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Music, the Non-Governmental Actor Changing Political Policy: Have We Failed the Power of Music?

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Music, the Non-Governmental Actor Changing Political Policy: Have We Failed the Power of Music?

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Abstract

Music, the Non-Governmental Actor Changing Political Policy: Have We Failed the Power of Music?

People learn that making music as well as listening to it frees them from the toil and tedium of a life dominated by the privileged and the powerful. Music means trouble for those who would own and control it as they perpetuate injustice and suffering. – Mat Callahan

It is believed that the pen is mightier than the sword, but is the guitar playing vocalist, a beatnik, mightier than the M-16 machinegun and an American political oligarchy? To find the answer to this question we must look at our American history and the awe inspiring role that music has taken to help change political direction. The source of American resistance seems to be historically rooted in music and transformed to something that has become known as 'Music of Social Change.' In the last century or so, music has become the cry of a people under duress. Political melodies have become the vehicle through which the common folk can raise their agenda and voice opposition. This unifying force has become a symbol of American revolutions. Socially conscious music has come in waves of hope and become the face of political movements. A common function of this genre of music has been to remind people of the good that is found in humanity, and is used to display what can be accomplished when people work together.

The utilization of music as a tool to address social woes within the American community has had an extensive history. Throughout the American experience, music has been politically synonymous with opposition. Starting with Congo Square, Louisiana, and moving into the cotton fields of North America, the music of African slaves became the very foundation of this American movement, and would be used to symbolically defy their masters. Melodies would be used to record the history of an enslaved people, and would evolve to fight oppression wherever cruelty was found. From the African slaves to the Immigrant Labor Movements, from the Civil Rights Movement to the Anti-War Movement, music has served as an instrument for cohesion, in the fight against oppression. Music, in its ability to unify people, has become a non-governmental actor that has the power to change the political process in the United States. The music of social change has shown that politicians may come and go, but music will always be the voice of the people.

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People learn that making music as well as listening to it frees them from the toil and tedium of a life dominated by the privileged and the powerful. Music means trouble for those who would own and control it as they perpetuate injustice and suffering.¹

Introduction

It is believed that the pen is mightier than the sword, but is the guitar playing vocalist, a beatnik, mightier than the M-16 machinegun and the American political oligarchy? To answer to this question we must examine our American history and the awe inspiring role that music has taken to help change the political direction of this Country.

There is a feeling that the source of American resistance would be historically rooted in music. Throughout the last century, socially conscious music has helped ease social strife in the American community. Therefore, the music of social change has become the symbol of the American revolutions and the face of the political movements. In the last century or so, this music has become the tongue of a people under duress. Melodies have been the vehicle through which the common folk can raise their agenda, and voice opposition. Politically motivated music has invigorated a defeated people and has breathed life into the organic machine of the various social justice campaigns. An important function of this type of music is

¹ The Trouble With Music: Mat Callahan XXIV

to remind people of the good that is found in humanity, and express what can be accomplished when people work together.

Even though scholars have had an opportunity to study the events of the 20th century, there are still many questions left unanswered about the political influence of music. This paper will attempt to answer a very specific question: has the contemporary generation failed the power of music? This will be accomplished by examining the historical roots of political music, by analyzing the media's role in the American counter-culture, and investigating the reconstruction of music as a social force. The paper offers an in-depth perspective on how music functions as a means to fuel the engine of the political campaigns, as well as recognize the integral relationship between music and politics.

The utilization of music as a means to address social woes within the American community has become a mainstay in the American political spectrum. From the beginning of the American experience, music has been politically synonymous with opposition, a concept that was particularly evident during slavery.

It was forbidden for African slaves to learn to read and write. Therefore, music was used to record the history of a people enslaved, and would continue to be used wherever oppression was found. From the African slaves to the immigrant Labor Movements through the end

of the last century, music has been used as a tool of solidarity in the fight against economic cruelty, and political intolerance. Music, in its ability to unify people has become a non-governmental actor that affects the political process in the United States. This non-governmental actor has led to the very foundation of the various social movements in the United States.

Although not the first movement by any means to use music to gain political leverage, the Civil Rights Movement may be the height of this application of music. Out of the Fifties came, what I like to think of as spirituals of liberty. The powerful voice of the Black community was solidified through song. These people knew what they were after and therefore, there were no questions found here. This non-violent revolution was about statements; statements that would reply to bigoted phrases like "with all deliberate speed."

The Civil Rights leaders had a mission to recoup the rights that many Americans had long been denied. These men and women forced the hands of those in power to make the promises of our political leaders an actuality. As a result, the Black Community turned equality, a right that was thought to be a legacy, into a contemporary reality.

The music which united a people in the Civil Rights Campaign ignited the Anti-War Movement. The kindling in this case however, was

people fervent about stopping the war. These people were ready to learn the lessons of the Civil Rights Campaign, but ready to question the political theory behind the War in Vietnam. The students of my parent's generation vocalized resentment against the government, but were most frustrated with the inability of the Presidential Administrations to move towards peace. These people were ready to discover where the lines of reality and political fabrication blurred. Finally, they were ready to ask questions until the truth had come to light.

The War in Vietnam made the American people tired of a rubber stamp regime and questions began to surface about the initial assumptions of the War. Yet, one of the most influential questions of the Vietnam era was not that of politics, but a simple question posed by Pete Seeger, a very influential lyricist. Seeger did not ask questions of international policy, Seeger simply asked, "Where have all the flowers gone?" This question created the foundation for a movement that would eventually lead to peace.

In the current American political atmosphere, however, we must not ask "where the flowers have gone" as Seeger suggests, but where has the music gone? Is the music of social change still with us, if so where is this force rearing its head? Has there been a role shift in political music? Has there been a reapplication of this kind of music, or

have we failed the power of music and its ability to change society? The path to a conclusion is not an easy one, but through historical comparisons, and contextualizing the role of our modern story in the overarching political scheme of the movements, we will begin to analyze these troubling issues. In this endeavor we must also ask ourselves, what is the function the media and the internet in understanding the role of music in today's society? Most importantly we must ask why there is a feeling of apathy among the students of my generation. Has my generation been left out of strides towards the next reconstruction of American society?

The ramifications of the music that came out of the 1950's and subsequent decades, has had a long lasting impression on the American psyche, one that still thrives today. Through the experts that have come to the Fall 2007 Honors Colloquium at the University of Rhode Island on 'Music of Social Justice', it has been explained that there is more music of a social persuasion now than ever before. Is it possible then to reconcile the juxtaposition of my generation's apparent complacency and lack of community on campus, with the fact that there are more songs of social change being written now than ever before?

Why has music become such an integral part of American history? Mat Callahan suggests that "music means trouble for those

who would own and control it as they perpetuate injustice and suffering².” So with the constant tension in the United States during the Twentieth Century, one can understand how music was needed as a response to a scenario of helplessness. This new political medium created a creative, mainstream outlet that found a home in the American movements. Before one can appreciate the impact of movements such as the Anti-War Movement and Civil Rights Movement, one must understand the changes in the political atmosphere as a result of the infusion of music into American history.

The Roots of Music for Social Change

Some of the most basic roots of folk and modern political music spring from Jazz and the Blues. These genres had not brought a new quality to the American culture, but instead underscored a concept explained by Howard Zinn in his book, A People’s History of the United States. Zinn said, “In a society of complex controls, both crude and refined, secret thoughts can often be found in the arts, and so it was in black society. Perhaps the blues, however pathetic concealed anger; and the jazz, however joyful, portended rebellion³.” It is this rebellious attitude that has created an American legend around the mysterious advent of Jazz, and the asymmetric rhythms that define this relatively new sound.

² The Trouble With Music: Mat Callahan XXIV

³ A People’s History of the United States: Zinn 443-444

At the epicenter of protest music, there is an American Folklore that indicates that Jazz and the Blues came from African slave ships, as suggested by Chuck D, a speaker at the Fall 2007 Honors Colloquium at the University of Rhode Island. Africans were brought to this country in shackles and were not allowed to read, nor were they allowed in some instances, to communicate. Therefore, it is thought that music was the only permitted outlet to their frustration and fostered the political dissonance of their enslavement.

Barry Ulanov in his book A History of Jazz in America, wrote that "the negro... was fleshing his music with his own aches and pains, his own unhappiness... First came the work song- not the spiritual not the joyous song."⁴ It is in the spirit of confronting the oppressor that these songs would be the seedlings of protest culture.

Ulanov makes an interesting comment when he suggests that this legend of Jazz and the Blues may not be as accurate as believed to be. "[T]his tradition holds that the American Negro shaped Jazz by imposing a heavier layer of his native jungle chants and rhythms upon European materials he found in the land of his forced adoption... whatever its merit as myth, it doesn't fit with the facts of the music itself."⁵ So the question is then, "If Jazz did not arise from the need to create something new and unique, blending the African and American

⁴ A History of Jazz in America: Ulanov 18

⁵ A History of Jazz in America: Ulanov 9

rhythms, why is Jazz still considered the foundation for protest music?" The answer is again explained by Ulanov, he proposed that Jazz may be a rejection of the syncopated dancing practices of the French and English Aristocracy. The connection between protest music and Jazz may be found here, because the case may be that these asymmetric rhythms embodied the fight against the dancing practices of the European Bourgeoisie. Even though the musicians used syncopation to protest the aristocracy and portray freedom, there is a much more subtle layer of defiance found here.

The music they fashioned in New Orleans, where Jazz began, was an elaborate compound of many folk strains, a few of them bearing more than an echo of African musical culture⁶. But the Blues, Jazz, and Gospel were born from the music of an enslaved people. This is especially significant because not only were these musical practices creating a social form of defiance, but they created a much more elegant level of defiance as well.

Slaves could not, as stated before, learn to read or write, yet there had to be some way for the slaves to keep their traditions alive, and a way to record their history. This feat of retaining history through an oral tradition was accomplished through music⁷. The roots for all of the music for social change begin here, because this music

⁶ A History of Jazz in America: Ulanov 10-13

⁷ Music and Social Movements: Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison 49

was sung by the slaves, in defiance of the slave owners. These African songs would become the basis for many of the social movements of the 19th and 20th centuries.

This system of oral traditions is not unique to American slaves; there are other oppressed cultures that have had oral traditions when illiteracy prevented written expression. What is unique to this scenario, however, is the reapplication of this technique to the subsequent movements. The labor unions used oral traditions expressed through song to record their history, because many of the people being oppressed were poor illiterate immigrant workers⁸.

The Role of Music in the Early Years, the Labor Movement

The music of the immigrant laborer did not simply appear. The transformation of religious and cultural music to liberation music and oral traditions became a very common practice. Familiar progressions and easily repeatable music, built the very foundation for the creation of a new community. The coalescing of many different people was forged in a revival of various forms of the southern musical expression. Whatever the truth about the movement, music would play a vital role in jelling what could have potentially been a fragmented group of people.

“Where the labor movement provided a context for further development of political songs and or a broader tradition of

⁸ Music and Social Movements: Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison 55

political radicalism and dissent... the labor movement incorporated elements derived from the ethnic cultures of immigrant groups into its songs... The progressive political ideals of populism, which gave voice to the dreams and ideals of the small producer which championed direct participatory democracy, were transformed, in the idiom of country music, into a moralistic, often reactionary, anti-modernism.⁹

The labor movements would begin to learn to manipulate the power of the combination of organization based on socially conscious issues, and music. Using this strategy, union leaders would bend the will of this country until for the first time, the unions in the United States became more powerful than the coveted, Big Business.

The IWW (Industrial Workers of the World), better known as the Wobblies, were especially important in the way that they made substantial use of songwriting and singing in conducting their political struggles... The IWW mobilized the materials of both folk and popular song for the purpose of propagating their highly utopian vision of a collective future.¹⁰

The success of this new found medium to project a message of a better world to the masses, allowed people to dream of a better life, and of better wages. This system of unified struggle to create economic growth would not be lost on the labor movement, because unions became increasingly strong.

There was another group of individuals that banded together to create a better life. Beginning in the 1950s, the Civil Rights Movement used these ideas of togetherness through spoken word and music to

⁹ Music and Social Movements: Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison 54

¹⁰ Music and Social Movements: Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison 57

bring equality to the American community. The transition to our modern era begins here because the folk revival that blossomed in the 1950's and 1960's imbeds its roots at this point in American history.

The Civil Rights Campaign and the Reapplication of Religious Music

In the Civil Rights movement, the victory of music was not initially evidentiary. The marginalized Black community, fueled by belief, and tempered through music, would become a symbol of freedom and equality. What made everyone equal was the foundation of a common belief system reinforced by music. The melodies that ran through the marches and passionately sung in the black churches had a lineage that stretched back to slavery. Music was woven into the fabric of the Civil Rights Movement and was the thread that held the very different and vibrant colors of the black community together¹¹. The Civil Rights leaders understood that weighing heavily on the arrangement of socially conscious lyrics to traditional or gospel music would further their cause. In other words the basis for the music sung in the movement came out of the church. Bernice Johnson Reagon, one of the original freedom singers expressed the role of music in the Civil Rights Movement. She said

The Music of the church was an integral part of the cultural world into which I was born... the Civil rights movement changed my view of music. It was after my first march. I began to sing a song and in the course of singing, changed the song so that it made sense for the

¹¹ Music and Social Movements: Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison

particular moment. Although I was not consciously aware of it, this was one of my earliest experiences with how the music was supposed to work¹².

A unified Black community would unearth the covers that had hidden the truth of oppression and would do so through a united front. The music in this context was converted religious songs that made the Black community feel the freedom which they experienced in the church, in all other aspects of their lives.

Engrained in the concept of the creation of a better world through a non-threatening medium, the Civil Rights Movement imbedded a social objection that was continued through the 1960's. Nonviolence was not enough to capture the hearts and minds of the country. The movement was infused with popular music, which became a metaphor for the human spirit because the harmony of the music portended freedom.

The Albany Movement was already a singing movement and we took the songs to Jail. There the songs I had sung because they made me feel good or because they said what I thought about a specific issue did something. I would start a song and everyone would join in. After the song, the differences among us would not be as great. Somehow, making a song required an expression of that which was common to us all. The songs did not feel like the same songs I had sung in college. This music was an instrument, like holding a tool in your hand.

This tool that Mrs. Bernice Johnson-Reagon describes was something that could even be brought to jail because music nourishes

¹² Civil Rights Since 1787: Johnson-Reagon: Birnbaum and Taylor: P. 524

the soul, and became an intangible possession that could not be taken away. Demonstrators and protestors, who were forced into jail, replied to the racism they experienced with song. With every note, they exclaimed that the case may be that the people in power could impose physical restraints, but their beliefs and ideas could never be taken away. As if to proclaim that the battle for Civil Rights would not be lost.

Church music was not the only tool that furthered the cause of the Black community. The other instrument, that helped move the Civil Rights Movement to the success of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, was the media and the advent of the television.

The Media and Manipulation

A discussion of the music of social change without the media would be an inadequate portrayal of the overall picture of these events. The necessary evil of the media, in the both the Civil Rights Movement and Anti-War Movement became both the champion of the people and an outlet for exploitation. Mrs. Rosa Parks was not the first Black woman to sit in the front of the bus, but her individual act of protest had enormous impact when the new media of the television. Her story, symbolic of the plight of the Black men and women was broadcast into the homes of millions.

Other flares of brilliance during this time may never have been noticed if it were not highlighted by the media. Without the media, Bob Dylan's genius may never have been a socially accepted piece of artwork. Yet, even with the positives of the media, there are vivid examples of the media's interference into the counterculture. This fabricated medium manipulated the authenticity of the counter-culture and reformulated the dominant culture for their economic gain. With that said, there are those that look at our modern culture and make the argument that the media is the force that continues to keep modern political music fragmented.

The argument is more complicated than one would think. The short answer is that the responsibility of the music corporations to do what is best for our society does not lie with their musical vision. The responsibility of the corporations is to distribute what they believe has the potential to be most fiscally lucrative. As noble as the intentions of musical artists may be, recorded music is a profitable commodity to be exploited for economic gain.

Capital does what it must without regard to the consequences. The trouble with music is that we're in trouble without it; not only are musicians routinely screwed by a viciously exploitative industry not only are gross injustices done when entire musical legacies are expropriated to be sold like trinkets to tourists; most important is to recognize that without a deep, living connection between people and music there can be no

community...THE ONLY CRITERION IS HOW MANY PEOPLE BUY THE PRODUCT."¹³

Our lives are bombarded with music, and we have found a level of comfort in the modern equivalents of 1950's pop music. Why has this happened? Why have the generations since the liberation movements moved away from the anti-capitalist music of expression? The answer may be, as explained by Mat Callahan, that "[i]n the last twenty years, the means to make music a willing servant of capital have been adapted to new conditions. The specific task of purging music... of the revolutionary Sixties has been high on the agenda¹⁴."

There are those who assume that apathy on college campuses is a reflection of the capitalistic ventures of the record companies. The agenda of corporations to rid American culture of nostalgia for the revolutionary periods does not necessarily have a direct correlation to collegiate apathy.

With regard to apathy and the college campus, it should be a welcomed feeling after reading of the anguish in the last 100 years. There are however people organizing meetings, holding rallies and visibly disagreeing with the countries policies. Howard Zinn, in a book titled You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train, said in his conclusion, "[o]f course, some would say, that was the *sixties*. But even in the

¹³ The Trouble with Music: Mat Callahan: XXIV, 26

¹⁴ The Trouble With Music: Mat Callahan: 173

seventies and eighties, when there was widespread head-shaking over the 'apathy' of student generation, an impressive number of students continued to act¹⁵." People are still acting, but the media may not be as involved in covering such stories of conscience.

People may make the argument that people today are not as passionate as the baby-boomers of the Sixties. They may accuse this generation of not being active enough to protest policy, but apathy is not the condition from which students of my generation suffer. There must be a recognition that times have changed. We will not, however, forget the teachings of our political past.

There will be those who look back at our modern history and the contemporary issues and ask, "What happened?" There will be people who look back and make comparison to the generations of the 1930's through the 1960's to the children of the second half of the Twentieth Century. They will ask, "Where has all the passion and ability to affect change gone?" Being so far removed from such an experience, however, the case may be that society has made the Sixties into a modern American myth.

Our generation has a tendency to dramatize the events of both the Civil Rights Movement and Anti-war Movement. In an attempt to grapple with the awe of the events that transpired in those decades,

¹⁵ [You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train](#): Zinn 199

our society has sensationalized the Anti-War Movement to contrast the horrid conditions of war. We have neglected the commercialization of the Anti-War or protest music, which essentially started out as a means to unite the people in small groups. Yet, as the popularity of the music grew and the popularity of the war declined, music became the rallying point of the nation.

When the students of history take a closer look at the generation that came before us, the stories unravel. The facts are that we cannot generalize the backlash against the government and must revisit these stories and eliminate our bias about the events that transpired.

Though our lives are probably graced with the subtle changes created by everyday life, how do we reconcile the fact that we have this awesome power and yet neglect it? The answer is that music and the movements reflected the hellish conditions of life.

The Sixties, as they have come to be known, were a period of worldwide revolution. A great assault on power, privilege, government and the injustice and suffering for which they were responsible was underway... the world was in an uproar, all hell was breaking loose! Naturally, this was given expression in music, and soon after, on radio¹⁶.

Songs about love and heartache, loss and euphoria will never lose their appeal because everyone at one point in their lives, experiences at least one of these powerful emotions. But political songs need a niche in order to convey a message, whether palpable or

¹⁶ The Trouble With Music: Mat Callahan P. 105

subliminal, and the Sixties had the conditions to support this type of music. The case may be that today, people are not ready for the exchange of harsh ideas and may not be ready to listen.

In the Sixties the use of music in these scenarios allowed for an assimilation of these avant-garde ideas into the commercial sector. The world had reached a point in history where these messages of civil disobedience could be applauded and shared by the public at large. The loss of the government's capability to respond to the will of the people created a power-vacuum. The movements became a driving force for unification under a particular banner. These conditions allowed folk music to become a non-confrontational vocalization of distress. Before the media moved to rejuvenated the folk revival, Paul Simon said

“when I started doing music, music was in real danger. My theory is that every time the industry gets powerful the corporate thinking dominates what the music is, then the music really pales...They were thinking corporately. The people who were making the music weren't thinking about what was going to sell. And then for the first time the industry started to get a little cynical about it, that's when you had Fabian and Frankie Avalon...Folk rock came out of Greenwich Village. It was anti-corporate, left wing.”

The media, which controlled the information outlets, decided that as the America public turned away from the so called 'bubble-gum' music of the 1950's, so would the music industry. The media would drastically manipulate the counter culture and capitalize on groups

such as Peter Paul and Mary, Bob Dylan and the many other well known artists. The media's evolution to the much rawer sound that came from these artists allowed music of social change to be accepted in mainstream audiences.

The media coverage of Rosa Parks ignited a revolution, because the plight of the Black Community was brought into the homes of most Americans. The draft was another hot-button issue because there was no denying the staggering, tragic loss of life that ensued in 1968. The Newspaper covers depicted pictures of fallen soldiers in caskets and little by little the media's portrayal of helpless in America quickly turned a hawkish country to rage against the War in Vietnam. By 1968, most individuals were coming to the conclusion, as the media portrayed the scenario, the cost of the War in Vietnam was high and the price was higher than the Presidential Administration had anticipated.

The Internet and Decentralization of Community

Much like the new media of the television was a dynamic force in the movements, in today's society, the internet has become the next new media to change the way information is exchanged. I am not sure that the public, during the middle of the last century, could even begin to fathom one of the most influential inventions since the pen, the internet and its role in this new global community. The two

aspects of this discussion on the media that are particularly significant are the increased availability of music and the decentralization of community.

The first issue that must be discussed is the creation of decentralization of community. With the increased availability and accessibility of information at all hours of the day or night, it is easy to conclude that the internet has become a wonderful tool. Yet, within the context of creating community within a culture, the internet also has become an obstacle to community. People can converse in the comfort of their own home on their own computer and there is no actual personal contact or face-to-face time with other people. And although it is true that the internet has allowed many people to broadcast their homemade music around the world, and creating individual play-lists, the concept of this decentralization of community inhibits the music of social change. Historically the success of the movements has been based on the mobilization people within social movements. In the last two great movements, which have used political music, melodies were used as a tool for unification and integration. In the context of the internet, music may be enjoyed by a more substantial number of people, even though it does not allow the music to build community.

Looking into the past, music united people of differing backgrounds who needed to find commonality. Peter Yarrow, of the well known folk group Peter Paul & Mary, eloquently explains the role of folk music in the Anti-War Movement. Specifically, he explains the role of folk music within the collegiate atmosphere. He said it was simple; folk music was an attempt to create community. He said,

“my primary reason for wanting to be a part of folk music was to see activated what we still see activated by folk music today- a sense of community that appears almost inevitably when people feel they can reach out for one another and care for one another. Its conformation of a mutual feeling about something, whether personal or political, that seems to happen whenever traditional songs are sung¹⁷.”

If we decentralize the community, we are taking the teeth out of bite of the future movements. We therefore are separating the political vision from the music; taking the wind out of the sails of socially conscious music.

The Folk Revival and the Anti-War Movement

During the Vietnam conflict, what lit the fire of the Anti-War Movement was a feeling of helplessness. It is understandable that the American people, by 1970 were frustrated. Presidential candidate Nixon stood in front of millions of Americans and fervently stated that he had a secret plan to end the war.

We have taken other significant initiatives which must remain secret to keep open some channels of communication which may

¹⁷ Off the Record: An Oral History of Popular Music: 162

still prove to be productive...It is in line with a major shift in U.S. foreign policy which I described in my press conference at Guam on July 25. Let me briefly explain what has been described as the Nixon Doctrine -- policy which not only will help end the war in Vietnam, but which is an essential element of our program to prevent future Vietnams¹⁸.

Well, apparently it was such secret, that he himself had no solution. Instead of finding a resolution to the problem and settling this dispute through a gentleman's accord, he decided to re-escalate the war. Starting with the Tet-offensive, Americans were turning their political views away from the hawkish ideological references, to question their government's foreign policies.

Any chance to show the disgust of the people with an endless war and draft in an unjust conflict was just another excuse to fuel the flames of the Movement. By this time the American people had lost faith in the rhetorical references of the government and the people were beginning to show a vote of no confidence. At this point, the folk revival of the 1960's reemerges as a political force. Perceived as anarchy by the government and those in authority, the social movements began rallying the people through thought and music.

Just as folk music was used in the labor movement, the folk revival was the cornerstone of the Anti-War Movement. "A culture of personal rebellion across normally impermeable social and cultural barriers under the influence and authority of folk music, at once

¹⁸ Richard Nixon's Silent Majority Speech: Cnn.com: November 3, 1969

democratic and esoteric, already obscurely imbued with a spirit of protest.' The movement helped make folk music popular¹⁹." Folk music became the noncompulsory reaction of choice because it gave people a voice that would be heard.

The folk revival... was a short response- flowing out of various elite, progressive, radical... and popular cultures and movements into the commercial marketplace, with little coherent ideology of its own but derived from many ideological traditions- to the conditions of life in America after World War II. In a sense the folk revival represents a reconciliation of originally antagonistic socio-political developments, temporarily making common cause against what must have been understood on some level, as the same adversary or mass commercial [counter-] culture.²⁰

This musical genre allowed the concepts and ideas of the movements to be acceptable because the music was respected and the messages that resulted helped sustain the movement. The use of rhetoric through music can be "inherently symbolic. The act carries a message. It dissolves lines between marches and ... acts of physical violence and discourse²¹." Music embodied a speaker-box to inform populations of the struggles of others. Artists such as Peter, Paul and Mary, Phil Ochs, Tom Paxton, and Pete Seeger used this platform to vocalize societal issues.

The Anti-War Movement allowed individuals to use music as a medium to ask difficult questions. Much like Pete Seeger, Bob Dylan,

¹⁹ Music and Social Movements: Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison 118

²⁰ Music and Social Movements: Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison 119

²¹ Readings on the Rhetoric of Social Protest: Morris Iii, Charles E., and Stephen H. Browne 33

another famous singer-songwriter would produce politically relevant songs. He would write songs asking questions of the political atmosphere, trying to find the words to relate his personal frustration with the public. Ultimately, he found language that seemed to echo in the minds of Americans. Dylan through folk music found a niche and would use this medium as a means to temper the gruff words of truth. In doing so he created phrases that would resonate with the public, allowing others to wade through the generational lines of resentment.

Like the philosophers of old, it is through the lyrics of song, that the political writers may have had public conversations. Dylan potentially could have used this channel to answer Mr. Seeger's question, stated at the beginning of this paper, with one of the most defeated phrases in all of music; he exclaimed that the "answer my friend is blowing in the wind." Dylan's simple demeanor and message would eventually be accepted by a country gripped with generational polarization. His unpretentious phrases would become the voice of dissonance among the frustrated and tired American people. This new sound satisfied the media's need to capitalize on the counterculture, and harbored the artists need for expression. The American public expressed that anti-conformity and above all the rejection of the

military industrial complex²² were topics of interest, issues that would find a home in the media.

Robert Cantwell in the text Music and Social Movements explains the vacuum which fostered an anti-commercialization was done so through the “convergence of movement and music in a shared attitude of position.”²³ What this means is that the folk revival was fostered in the movements because it encouraged a progressive vision that jived with a new way of life that people had hoped to encounter.

Artists could now use their artistic abilities and social concerns to become the popular culture of the time. This was a complete rejection of the commercial popular music that had come before. Before artists may have given up some of their political or personal views to obtain fame and fortune or even blacklisted, but the Anti-War Movement changed that situation. In the movement the artists set the agenda, not music companies.

The Folk revival was only a small piece of the anti-commercialism that began in 1968. With the antiwar movement coming on the success of the nonviolent movements, it would make sense that an Anti-War Movement would form to mobilize the people. The question is however, “Why would music be such an integral part of the success of the movement?” There are many answers to this

²²Music and Social Movements: Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison 118

²³ Music and Social Movements: 118

question, but the simple answer is that music is an equalizing force. If music can use confrontation as a non-totalistic tactic, it projects a message without a purpose of humiliation.

Radical and revolutionary confrontation worries and bleeds the enemy to death or it engulfs and annihilates him. The logic... calls it forth to be bids it be total. But undoubtedly confrontation is brought by those who feel only forces of good and evil pop in and out of focus²⁴.

Rhetoric was used to display the truth, but through music, the rhetoric of the common man could be just as powerful as the language of the politician. That was why music was so influential in these movements; it was a non-confrontational vision of the truth.

Such measures of mobilization through movements and music were necessary. For some reason politicians believed that they could usurp the American people, and still do. As elected officials, attempt to 'protect' Americans, politicians have a tendency to use their ideological rhetoric to augment the truth. Governments are created for the betterment of the people and are supposed to tremble in fear of them, but the truth is that in some instances, the opposite is true. Absolute power corrupts and creates an unwavering ideology; that was never as clear as in the War in Vietnam. Echoes of which can continue to be heard in the current political quandary of the Second Iraq War.

²⁴ Readings on the Rhetoric of Social Protest: Morris Iii, Charles E., and Stephen H. Browne 32

The Rhetoric of the War at Home

These instances in history created a need to display a radical voice without the fallout of the dominant culture, and music would answer the call. The use of music to rally the people shaped the accomplishment of civil disobedience. An article written by Robert L. Scott in the text Readings on the Rhetoric of Social Protest discusses the idea that division is created through the use of a radical voice²⁵. A counterculture can be quickly dismissed if it creates a bipolar system where the world becomes a battle of two opposing ideologies.

Just as politicians have harvested the power of rhetoric, the counter-culture was learning that in order to be successful, the movements would have to use rhetoric, a concept which became a cornerstone of the revolutions. Rhetoric was used to rally the people to obtain the peace that the American public desired. Through folk music the American people would get their opportunity to use their own rhetoric to counter the propaganda of the government. Mary Travers, a famous musician from the group known as 'Peter, Paul and Mary', described why the folk revival was perfect for the anti-commercialism of the time. In Off the Record: An Oral History of Popular Music written by Joe Smith, Travers explains that "you really did not have to have a lot of talent to sing folk music. You needed

²⁵ Readings on the Rhetoric of Social Protest: Morris Iii, Charles E., and Stephen H. Browne

enthusiasm, which is all folk music asks. It asks that you care²⁶." It was that enthusiasm for change that led to the Anti-War Movement and invigorated the Civil Rights Campaign.

Nothing would be more important than the use of chants to unify a people under a cause. Spoken word and protest chanting were probably the two most significant contributions to the Musical revolution. Catchphrases such as "Hell no, we won't go" was one of the most effective slogans of the Vietnam era. The vividness of this phrase is particularly clear, and if we listen closely we would not hear one voice screaming out of the darkness, we hear many voices chanting and even screaming together.

In a sense, spoken word had a huge impact on the movements. Although not specifically set to music, the genre of spoken word was significant to the success of the campaigns. Whether on a picket line or in protest, the music of spoken word was being sung, even if the individuals had no individual musical ability. This was an opportunity for all people to be part of the musical revolution.

In 1967 Martin Luther King Jr. said, "Somehow this madness must cease. We must stop now. I speak as a child of God, and the brother of a suffering Vietnamese."²⁷ Although most would not apply the poetry of Dr. King and the vividness of his words to the genre of

²⁶ Off the Record: An Oral History of Popular Music: 160

²⁷ A People's History of the United States 1492 to the Present: Howard Zinn 485

the so called folk revival and gospel revival of this time period, it is blatantly obvious that the genre of spoken word would be incredibly important to the movements. The timbre, cadence and dynamics that are so apparent in Dr. Kings speeches, are what would allow for the argument that Martin Luther King was the first to apply, what we consider today to be the modern genre of rap. Yet in all his power and conviction, the prophetic words of Dr. King fell on deaf ears. The War in Vietnam would continue years after his death.

The power of words and reason, these notions that came out of the Renaissance, would not impede the logical conclusions of a close-minded individual. When emotion takes over, mankind loses the ability to listen to the spoken word of his enemy. From Mohammed Ali's, "no Vietnamese ever called me nigger," to "L.B.J., L.B.J., How many boys are you going to kill today?"²⁸, to Bob Dylan's most famous quote, "how many roads must a man walk down before they call him a man?" the integration of protest and socially conscious music, contributed significantly to the movement that brought about an end to the Vietnam War.

Rap, the Reconstruction of Social Music

Out of the genre of spoken word came the very new, raw sound called rap music. Much like folk, rap in the context of the early 1980's

²⁸ A People's History of the United States 1492 to the Present: Howard Zinn 485

was a social intervention, a conduit through which a political message could be broadcast to a sympathetic audience. Ronin Ro, in the introduction to his book called Gangsta Merchandising the Rhymes of Violence, describes what was so important about the roots of rap and hip-hop. Rap was created as a channel to speak out against the inequality of society and yet, the media eventually moved away from music with a political message. "In our own way, we were as idealistic as the hippies of the sixties, and we truly believed that everything would be all right; we would listen to our music, learn our history and unite to become a political force to be reckoned with. And we were on our way to becoming that just as NWA arrived to confirm the commercial viability of a strange new form of hip-hop²⁹."

The beginning of rap was not that much different then the conditions that brought about the folk revolution of the 1960's. Just like folk music fused with the new genre of rock to create a new sound that appealed to the younger generation, the fusion of rap and hip-hop would bring the Black community together.

The time had come for the African American community to take the next step towards the third American reconstruction. Rap was the vehicle to propel their message of hope and describe the struggles of their community. There is no question that there were socio-economic

²⁹ Gangsta Merchandising the Rhymes of Violence: Ronin Ro: 3

struggles within the Black community, they went so far as to call the areas that they lived in the ghettos, describing a place where social strife was rampant. Much like the folk revolution of the Anti-War and Civil Rights Movement, this new fusion of music was used to invigorate a defeated people, and united the people against a common enemy, inequality. Much like its musical predecessors, rap was then manipulated by the media. This new form of expression became both a scapegoat for acts of violence, and eventually turned into a lucrative money making proposition³⁰.

The now mainstream rap, once a very personal form of expression, turned into an ode to disappointment and dissatisfaction. Rap music described the anguish of the inner city kids. The feeling was that there would be no ladder for these kids to climb the socio-economic tree. This music was a glance into the life of modern ghettos, or the socio-economically deprived areas of New York, Los Angeles, and other such urban areas. Ironically, the media would not endorse rap initially. At the outset, "[h]ip-hop would empower the inner city; we didn't see its perversion into the more 'marketable' hood coming. We were going to be galvanized by art not demonized³¹."

When the media embraced rap, as it did in the 1980's and early 1990's hip-hop became a very successful enterprise. Although many media

³⁰ Gangsta Merchandising the Rhymes of Violence: Ronin Ro

³¹ Gangsta Merchandising the Rhymes of Violence: Ronin Ro: 3

outlets would welcome rap as a new form of expression, it was the media that began to manipulate the outlets. This pushed the genre of gangster rap onto the main stage and diminished the political message that rap used to springboard to success³².

Just like rap, music with a political message may seem to be disappearing. There is much to be said about world injustice and it seems as if music of social change is dying. On the surface of things, there is a sense that collegiate complacency has taken root, but the truth of the matter is that socially explicit music exists now more than ever. We must stop, however, comparing each generation to the next, because the only thing constant in the world is change. How can we compare ourselves to a generation racked with fear, bound together by many common enemies? Injustice during these time periods was extensive, inequality obvious, and only through strong language and fierce action, did society begin to change.

The Generational Comparison

In rap music we heard an echo of the passion that came out of the Sixties. There should be a sense of indignation that the American people were forced to such a corner that the movements and folk music were needed to rally the country, before the American political system would begin listening to the people.

³² Gangsta Merchandising the Rhymes of Violence: Ronin Ro: Page 4

This contemporary generation, even with all of its problems and potential shortcomings, is not faced with such an extremely grim outlook on life. We are not unified because there is no evil oppressor staring down at us from a near. People argue everyday that the next atrocity will be as a result of one of our many limitations. Therefore, if we seem socially fragmented, it is because we are. My generation has no draft, and has no evil empire to topple, therefore very few things actually hit close to home. We have a war, the Second War in Iraq, but we have a tendency to separate ourselves from the mission of this government, because we can. Americans have this perception of a War fought by someone else, as if this "is something happening over there, in Iraq, many thousands of miles away, fought by people who chose to be there." Therefore, it is easy to withdraw oneself from that kind of political discussion. As the war drags on the movement gets stronger and the pieces of the fragmented puzzle have been reassembling themselves.

These movements take time, and when historians judge my generation, I hope they understand that the Nonviolent revolution of the Civil Rights Campaign had evolved over two hundred years to become the effective instrument that it became. Although not nearly as long, the Anti-War movement needed the better part of a decade to put the breaks on a renegade government. What this indicates,

however, is that hope should not be lost on the great people of this country because the potential is there to revitalize this machine.

Going back to the issues in the bible, oppressed individuals have found strength in the fight against a common enemy. The Passover Seder is a reminder of the Israelite story of slavery and their redemption. The lack of a fight against the common enemy makes my generation seem fragmented and complacent. My generation is lucky, it is true we have no draft, we experience relatively low amounts of inequality, and we no longer fear the bonds of slavery. Therefore we have not been forced to change the political agenda to the extent that was so desperately needed in the 1960's.

My parents' generation saw a completely different world than we do today. For my parents' generation the draft made every man equal, because death did not distinguish one man from his brother, and no woman wanted to watch God take another angel. The test of the generation of my grandparents was their opposition to Germany's ultimate solutions and our government's blatant disregard for the equal protection of people under the Constitution.

Although the internet has the quality of a decentralization of localized community, the accessibility of the international community has had an effect on my generation. Elie Wiesel has suggested that he thought that today's younger generation is more socially active than

any one that has come before. How do we remedy the dichotomy of being the most active and at the same time the most complacent generation? Perhaps people as individuals are fulfilling their personal needs to help the global community. There is just no, single unifying force that has brought my generation to take a united stand, like the generations that have come before.

We hope that it is through wisdom that we know when to affect change. Whether or not there are political issues to be discussed, on a daily basis, there are enough pictures in the newspaper and on magazine covers to highlight mankind's inhumanity; its senselessness continually finds ways to emphasize our infinite and endless quest to create the next atrocity.

Yet, hope is not lost. Brutality, cruelty, and fascism are forces that are confronted by the 'music of social change' and in the evolution of this political device, music may one day soon, set the political agenda once again. All of this hate is not a perpetual state. There are those fighting in the moral trenches for whatever their position, chanting, arguing and singing their political message. Right now, the flames of such a powerful instrument are being kindled, like a mythical golem creature being kept on life support, in the event that such a drastic measure is needed.

It could be argued that of late, socially conscious music has been kept incognito. Just like the bass line on a musical score, the music of social change has always existed, but sometimes subtle enough not to be noticed. The use of music to project a moral perspective on what seems to be an amoral set of societal norms should not stop with names of Bob Dylan and Phil Ochs. If one considered a historical timeline of musicians and the issues they addressed through music within the 20th Century, it becomes clear there has been a long lineage of artists pushing for change within society.

A Closer Look at Political Music

There have been many socially conscious musicians that have graced the worlds' stage since the end of the Anti-War Movement. There have been musical giants like Bob Marley who have musically described the social woes that still exist, even many years after his death. Throughout the Eighties there have been attempts to describe the hardships of the economic ramifications of the Cold War. Marley said "Emancipate yourself from mental slavery, none but ourselves can free our minds. Have no fear for atomic energy; none of them can stop the time." He explicitly addresses the frustration with the arms race in an effort to show the fear of atomic onslaught.

Tracy Chapman another famous singer-songwriter has used her talents to discuss social issues throughout the 1980's and 1990's. She

expressed her dissatisfaction with the conditions of the poor during the recession towards the end of the last century. She even wrote a song called Talking About a Revolution in which she said,

“don’t you know were talking about a revolution songs,
like a whisper... standing in the welfare lines crying at the
doorsteps of those armies of salvation; Wasting time in the
unemployment lines, sitting around waiting for a promotion.
When are people gonna rise up and get their share?³³”

The music of social consciousness has maneuvered its path like a thread through history. This kind of music has not always been as evident as in the folk revolution, but it has not gone anywhere.

The socially conscious music that once existed still does. Even today there are new songwriters expressing their vision of hope and proclaiming their dissatisfaction with modern society. Other singer-songwriters like Bono, Michael Franti, and Ember Swift, and many others are still fighting the good fight to discuss issues affecting our everyday lives. Even popular rappers have jumped on the bandwagon of music for social change. Modern musical giants Ludicrous and Mary J. Blige have recently recorded a song addressing domestic violence issues. In short, this music still exists there has just been a reapplication of this type of music.

The internet does decentralize community which makes a unified local community impossible, but it also allows for people to tackle

³³ *Talking about a Revolution*: Tracy Chapman

issues that are meaningful to them as individuals. This has a direct correlation to music. The internet allows for quick dispersal of information and what could be called 'homemade' music. In this instance people can record their own work, without expensive recording costs. Although the music is not professionally recorded and distributed on a national scale, the freedom of this medium allows for many more people to write and record a plethora of music that can be distributed over the internet. This, in a sense is the answer to why many people believe that there are more people writing social music than ever before. Many more people have been encouraged to write their own music because there are fewer obstacles in the way of transmitting messages.

What has happened in other instances like the band *Red Jumpsuit Apparatus* and similar musicians in the professional arena is that political music is more likely to be transmitted if the issue discussed has no room for political dialogue. Domestic violence is such an issue, because domestic violence is something to be abhorred, it therefore, is more easily championed by the media.

The flipside of this argument is that maybe we should just "Shut up and play your guitar," as Mat Callahan suggests. He suggests that we should stop using music as a tool for political discussion and just play our instrument of choice. There is no need to use words to

change the world when the musical tones would be sufficient in obtaining the same goals. Replying to such an accusation, a response might be that the reason why musicians use language is that the words add a color to the music which adds depth to the musical experience. Maybe Mat Callahan is right, maybe the lyrical bombardment of music has gone too far, but when lyrics are used in song, a texture is added to the canvass of music. In light of these new perspectives we must reexamine the power of music.

Have We Failed the Power of Music?

To answer the question, of whether or not we failed the power of music, the answer is no. The case may be that the indignation that fueled the American revolutions has been diluted since the last political atrocity. Each day this war grows, however, so does that same resentment that made previous political administrations quiver. Our generation has no common cause or unifying enemy right now, but as long as there are students of history, the potential is there to revisit the successes of the social justice movements from previous eras.

The utilization of music as a tool to address social woes within the American community has had an extensive history. From the beginning of the American experience, music has been a powerful force, which has changed the American political landscape. Starting with Congo Square and moving into the cotton fields of North America,

the music of African slaves would be used to disobey their masters, and helped to create the very foundation of this American movement. Songs would be used to record the history of an enslaved people, and would evolve to be used to fight oppression wherever cruelty was found. From the African slaves to the immigrant Labor Movements, from the Civil Rights Movement to the Anti-war Movement, music has been a tool for solidity, in the fight against oppression. Music, in its ability to unify people has become a non-governmental actor, an agent of social justice that has the ability to change political policies in the United States and internationally. This exploration of the music of social change has shown that politicians may come and go, but music will always be the voice of the people. Will there be a unifying force for future generations? We will have to wait and see, but the music will be ready and there will be those who will be ready to harness its power.

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Keeping the Traditions Alive

Even today, there are some of us writing songs of social change. It may be the agenda of record companies to squash this type of political expression. I will not allow this form of art to die, because "sometimes to be silent is to lie"³⁴.

I Write Therapy

Swore I'd never leave you
when times got tough
How long must this go on
'til you tell him you've had enough
It's not a judgment call, who am I to say
'til things get better I'm gonna Use my voice and sing.

Stop protecting him he hit you anyway
and I'm here to say it's not ok with me
when home is hell where can heaven be
building walls of integrity

I confront her and she says
Just one more time, just nine more months
How do you find clarity in invisibility?
Its so obvious cant you see?
That's why you still talk to me

I'm not doing this cause I'm still in love with you
no, that man died long ago, but you're
drowning in a puddle of frustration
why will no one stand up to help you out
If I have to I alone will sing.

Building walls will bring you a new life,
Building walls will bring you away from here
When home is hell heaven is right here,
Home is between the two of us

Stop protecting him he hit you anyway
and I'm here to say it's not ok with me
when home is hell where can heaven be
home is between the two of us.³⁵



I Write Therapy.mp3

Click on me...→

³⁴ A People's History of the United States 1492 to the Present: Howard Zinn Page 486

³⁵ Open D Tuning Musical Progression for Melody and Chorus: Bm, A, D: Bridge is (BAE), F#, G.

Fabricated War

He's a man of courage can't you see
Dressed in the flag for eternity
Now were Left to remember a time
When his smile and fatigues were going
To bring a nation to its knees
With the angels at the door the consoling shoulder
Will not prevent the next life from being taken

Newspaper covers are so wrong
Tell his kids that they are right where they belong
Try to tell his mother that it won't be long
Not forgetting the service and the sacrifice
Of the soldiers

I'll be the first to tell them that they have sinned
Those politicians pulling their unsuspecting strings
This fabricated holy war, this economic war of choice
People get rich while the G.I.'s are sent to their endings

Newspaper covers are so wrong
Tell his kids that they are right where they belong
Try to tell his mother that it wont be long
Not forgetting the service and the sacrifice
Of the soldiers come and gone

I wont bare false witness something must be said.
Things can't go on as read

I see the struggles and feel the angst,
I see the tears running down her face
I know she'll find the strength I know she needs
While I sit here and watch this country bleed³⁶

³⁶ Chord Progression: Melody, F, A, Bb, G: Chorus: A, F#m, D, Dm. Bridge: Em, Bm, C, Cm.

Makeshift Sanctuary

A woman lays on a carpet of cardboard
And all that is holy looks away,
Laying her corrugated home, her sunken eyes
Scream for help. She Screams for policy
Scream for humanity, left dreaming
Of a better life.

Chorus: We send Ships to the moon and
Say we'll help soon while the soup-kitchen lines grow long
How come we can save the world from evil
But we won't help you, we can't, help you?

He's a vet God damn it well,
That's what the sign says anyway
The words will work for food rang clear on the highway
Drove by that man for years and did absolutely nothing
But watched while he embraced the cold another night
Chorus

Do you believe the lies they tell
Is this our colossal mistake?
Is this the cost of this war?
The bindings that shackle justice to the floor

At least for tonight
The little ones can hide
Using their the blankets as shields in
This makeshift sanctuary.
The dry tears tell a story
that I dare not, a story of
people long forgotten³⁷.

³⁷ Melody: C, C/B, Am, Am/g, F, G. Chorus (F, G, C, C/B, Am, Am/g,) x2 F, G. Bridge: (Am, Am/g, F, E) x4 (last time E7)