which Anthony Smith points to as a key feature of many ethnically based nationalisms.⁶⁸

Textually, “Skyfall” is characterized by its constantly repeated lyric, “Let the sky fall, when it crumbles, we will stand tall,” inviting the sky to fall, and expressing faith in the collective’s potential to weather the destruction associated with the heavens falling in. As with “Memory,” “Skyfall’s” lyrics resist concrete narrativization, in part because “we don’t know what a ‘Skyfall’ is.” “Skyfall” as a noun references a specific locale in the eponymous 2012 Bond movie; divorced from its originary filmic source, the word becomes more strongly indexed to the verb formation, as in “the sky is falling.” For this very reason, though, the text can be applied to any number of scenarios. The textual fragments that do stand out

imply the embrace of a kind of apocalyptic millenarianism that bespeaks a willingness to accept (political? social? physical?) carnage. This sonic embrace of carnage matches eyewitness accounts of a campaign culture that at times actively encouraged violence against dissenters.⁶⁹ “Skyfall,” in short, should be read as more than merely an unconventional campaign pick, and as something other than a musical setting of a textual blueprint for Trump’s ideological positions. Instead, we should read “Skyfall” as an affective indicator—and enhancer—of one of the dominant moods cultivated over the course of Trump’s populist campaign.

Not only does “Skyfall” reflect many of Trump’s ideological desiderata, it fulfills them in a way that other recent Bond songs could not. Sam Smith’s “Writing’s on the Wall” (2015) might share “Skyfall’s” rich orchestral sweep, and its gloomy, melancholy *Stimmung*. But unlike Adele’s song, Smith’s lyrics admit too frequently to the possibility of failure in its repeated line, “If I risk it all, could you break my fall?” Furthermore, Smith’s recurring recourse to a delicate, feminine-sounding falsetto enacts a sonic emasculation that would have had limited appeal in a campaign that regularly faced accusations of misogyny, culminating in the leak of the infamous 2005 “grab them by the pussy” recording.⁷⁰ Other twenty-first century Bond songs fall even further from the mark than Smith’s. Madonna’s “Die Another Day” (2002) is produced in a flamboyantly autotuned tone that, in its cyborgian splendor, shuts down perceptions of human emotion and authenticity. And Alicia Keys’s “Another Way to Die” (2008) has been widely panned as one of the worst Bond songs in history.⁷¹ In short, only Adele’s contribution to this corpus could provide quite the alchemy of instant star recognition, timbre, scale, and overall monumentality to serve Trump’s aspirational presidential aesthetic.

“Rolling in the Deep,” another frequently heard Adele track on Trump’s playlist, also embeds intensely affective content within a monumental setting. The hit single from Adele’s second album, *21*, is another that is notable for reviewers’ lack of attention to lyrical details. Indeed, lyrics

are almost never quoted in reviews of the song, hardly a surprise, given their lack of narrative clarity. Instead, they express a vendetta or a grudge (against what or whom is left to our imagination), threaten revenge for past wrongs, and promise future regret: “We could have had it all / You’re gonna wish you never had met me;” “Go ahead and sell me out / and I’ll lay your shit bare”; and “Think of me in the depths of your despair.”⁷² As in “Skyfall,” “Rolling in the Deep” combines disjunct text with pointillistic dabs of affect. Where “Skyfall’s” text merely hinted at some of the anger and resentment of the Trump campaign’s populist base,⁷³ the lyrics to “Rolling in the Deep” make these resentments both explicit and actionable.

As with “Skyfall,” though, the import of “Rolling in the Deep” is found not solely in its text, but also in its emotionally raw affectivity. In reviews, observations of the timbre and impression of power generated by the singer are consistent talking points, such as: “‘Rolling in the Deep’ finds the 22-year-old in bluesy gospel mode, sounding powerful”;⁷⁴ “Adele has toughened her tone ... and sounds ready for a pub fight”;⁷⁵ or “[Adele] stomped through her hit ‘Rolling in the Deep’ as her thousand-plus tribe sang along in a moment of cathartic joy.”⁷⁶ These reviews all come from the same publication, *Rolling Stone*, but they are notable for their consistency across time and between authors, and they are representative of many of the song’s media reviews.

Several features come to the fore: as the title of one of these reviews notes, Adele is in a “post-breakup” phase. Furthermore, she draws on a “bluesy gospel mode,” once again reinforcing her sonic links to an African diasporic tradition, while safely conveying it within a pale-skinned, pale-eyed, and pale-haired package that renders her unthreatening to the largely white, “tough on immigration” listener base at many of Trump’s rallies.⁷⁷ Meanwhile, her apparent readiness “for a pub fight” correlates with a campaign culture in which violence was not only condoned, but sometimes explicitly encouraged.⁷⁸ All the while, “[stomping] through her hit ... in a moment of cathartic joy” legitimates the release of pent-

up resentments that were so inflamed by Trump’s verbal rhetoric.⁷⁹ In other words, “Rolling in the Deep” evokes not only strong anger, but equally strong emotional release. It provides yet another instance of the phenomenon described by Turino, in which the song’s intense emotional fulfillment, indexed repeatedly to the simple but angry messages of the Trump campaign, primes audiences to accept “their” candidate’s statements as truer, more deeply felt.⁸⁰

It would be a mistake to interpret Adele’s presence on Trump’s soundtrack as simply a quirky choice by an eccentric billionaire. Trump’s campaign playlist, exemplified by Adele’s unwilling contributions, but also seen in his other musical choices such as Pavarotti, excerpts from Andrew Lloyd Webber’s musicals, and rock groups like the Rolling Stones, was a soundtrack to the consistent messages of anger, resentment, and disenfranchisement found throughout the Trump campaign. Trump’s playlist belied the occasional desultory attempts at outreach that he made to minority communities⁸¹ through its refusal to represent people of color, except through appropriative contexts such as Adele’s “bluesy gospel mode.” In its consistent dismissal of artists’ concerns about their inclusion on his playlist, it communicated a cultural imperialist entitlement to make use of any object or person as he saw fit. Finally, it revealed the same aesthetic of monumental extravagance that characterizes many of Trump’s personal possessions. This ethos, however, would prove problematic as Trump transitioned from campaigning to governing.

FROM CAMPAIGN TO GOVERNANCE: NOT QUITE LIKE THE RECORDING

While on the campaign trail, Trump and Clinton alike faced an imperative to coalesce their voting bases. Music, as we have seen above, was deployed by the Trump campaign to create an affective backdrop for the candidate’s ideological rhetoric. The New York real estate mogul’s stump songs were drawn mainly from the popular sphere, and did not contest the national symbols of the United States such as the national anthem. For

the elevated solemnity of a presidential inauguration, though, recordings are no replacement for the glamor of celebrity performances; live musicians are a necessity.⁸² This was, in theory, the administration's first opportunity "for re-imagining the present social world,"⁸³ to sonically confirm or deny the vitriolic themes that helped sweep Trump to power. But the inauguration showed artists to be far from powerless. In the case of live performance, artists finally had the opportunity to deny Trump the use of their voices, and they did so in droves.

First, a couple of notes are in order about the nature of the musical acts that the organizers of Trump's inaugural celebration attempted, but failed, to assemble. As with Trump's campaign playlist, they were a surprisingly international bunch, especially given the nationalistic nature of any presidential inauguration. The committee for Trump's inaugural gala courted a musically diverse group that included artists from Canada, Italy, Wales, and England. Ultimately, all of these artists turned down Trump, making the final lineup entirely home-grown.⁸⁴ British singer Rebecca Ferguson caused a stir with the widely reported nature of her rejection of Trump's invitation, stating that she would agree to perform on the condition that she be allowed to sing Abel Meeropol's "Strange Fruit," a song protesting American racism, and famously associated with Billie Holiday.⁸⁵ The universal rejection of Trump by invited foreign artists, including those with whom Trump claims a personal relationship such as Elton John,⁸⁶ parallels developments in some American musical genres. For example, local news in Washington, D.C. noted that, although at least one D.C. high school marching band had participated in each of the last five presidential inaugurations, not a single local band even applied to participate in Trump's inauguration.⁸⁷

The Trump inauguration committee's difficulties in attracting high-profile performers is in distinct contrast to his predecessor. For example, Obama's first inauguration included appearances by the likes of Mary J. Blige, Denzel Washington, Jon Bon Jovi, John Legend, will.i.am, Renee Fleming, Sheryl Crow, and Josh Groban, to name just a few.⁸⁸ Nor is this

a simple issue of artists’ generally more liberal leanings. For example, the younger George Bush attracted a diverse array of high-profile performers to his first inauguration, including Ricky Martin, Destiny’s Child, and 98 Degrees.⁸⁹

This is not just a fundamental shift in the ability to recruit talent, however. Following Appadurai, Trump’s antagonistic relationship with many performers during his campaign showed the potentials of the ideoscape to appropriate the products of the mediascape, and to adapt the messages of cultural products to its own ends within the context of prerecorded, commodified music.⁹⁰ But Trump’s inauguration shows how the flows of influence move in both directions; in the inauguration, the mediascape exerted considerable influence upon the racial and political imaginary constructed over the course of the ceremonies.

Trump’s relationship with the artistic community deviates from Obama’s both in his use of recordings in the face of artistic opposition, and in his subsequent relationship with live performers. Where Obama (and most of his predecessors) desisted from the use of music by artists who protested,⁹¹ Trump largely ignored artists’ complaints. Conversely, high-profile artists’ unwillingness to collaborate with Trump’s installation in the White House was surely related in no small part to his politics, but it cannot have been helped by the confrontational posture his campaign struck with many creatives. Thus, Trump’s use of music represents a profound shift not just ideologically, but also in the ways in which recent political figures have interacted with the American artistic community.

Finally, the interplay between artistic outrage, covered in both traditional and new media, and the music of Trump’s playlist shows the degree to which the discourse surrounding a political campaign’s seemingly cosmetic choices, such as which songs to play at rallies, can in fact drastically amplify political themes and ideologies. Two years into Trump’s presidency, the millenarian embrace of carnage heard throughout the presidential campaign in Adele’s “Skyfall” has faded. Nevertheless, we continue to hear the echoes of Trump’s playlist, as its musical contents

are still played at his rallies and events. Although the artistic and media outrage around Trump's musical choices may be reduced, it nevertheless continues to receive press coverage, thereby perpetuating the tone of artistic outrage that first emerged during the campaign through news and social media.⁹² Thus, as Trump continues to construct the media spectacle of his presidency, we are left to wonder: what will appear next on Trump's presidential playlist?

NOTES

1. The full text of Donald Trump’s inaugural speech can be found at “The Inaugural Address,” The White House, updated 20 January 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/inaugural-address>.
2. Ibid.
3. Cathleen Decker, “Trump Starts his Presidency with a Theme Similar to Reagan’s, But a Tone Far More Negative,” *Los Angeles Times*, 20 January 2017, <http://www.latimes.com/politics/la-na-pol-trump-inauguration-analysis-20170120-story.html>.
4. Susan Page, “Trump’s Short, Dark and Defiant Inaugural Address,” *USA Today*, 20 January 2017, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2017/01/20/donald-trump-president-inauguration-speech-analysis-defiant-address-and-political-revolt/96836152/>.
5. Thomas Leeper, “President Trump’s Inaugural Address: Expert Reactions,” *EUROPP*, <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2017/01/23/president-trumps-inaugural-address-experts-reactions/#One>
6. Judson Berger, “Trump Pursues ‘New Vision’ on First Day as President,” Fox News, 20 January 2017, <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2017/01/20/trump-pursues-new-vision-on-first-day-as-president.html>.
7. Adrian Daub and Charles Kronengold, *The James Bond Songs: Pop Anthems of Late Capitalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 37.
8. Will Hermes, “Adele Toughens Up Her Soul,” *Rolling Stone*, 3 March 2011: 70.
9. Jeremy Diamond, “Adele: Donald Trump Doesn’t Have Permission to Use My Music,” *CNN*, 1 February 2016, <http://www.cnn.com/2016/02/01/politics/adele-donald-trump-music/index.html>.
10. Travis M. Andrews, “The Rolling Stones Demand Trump Stop Using Its Music at Rallies, But Can the Band Actually Stop Him?” *Washington Post*, 5 May 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2016/05/05/the-rolling-stones-demand-trump-stop-using-its-music-at-rallies-but-can-the-band-actually-stop-him/>.
11. Daniel Kreps, “Aerosmith Warns Donald Trump Over ‘Dream On’ Use,” *Rolling Stone*, 11 October 2015, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/aerosmith-warns-donald-trump-over-dream-on-use-20151011>.

12. Jason Newman, "Neil Young, Donald Trump Spar Over 'Rockin' in the Free World' Use," *Rolling Stone*, 17 June 2015, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/neil-young-donald-trump-spar-over-rockin-in-the-free-world-use-20150617>.
13. Roisin O'Connor, "Donald Trump's Inauguration: All the Artists Who Said No," *Independent*, 19 January 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/music/features/donald-trump-inauguration-acts-kanye-west-celine-dion-john-legend-elton-john-a7535966.html>.
14. Chris Rogers, "Authoritarian Hold Music: How Donald Trump's Banal Playlist Cultivates Danger at His Rallies," *The Washington Post*, 16 March 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/authoritarian-hold-music-how-donald-trumps-banal-playlist-cultivates-danger-at-his-rallies/2016/03/16/723159ac-eab1-11e5-bc08-3e03a5b41910_story.html?tid=hybrid_collaborative_1_na. Rogers notes Trump's penchant for "benign rock songs played at unforgiving volumes" at his rallies.
15. Robinson Meyer, "It's More Than Just a Monument," *The Atlantic*, 4 December 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2017/12/trump-shrinks-bears-ears/547445/>.
16. Roland Barthes, "The Grain of the Voice," *Image Music Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 181.
17. Chris Rogers notes with frustration many pundits' dismissal of Trump's unusual playlist in "Authoritarian Hold Music."
18. Dana Gorzelany-Mostak, "I've Got a Little List': Spotifying Mitt Romney and Barack Obama in the 2012 U.S. Presidential Election," *Music and Politics* 9, no. 2 (Summer 2015): 5.
19. James Deaville, "The Sound of Media Spectacle: Music at the Party Convention," *Music and Politics* 9, no. 2 (Summer 2015): 17.
20. Doreen St. Félix, "The Uses of the Classical: On Jackie Evancho's Inauguration Performance and the Subtle Theater of Pop Authoritarianism," *MTV*, 4 January 2017, <http://www.mtv.com/news/2968672/donald-trump-classical-music/>.
21. Rebecca Sinderbrand, "Donald Trump's Campaign Soundtrack: A Grammy Day Playlist," *The Washington Post*, 15 February 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2016/02/15/donald-trumps-campaign-soundtrack-a-grammy-day-playlist/>.
22. Carol Vernallis analyzes will.i.am's video in detail, along with several other musical fixtures of Obama's 2008 campaign, in "Audiovisual Change: Viral Web Media and the Obama Campaign," *Society for Cinema and Media Studies* 50, no. 4 (Summer 2011): 73-97.

23. Simon Van Zuylen-Wood, “Donald Trump and the Artifice of the Deal,” *Politico*, 12 May 2016, <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/05/donald-trump-2016-father-artifice-of-the-deal-213888>.
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25. For a complete list of awards won by *Phantom*, use the Tony Awards search at https://www.tonyawards.com/p/tonys_search.
26. “The Rolling Stones Chart History,” *Billboard*, <http://www.billboard.com/music/the-rolling-stones/chart-history>.
27. Courtney Blankenship and Stan Renard, “Pop Songs on Political Platforms,” *Journal of Pop Music Studies* 18 (August 2017): 31.
28. Alexander Rehding, *Music and Monumentality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 28.
29. Mikal Gilmore, “Love and War Inside the Rolling Stones,” *Rolling Stone*, 7 May 2013, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/the-rolling-stones-soul-survivors-20130507>.
30. Talia Avakian, “The \$100-million Penthouse Where Donald Trump’s Family Lives in New York City,” *Travel and Leisure*, 16 November 2016, <http://www.travelandleisure.com/culture-design/architecture-design/trump-tower-donald-trump-penthouse>.
31. Alan Blyth, “Pavarotti, Luciano,” *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, updated 15 May 2009, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/21122>.
32. This latter point is underscored by the fact that, although recordings of the aria abound, Trump nevertheless continued to use Pavarotti’s recording even after the tenor’s estate requested that he refrain from doing so (“Pavarotti’s Family Tells Trump to Stop Using Beloved Aria,” *Reuters*, 21 July 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-election-pavarotti-trump/pavarottis-family-tells-trump-to-stop-using-beloved-aria-idUSKCN1012T0>). Thus, it is clear that Trump’s attraction to this piece did not lie entirely in the aria.
33. Justin Patch, “Notes on Deconstructing the Populism: Music on the Campaign Trail, 2012 and 2016,” *American Music* 34, no. 3 (Fall 2016): 386.
34. Cf. Sara Cohen, “Men Making a Scene: Rock Music and the Production of Gender,” in *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender*, ed. Sheila Whiteley (New York: Routledge, 1997), 29. For additional commentary on the ways in which rock is constructed as masculine, see Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 154. For a discussion of the ways in which the

- rock genre has proven resistant to female performers, see for example Mary Celeste Kearney, "The Missing Links: Riot Grrrl—Feminism—Lesbian Culture," in *Sexing the Groove*, 212.
35. Interview on *The Graham Norton Show*, 11 November 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6YkuTGS1_BA.
 36. See, for example, Mark Tran and Amber Jamieson, "Adele tells Donald Trump to stop pinching her songs for his campaign," *Guardian*, 1 February 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2016/feb/01/adele-donald-trump-songs-campaign>; or "Rolling Stones Tell Trump to Stop Using Their Music" *BBC*, 5 May 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-36210829>.
 37. A summary of one such Twitter protest can be seen at Ryan Gajewski, "R.E.M. Slams Donald Trump for Using their Song in 'Moronic Charade of a Campaign,'" *Hollywood Reporter*, 9 September 2015, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/rem-slams-donald-trump-using-821609>.
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 39. See, for example, Trump's response to Neil Young's request to stop using his music: (@realDonaldTrump), ".@Neilyoung's song, 'Rockin' in the Free World' was just one of 10 songs used as background music. Didn't love it anyway," Twitter, 24 June 2015, <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/613814933860519936?lang=en>.
 40. "Inside Donald and Melania Trump's Manhattan Apartment Mansion," *iDesignArch*, <http://www.idesignarch.com/inside-donald-and-melania-trumps-manhattan-apartment-mansion/>.
 41. Indeed, within a few weeks of the beginning of Trump's feud with Adele in early February of 2016, his poll numbers saw a significant improvement. Cf. Philip Bump, "On Super Tuesday eve, Donald Trump gets his best poll numbers yet," *Washington Post*, 29 February 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/02/29/on-the-eve-of-super-tuesday-donald-trump-just-got-his-best-poll-yet/>.
 42. Blankenship and Renard, "Pop Songs on Political Platforms," 33.
 43. Mikael Wood, "Why Donald Trump Keeps Celebrating Victories with a Grim Rolling Stones Song," *LA Times*, 9 November 2016, <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/music/la-et-ms-donald-trump-rolling-stones-20161109-story.html>.
 44. St. Félix, "Uses of the Classical."

45. Daniel Kreps, “Twisted Sister Allow Donald Trump to Use ‘We’re Not Gonna Take It,’” *Rolling Stone*, 28 November 2015, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/twisted-sister-allow-donald-trump-to-use-were-not-gonna-take-it-20151128>.
46. Patrick Colm Hogan, *Understanding Nationalism: On Narrative, Cognitive Science, and Identity* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2009), 24. Although Hogan’s view provides more nuance than is captured in this quote, he nevertheless stresses the centrality of labelling over content in defining in-group/out-group relationships.
47. Trump is clearly not the only politician to do this. Indeed, Hillary Clinton’s 2016 election campaign also included pieces such as “Fight Song” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YttscNOoAjA>), which alternates between statements about the impact individuals can make and the assertion of a shared, collective goal.
48. Simon Frith and Angela McRobbie, “Rock and Sexuality,” in *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word*, ed. Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (New York: Pantheon, 1989), 373ff.
49. John Shepherd, “Music and Male Hegemony,” in *Music and Society: The Politics of Composition, Performance, and Reception*, ed. Richard Leppert and Susan McClary (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 165ff.
50. For example, Trump disputed Carly Fiorina’s ability to become president on the basis of her looks (Jessica Estepa, “Donald Trump on Carly Fiorina: ‘Look at that Face!’” *USA Today*, 10 September 2015); he retweeted comments that referred to reporter Megyn Kelly, using sexist language (Tessa Berenson, “Donald Trump and Megyn Kelly Spar Over ‘Bimbo’ Retweet,” *Time*, 17 May 2016); and threatened to punish women seeking legal abortions (Tom Kertscher, “In Context: Transcript of Donald Trump on Punishing Women for Abortion,” *Politifact*, 30 March 2016, <http://www.politifact.com/wisconsin/article/2016/mar/30/context-transcript-donald-trump-punishing-women-ab/>).
51. Barthes, “Grain of the Voice,” 181.
52. Rogers, “Authoritarian Hold Music.”
53. *Ibid.*
54. Blankenship and Renard, “Pop Songs on Political Platforms,” 33.
55. Thomas Turino, *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 195.
56. See, for example, Pavarotti’s performance of “Nessun dorma” at the opening ceremony of the Torino Olympics in 2006 (Alessandra Rizzo, “Italian Tenor Pavarotti Is Dead,” *Washington Post*, 6 September 2007,

- <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/09/06/AR2007090600058.html>). For another example of “Nessun dorma” used in an international sports setting linked to nationalism, see also the description of Pavarotti’s performance at the 1990 World Cup in “Luciano Pavarotti,” *Economist*, 13 September 2007, <http://www.economist.com/node/9794845>.
57. The *Grove Music Online* article on soul music opens with the definition, “An African American popular music style,” and goes on to say, “The term soul has connotations of black pride and culture.” David Brackett, *Grove Music Online*, accessed 10 September 2017, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article_citations/grove/music/A2257344?q=soul+music&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1.
 58. See, for example, the cover to 19 August 2017’s *Economist*, which shows Donald Trump yelling through a megaphone made from a KKK hood (<http://www.economist.com/printedition/covers/2017-08-17/ap-e-eu-lame-na-uk>).
 59. *Billboard* reported plays of “Skyfall” at campaign rallies at least as early as November 2015. Natalie Weiner, “Donald Trump Plays Adele’s ‘Skyfall’ at Campaign Rally,” *Billboard*, 27 November 2015, <http://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/pop/6777870/donald-trump-adele-skyfall-campaign-rally>.
 60. Greg Cochrane, “Adele’s James Bond Theme Song Skyfall Is Leaked Online,” *BBC*, 2 October 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsbeat/article/19785659/adeles-james-bond-theme-song-skyfall-is-leaked-online>.
 61. See, for example, Martens, “Adele’s ‘Skyfall.’”
 62. Fehintola, Bull, and Cooper of *The Daily Mail* refer to the “sultry lyrics” of the piece, without actually providing any examples of what makes them so (<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-2213351/Adeles-James-Bond-theme-Skyfall-hits-number-hours.html>), while Adam B. Vary of *Entertainment Weekly* opines “the lyrics manage to work as a classic torch song,” without once mentioning what any of the lyrics are (<http://ew.com/article/2012/10/04/adele-skyfall-james-bond-theme/>).
 63. Martens, “Adele’s ‘Skyfall.’”
 64. *Ibid.* (emphasis added).
 65. Daub and Kronengold, *James Bond Songs*, 29-31.
 66. *Ibid.*, 35.
 67. *Ibid.*, 37.

68. Anthony Smith, “Ethno-Symbolism and the Study of Nationalism,” in *Nations and Nationalism: A Reader*, eds. Philip Spencer and Howard Wollman (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 27ff.
69. Rogers, “Authoritarian hold music.”
70. Although the above comments were uttered a decade before the start of Trump’s successful presidential campaign, they came by many to be seen as indicative of a campaign that was plagued by accusations of sexism. For more refer again to Estepa, “Donald Trump on Carly Fiorina”; Berenson, “Donald Trump and Megyn Kelly”; Kertscher, “In Context.”
71. See, for example, David Ehrlich, “James Bond Movie Theme Songs, Ranked Worst to Best,” *Rolling Stone*, 2 November 2015, <http://www.rollingstone.com/movies/lists/james-bond-movie-theme-songs-ranked-worst-to-best-20151102>; Simon Reynolds, Hugh Armitage, and Morgan Jeffrey, “23 Best and Worst Bond Theme Songs Ranked: Which Are Classics and Which Need Their 00 Status Revoked?” *Digital Spy*, 20 May 2017, <http://www.digitalspy.com/movies/james-bond-007/feature/a659194/james-bond-theme-songs-ranked/>; Matt Goldberg, “James Bond Theme Songs Ranked from Worst to Best,” *Collider*, 5 November 2015, <http://collider.com/best-james-bond-theme-songs-ranked-worst-to-best/#for-your-eyes-only>.
72. For the full text of “Rolling in the Deep,” see “Music,” <http://www.adele.com/music>.
73. For more on the nature of these resentments, see Justin Patch, “Deconstructing the Populism.”
74. B.W., “Adele’s Post-Breakup Blues,” *Rolling Stone*, 9 December 2010, 116.
75. Will Hermes, “Adele Toughens Up Her Soul,” *Rolling Stone*, 3 March 2011, 70.
76. Evan Serpick, “Adele,” *Rolling Stone*, 9 June 2011, 24.
77. Here I should specify that I am not implying that her whiteness is the sole reason for Adele’s successes. Rather, I am suggesting that it can help explain Adele’s specific utility within the framework of the largely white populist movement that continues to characterize a large portion of Trump’s base.
78. Rogers, “Authoritarian Hold Music.”
79. Most saliently, several months after his election, a federal judge in Kentucky ruled that there was reasonable grounds to allow a lawsuit accusing Trump of inciting violence at a campaign rally to proceed. This is not only an issue of the frustration and anger of rallygoers cathartically boiling over, but also of the candidate’s verbal rhetoric

- eliciting, whether intentionally or not, this response from his partisans. See Avi Selk, "Trump Says He Can't be Sued for Violence at His Rallies because He Won the Election," *Washington Post*, 15 April 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2017/04/15/trump-says-he-cant-be-sued-for-violence-at-his-rallies-because-he-won-the-election/>.
80. Turino, *Music as Social Life*, 195.
 81. E.g., David A. Graham, "How Donald Trump Speaks To—and About—Minorities," *The Atlantic*, 3 May 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/05/the-way-donald-trump-speaks-to-and-about-minorities/481155/>.
 82. The imperative of live performance at the inauguration is clearly illustrated by the to-do surrounding Beyoncé's lip-synced performance of the national anthem at Obama's 2013 inauguration. "Beyonce speaks out on National Anthem lip sync controversy at Super Bowl press conference (video)," *The Reliable Source*, *Washington Post*, https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/reliable-source/post/beyonce-speaks-out-on-national-anthem-lip-sync-controversy-at-super-bowl-press-conference/2013/01/31/dc3dfd2a-6be6-11e2-bd36-c0fe61a205f6_blog.html.
 83. Kun, *Audiotopia*, 23.
 84. Katie Rogers, et al., "Who Is Performing at Donald Trump's Inauguration?" *The New York Times*, 11 January 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/11/arts/music/donald-trump-inauguration-performers.html>.
 85. See for example Amber Jamieson, "Rebecca Ferguson Says She Will Play Trump Inauguration If She Can Sing Strange Fruit," *The Guardian*, 2 January 2017, accessed 10 September 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jan/02/rebecca-ferguson-says-she-will-play-trump-inauguration-if-she-can-sing-strange-fruit>.
 86. Trump has tweeted photos of himself "taking piano lessons from my friend Elton John," 19 December 2013, <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/413707807331209217>.
 87. Andrea Swalec, "DC-Area Marching Bands Opt to Sit Out Trump's Inaugural Parade," NBC Washington, 14 December 2016, <http://www.nbcwashington.com/news/local/DC-Area-Marching-Bands-Opt-to-Sit-Out-Trumps-Inaugural-Parade-406387625.html>.
 88. Phil Gallo, "We Are One: The Obama Inaugural Celebration," *Variety*, 18 January 2009, <http://variety.com/2009/scene/markets-festivals/we-are-one-the-obama-inaugural-celebration-1200473270/>.

89. Gideon Yago, “Ricky, Destiny’s Child, Lyle Lovett Welcome Bush to White House,” MTV, 22 January 2001, <http://www.mtv.com/news/1438397/ricky-destinys-child-lyle-lovett-welcome-bush-to-white-house/>.
90. For more information on Appadurai’s theorization of “scapes,” see Arjun Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy,” *Public Culture* 2, no. 2 (Spring 1990).
91. See Blankenship and Renard, “Pop Songs on Political Platforms,” 25ff.
92. While few mainstream news media outlets continue to give Trump’s musical choices much thought, they still provided fodder for the tabloid press well into the second half of 2017. E.g., Jessica Finn, “Does Trump Always Get What He Wants? President Plays The Rolling Stones at the End of His Phoenix Rally Despite Multiple Warnings from the Band to Stop Using Their Music,” *Daily Mail*, 23 August 2017, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4816264/Trump-plays-Rolling-Stones-despite-asked-stop.html>; Nicole Bitette, “President Trump Gets What He Wants, Plays The Rolling Stones Despite Band’s Request to Stop,” *Daily News* (New York), 22 August 2017, <http://www.nydailynews.com/entertainment/music/president-trump-plays-rolling-stones-request-stop-article-1.3434191>.

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INDEX

- ABBA, 127
abortion, 134, 157, 180, 196, 341
acousmatic voice, 271
Adams, John, 1, 172
Adele, 9, 31, 135–136, 139, 242, 256,
258, 318–320, 323–324, 329–333,
335, 337, 340, 342–343
Adorno, Theodor, 23–25, 32–33, 40,
45–47
Aerosmith, 135, 139, 239, 242, 245,
256, 318, 337
Air Force One (film), 242
Alien and Seditious Acts, 172
Almanac Singers, 102
Alternative Tentacles, 63, 67, 84, 86,
88
Anti-Nazi League (ANL), 59–60
Anthony, Marc, 29, 138
Appadurai, Arjun, 335, 345
Art of the Deal, The, 160, 178, 240,
255
Atkin, Hugh, 289, 291, 298–299,
306, 308–309, 315–316
audible optics, 120, 143, 149
auditory gesture, 273–280, 298, 313
authenticity, 136–139, 141, 149, 217,
286, 331
baby boomers, 233
Bachman-Turner Overdrive, 167
Bad Brains, 63
Bad Religion, 67, 74, 85
Banks, Elizabeth, 215–216, 223–224,
227, 231, 238
Bareilles, Sara, 166
Barshad, Amos, 28, 47
Barthes, Roland, 300, 319, 326, 328,
338, 341
Bears Ears National Monument,
319
Beatles, 163, 179, 243, 321, 329
Beethoven, 52, 81, 315
Bell, John, 3
Belly (musical artist), 243
Bernie Bro, 219
Biafra, Jello, 62–63, 67–71, 73, 86
Bikini Kill, 20, 37–38
Billboard, 7, 16, 65, 112–114, 116,
132, 145, 147, 256, 321, 339, 342
Black Flag, 63, 66, 76
Black Lives Matter, 41, 100, 107,
220
Black Panthers, 94
Black People Advancement and
Defense Organization, 100
Bon Jovi, 28, 129, 334
Boston, 24, 46, 127, 261, 312
Bragg, Billy, 68
Breckenridge, John C., 3
Brooks and Dunn, 20, 159
Browne, Jackson, 9, 127, 145
Bush, George H.W., 41, 55, 133, 253
Bush, George W., 9, 56, 64, 67–69,
79, 85, 127, 131, 136
Cabra, Eduardo (“Visitante”), 106
Calle 13, 90, 104–106, 108, 110,
115–117
canned song, 5, 7–9
Carter, Jimmy, 17, 60
Cats, 320, 327–328
Children’s Defense Fund, 222

- Chile, 90, 92, 94, 98–99, 106
 Chuck D, 100, 114–115
 Circle Jerks, 63
 Cline, Patsy, 8, 133–135
 Clinton, Bill, 7–8, 20, 37, 56, 65, 82, 133, 136, 172
 Clinton, Hillary, 9, 12, 16, 27–28, 37, 41, 47, 49, 89, 97, 101, 107–108, 129, 132, 137, 139–141, 147–148, 150, 155, 164, 167, 179–182, 215, 217, 219–221, 234–238, 242, 251, 310, 321, 341
 coalition building, 139
 cock rock, 326
 Cohan, George M., 186, 197, 205–206
 Colbert, Stephen, 202, 212, 305, 310
 Communism, 60, 161, 163
 Common Sense, 99
 constitution, 11, 41, 154–168, 170–176, 180–182
 counter-hegemony, 91, 96, 104, 112–113
 convergence culture, 185, 206–207, 213, 315
 Covfefe, 252, 260, 269, 299–300
 Cruz, Ted, 10, 17, 89–90, 97–99, 112–114, 155–156, 160–162, 164, 176–178, 246
 Cuba, 106
 Cuban Revolution, 95
 Dead Kennedys, 55, 63–64, 73, 84
 Dead Prez, 102, 115
 Dean, Ester, 229
 death penalty, 170, 182
 Deceptacon, 37, 39–40
 Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), 110
 Democratic National Convention (DNC), 5, 12, 96, 128, 180, 215, 218, 224, 231, 237–238
 Democratic Party, 129, 146, 217, 219, 244
 Diaz, Reverend Ruben, Sr., 97
 Dilated Peoples, 102
 Dion, Celine, 9
Dirty Politics, 240, 251, 255, 260–261
 DIY, 56, 58, 80, 284–285, 288–289, 312
 D.O.A., 63, 84
 Donaldson, Ian Stuart, 59
Don't Think of an Elephant, 189, 209–212
 Douglas, Stephen, 3, 143, 296–297, 315
 Eighth Amendment, 170
 Eisenhower, Dwight, 6, 16
 Enslar, Robert, 239
 Equal Protection Clause, 166, 169–171
 fake news, 208, 265
 Falcón, Maribel, 102, 115
 Farm Labor Organizing Committee, 100
 Fascism, 50, 63, 83, 211–212, 246
 Fat Mike (Michael Burkett), 57, 68, 74–75, 79, 87
 Fat Wreck Chords, 72, 82, 84–87
 federalism, 160, 177, 181
 Fleetwood Mac, 8, 16, 20, 172
 Foo Fighters, 68, 127
 Fourth Amendment, 165, 170
 Generation X, 233
 gentrification, 96, 103
 gesticulations, 271
 Giroux, Henry A., 210, 240, 252–253, 255, 260
 Gore, Al, 67–68, 85, 136, 149
 Gorillaradio.tv, 35, 49
 Gorsuch, Neil, 156–157, 176
 grain of the voice, 278, 319, 326, 328, 338, 341

- Gramsci, Antonio, 11, 90–92, 98,
 112–113
 Green Day, 67, 75, 85, 87
 Greene, Robert, 284–285, 287–288,
 292, 311, 315–316
 Greenwood, Lee, 7, 35, 172
 Grieg, Edvard, 282, 288–289,
 313–314
 Guatemala, 106
 Guevara, Ernesto “Che,” 95
 Guthrie, Woody, 23, 26, 169, 295
 Hall, John, 127
 Hall, Stuart, 22, 24, 43
Hamilton, 109, 249, 253, 299
 Hanani, Avner, 277, 287–288,
 305–307, 313
 Harrison, George, 243
 Harrison, William, 2
 Hebdige, 53, 80–81, 88
 hegemony, 91–92, 96, 104, 112–113,
 318, 341
 hip-hop, 10–11, 17, 22–23, 37, 81,
 89–90, 94–96, 99, 101–104, 109,
 112–114, 131–132, 147
 Hogan, Patrick Colm, 325–326, 341
 Holmes, Oliver Wendell, Jr., 164
 Huang, Andrew, 276
 Huckabee, Mike, 127
 Hunte, Justin, 98, 114
 Hussle, Nipsey, 241
 Hutchinson, Jesse, 3
 Hutchinson Family Singers, 3, 15
 iGeneration, 216, 233–234
 immigrants, 23, 31, 90, 93–94, 97,
 106, 109, 111, 204, 243, 318
 immigration, 99, 105, 161, 207, 210,
 221, 246, 332
 inauguration ball, 271, 273
 Interstate Commerce Clause, 167,
 169
 Iriscience, Rakaa, 102, 115
 ISIS, 163, 308
It Takes a Village, 229
 Jackson, Alan, 157, 176
 Jamieson, Kathleen Hall, 240, 251,
 255
 Jefferson, Thomas, 1, 172
 Jenkins, Henry, 206, 213
 Joglar, René Pérez (“Residente”), 90,
 104, 116–117
 John, Elton, 129, 131, 243, 256, 334,
 344
 Jolson, Al, 5
 Keith, Toby, 35, 128, 146, 205, 212
 Kennedy, John F., 6
 Kerry, John, 68, 70
 Keyes, Alicia, 166
 KGB, 54
 Kid Rock, 35, 128, 146, 173, 243
 Kilstein, Jamie, 171
 Kinesthetic gesture, 270–273, 279
 Kiss, 35, 128, 146
 Kissinger, Henry, 107
 K’naan, 109
 Kramer, Wayne, 170, 182
 Kun, Josh, 280, 307, 344
 Lady Gaga, 122, 147
 Lakoff, George, 188–198, 200–201,
 204, 207–212, 315
 Latin America, 91, 104, 106–107,
 110
 Latino, 11, 47, 89–90, 93, 95, 97,
 100, 102, 104–106, 108, 112–113,
 115–116, 138, 171
 Lauper, Cyndi, 128, 166
 Lee, Hana Mae, 228
 Legend, John, 250, 260, 300, 334
 Lennon, John, 122, 143
 Le Tigre, 37, 40
 lexical gesture, 266–270, 278, 280,
 300, 313, 315
 LGBT community, 107

- Lincoln, Abraham, 3, 70
 living constitutionalism, 168
 Lopez, Jennifer, 138
 Marshall, Bob, 28–30, 45, 47, 168, 181
 Marshall, Thurgood, 168, 181
 Marriage, same-sex, 157, 159, 165
 Marxist, 58, 91, 188
 May, Brian, 45, 81, 84–86, 112, 115, 143, 147–150, 169, 178, 181, 243, 257–258, 260, 299, 301, 303–304, 306, 314, 337, 339–341, 343–344
 McBride, Martina, 134, 166
 McCain, John, 9, 70, 94, 127, 130, 145, 149, 321
 McNeal, Stephanie, 28–30, 47
 media spectacle, 119–121, 127, 130–131, 135, 138–139, 141–143, 336, 338
 Mexico, 89, 94, 108, 112
 Melinda Molina, 105
 Mellencamp, John, 127
 Millennials, 219–220, 233, 235
 Millions of Dead Cops (MDC), 55, 64, 75, 88
 Mills, Mike, 246, 251, 323
 Miranda, Lin-Manuel, 109, 154, 253, 299
Miranda v. Arizona, 154
 Mondale, Walter, 64
 Montgomery Gentry, 158, 177
 monumentality, 288, 321–322, 329, 331, 339
 Moore, Michael, 281
 Moore, Sam, 20, 128, 244
Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think, 196, 210
 Morello, Tom, 100, 114, 281, 294, 315
 Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus, 289–292
 MTV, 65, 320, 338, 345
 Muzik, Loaf, 103, 115
 mythic gesture, 269, 278–282, 300, 310, 312
 Naison, Mark, 93, 113
 neo-liberalism, 61, 91
 Nicaragua, 106
 Nicholson, Jack, 223, 236
 New Deal, 15, 169
 Newsboys, 157
 NFL kneeling controversy, 208, 253
 Nineteenth Amendment, 217
 NOFX, 57, 67–69, 74–75, 82–87
 No Doubt, 9, 68, 166, 171, 285
 non-lexical sounds, 276
 Nugent, Ted, 128, 146, 243
 nurturant parent frame, 195, 202–203, 207
 Obama, Barack, 41, 56, 70, 86, 88, 94, 113, 126, 128, 131, 133, 138–139, 147, 173, 210, 236, 244, 320, 338
 Obama, Michelle, 218, 235
 onomatopoetic expressions, 276
 originalism, 156, 160, 164, 168, 176–177, 181
 original intent, 156
 original understanding, 156–157
 Palin, Sarah, 94, 134–135
 Parkinson, Huw, 271, 302
 parodied song, 4, 7
 parody, 1–2, 7, 15–16, 55, 186, 197, 202–203, 269–271, 277, 299, 303
 Pavarotti, Luciano, 246, 258, 319, 339, 342
 Pence, Mike, 249
 Perot, Ross, 8, 133, 135, 148–149
 Perry, Denise, 95, 113
 Perry, Katy, 26, 166, 180
 Perry, Rick, 133, 148
 Peters, Gretchen, 134

- Petty, Tom, 9, 127
Phantom of the Opera, The, 322
 Phillips, Amber, 27–28, 32, 46–47
 Pinochet, Augusto, 92, 99
 Pistol hands, 265
 Plato, 52, 81, 248
 Platon, Adelle, 97–98
 Platten, Rachel, 167, 181, 215,
 223–224, 227–228, 236–237
 Poe, Tef, 103
 Polyphony, 225, 230
 Poor Righteous Teachers, 99
 Popick, Jeff, 187, 200–202, 207
 Popular Music, 4, 10, 19, 22–23,
 32–33, 42, 45–46, 48, 52, 81, 84,
 122, 130, 143–145, 147, 172, 175,
 237, 256, 259, 275, 339, 342
 Populism, 269, 339, 343
 Positive Force, 64
 Pragmatism, 80, 164–166, 168, 179,
 181
 Pratt, Nicola, 91, 112
 Prophets of Rage, 100, 114–115,
 281, 294
 Prosodic tracing, 274–275, 289, 309
 Public Enemy, 99
 Puerto Rico, 97, 106–107, 109, 116
 punk, 11, 37–38, 51–88, 255, 304,
 312
 punk rock, 51–52, 57, 62, 65, 74–75,
 78, 81–84, 86, 88, 312
 PunkVoter, 68–70, 79–80, 85–86
 Pussy Riot, 54–55, 77, 82
 Putin, Vladimir, 54, 271
 Quad City DJs, 35
 Queen (band), 51, 54, 62, 68, 81–82,
 236, 243, 256–257, 312
 Queen Elizabeth II, 51, 54, 62, 68
 racism, 59, 83, 103, 171, 204, 316,
 334
 Rage Against the Machine, 281, 309
 Ragtime, 4–5, 15
 Ramones, 64
 Reagan, Ronald, 7, 11, 55, 61–64, 79,
 84, 121, 124, 130, 172, 199, 211,
 253
 Reaganomics, 61, 63, 84
 Reagan Youth, 55, 62, 64
 Rebel Diaz, 11, 90, 92–105, 107,
 110–115
 Reddy, Helen, 166, 180
 Reece, Florence, 102
 Rehding, Alexander, 321, 339
 Reich, Steve, 287
 Reject, Chelsea, 103
 religion, freedom of, 157, 172, 199
 R.E.M., 135–136, 242, 246, 251, 256,
 313, 323, 340
 Republican National Convention
 (RNC), 64, 100, 114–115, 211,
 242, 324
 Republican Party, 6, 127, 324
 Richards, Chris, 30–33, 47
 Ríos, Filiberto Ojeda, 104
 Rivas, Jorge, 106, 116
 Riz MC, 109
 Roc, Sa, 103
 Rock Against Bush Tour, 56
 Rock Against Communism (RAC),
 60
 Rock Against Racism (RAR), 59–60
 Rock Against Reagan Tour, 55
Roe v. Wade, 70, 165
 Rolling Stones, 9, 45, 131, 136, 243,
 256–258, 318–319, 321–324, 333,
 337, 339–340, 345
 Rollins, Henry, 66, 75–76, 82, 85, 88
 Romney, Mitt, 95, 127–128,
 136–137, 139, 147, 149–150, 173,
 198–199, 211, 244, 338
 Roosevelt, Franklin D., 5, 7–8, 129
 Rorschach test, 186, 188–189, 195

- Rotten, Johnny (John Lydon), 51,
53–54, 57, 76, 88
- Rubio, Marco, 10, 17, 89, 112
- rhythmic synchronization, 271
- Sam and Dave, 20, 128
- Sampo Wing, 37, 39
- Sanders, Bernie, 10, 16, 26–27,
37–38, 41, 49, 89–90, 106–107,
109–110, 116, 129, 138, 146, 155,
168–169, 179, 181–182, 219–220,
242, 310
- Sanders, Sarah Huckabee, 76
- Scalia, Antonin, 156, 173, 176
- Second Amendment, 157, 161, 163,
165, 170
- Seeger, Pete, 102
- Semiotics, 192
- Sessions, Jeff, 75, 87–88
- Sex Pistols, 51–55, 57, 62, 77, 81–82
- Silber, Irwin, 3–4, 14–15, 175, 182
- Simon and Garfunkel, 10, 26, 35, 40,
42
- Sinatra, Frank, 7
- Skrewdriver, 59
- Snider, Dee, 128, 145, 245, 325
- Sobule, Jill, 171, 182
- social construction, 121–123,
141–144
- songs, 1, 4, 13–15, 19, 28, 31, 39,
42–43, 45–46, 53, 65, 69, 72,
77, 102, 108–109, 119–120, 124,
126, 131–132, 137, 140–141, 145,
147, 149–150, 153, 155, 174–175,
183, 234, 257, 265, 268–269, 275,
314–315, 319, 337–339, 345
“Adams and Liberty,” 172
“All Creatures of Our God and
King,” 157
“America,” 10, 26
“Anchors Away,” 5
“Born Free,” 173
songs (*continued*)
“Born in the U.S.A.,” 121, 130,
162
“Brave,” 166
“Brown Sugar,” 243
“C’Mon N’ Ride it (The Train),”
35
“Crazy,” 8, 133–135
“Don’t Stop,” 8, 20, 172
“Dream On,” 139, 239, 242,
244–245
“Eine kleine Nachtmusik,” 289
“Eye of the Tiger,” 244
“Fight Song,” 12, 26, 167, 181,
215–217, 223, 225, 227, 229,
231–232, 341
“Freedom’s Call,” 186, 189,
191–194, 198, 200–203, 205,
207
“Fuck the NRA,” 171
“God Bless the U.S.A.,” 7, 35, 172
“God Save the Queen,” 51, 54, 82
“Happy Days Are Here Again,”
5, 8
“Here Comes the Sun,” 243
“Hey Now (Girls Just Want to
Have Fun),” 166
“High Hopes,” 7
“Hold On, I’m Comin’,” 128, 244
“I Got a Crush on Obama,” 9
“I Like Ike,” 6
“It’s the End of the World As
We Know It (And I Feel
Fine),” 26–27, 63, 240, 242,
246, 256, 313, 318
“Independence Day,” 134–135
“I Won’t Back Down,” 9
“Jail Guitar Doors,” 170
“Jefferson and Liberty,” 172
“Just a Girl,” 166
“Kennedy,” 6

songs (*continued*)

- “Let’s Get Loud,” 138
- “Lincoln and Liberty, Too,” 3
- “Memory,” 328, 330
- “More Than a Feeling,” 127
- “Nessun Dorma,” 239, 246,
321–322, 327–328, 341–342
- “Only in America,” 20, 159, 177
- “Revolution,” 163, 179
- “Roar,” 26, 166
- “Rockin’ in the Free World,” 27,
121, 139, 161–162, 242, 244,
252, 340
- “Rolling in the Deep,” 242, 318,
331–333, 343
- “Running on Empty,” 9, 127
- “Skyfall,” 242, 258, 318, 320,
329–332, 335, 342
- “Sleep Now in the Fire,” 281
- “Small Town Southern Man,”
157, 176
- “Sound of Silence, The,” 35, 40
- “Start Me Up,” 243
- “Still the One,” 127
- “Strange Fruit,” 334
- “Superwoman,” 166
- “Sympathy for the Devil,” 243
- “Takin’ Care of Business,” 167,
181
- “This Land Is Your Land,” 26,
169
- “This One’s for the Girls,” 166
- “Tippecanoe and Tyler Too,”
2–3
- “True Colors,” 128
- “Vivir Mi Vida,” 29, 138
- “We Are the Champions,” 243
- “We’re Not Gonna Take It,” 26,
34, 127–128, 321, 325–326
- “We Take Care of Our Own,”
169, 173, 182

songs (*continued*)

- “When They Say They Want
Their America Back,” 171
- “Where I Come From,” 158, 177
- “Where the Stars and Stripes
and the Eagle Fly,” 159
- “Yes We Can,” 16, 20, 34, 48, 70,
138, 224–225, 231–232, 309,
320
- “You and I,” 9
- “You Can’t Always Get What
You Want,” 135, 243, 324, 326
- Sotiris, Panagiotis, 91, 112
- sound bites, 37, 137, 268
- Sound of Silence (YouTube user),
35, 40, 42, 49
- Spanish, 13, 29, 89, 92, 105–106,
108–109, 112
- Spotify, 9, 16, 28, 47, 126, 132, 137,
140, 147, 150, 166, 180
- Springsteen, Bruce, 121, 129–131,
162, 169, 173, 182, 241, 255
- Stevenson, Adlai, 6
- Sting, 55, 127
- Stipe, Michael, 246, 323
- strict father frame, 194–195,
201–202, 204–205, 207
- Strinati, Dominic, 92, 99, 113
- structuralism, 159–160, 162–164,
177
- subaltern groups, 99
- Sullivan, Frankie, 244
- Supreme Court, 15, 67, 154, 156,
166, 168, 173, 175–176, 183, 207
- Survivor (musical artist), 244
- Swift, Taylor, 129
- Tanzer, Myles, 28, 47
- Tapper, Jake, 16, 249
- Taxing and Spending Clause, 167,
169
- Tea Party, 97, 171, 173, 204, 212

- textual analysis, 11, 121, 155, 200
 Tha Product, 109
 Third Eye Blind, 242, 256
Thinking Points: Communicating Our American Values and Vision, 195, 210
Think Like a Champion, 263, 305, 313
 Thomas, Clarence, 156
 Tillerson, Rex, 76, 88, 250
 Tin Pan Alley, 4
 Tippin, Aaron, 159
 Tribe Called Quest, A, 99, 298
Trump: Think Like a Billionaire, 240
 Trump, Donald, 9, 11–12, 27–28, 30–31, 36, 41–42, 45, 47–48, 56, 61, 71–72, 74, 76–77, 79, 87–89, 96–97, 100–101, 103–104, 108, 112, 115, 121, 126, 128, 135, 138–140, 145–146, 148–149, 155, 157, 159–162, 177–179, 185–186, 193, 202, 204, 209–212, 218, 221, 236, 239, 241–243, 247, 249, 252, 254–261, 268, 278, 286, 294–295, 297–317, 320, 337–344
 Trump Jr., Donald, 254
 Trump, Ivanka, 243
Truth About Trump, The, 241
Turandot, 239, 246–247, 320
 Twisted Sister, 26, 31, 34, 127, 245, 320–322, 324–326, 329, 339, 341
 Twitter, 49, 74, 76–77, 79, 87, 103, 106–108, 110, 114–117, 128, 139, 237, 243, 250–252, 260, 283, 289–290, 299, 315, 323, 340, 344
 Tyler, Steven, 9, 139, 242, 244–245, 256–257, 318
 Univision, 106
 USA Freedom Kids, 11, 28, 185–188, 198, 202–204, 206–212
 USA PATRIOT Act, 56, 67, 165
 Van Buren, Martin, 2
 Van Halen, 127
 Venegas, Gonzalo “G1,” 96, 98
 Venegas, Rodrigo “RodStarz,” 90
 Vets Versus Hate, 100
 Villa, Joy, 280, 299, 307
Violence of Organized Forgetting, The, 240, 255, 260
 war of maneuver, 91
 war of position, 91–92, 96, 110
 War on Drugs, 170
 Washington, George, 1, 14, 216
 Wasted Youth, 63, 84
 Webber, Andrew Lloyd, 322–324, 328, 333
 Weeknd, The, 243
 West, Kanye, 129, 250, 260
 will.i.am, 20, 34, 138, 224–225, 231, 309, 320, 334, 338
 Winfrey, Oprah, 126
 Witness Against Torture, 100
 Wonder, Stevie, 129
 Woodhull, Victoria, 217
 xenophobia, 103
 Young, Neil, 9, 27, 121, 128, 135–136, 139, 150, 161, 178, 242, 244, 257, 261, 318, 338, 340
 YouTube, 9, 28, 33–34, 38, 43, 46, 48–49, 72, 82, 87–88, 94, 113–117, 154, 182, 186, 193, 203, 207, 209, 212, 216, 224, 231–232, 236–238, 255, 266, 289, 294–295, 297–311, 313–314, 316, 340–341
 Zaragoza, Alex, 108, 116