

# MUSIC AND POPULAR CULTURE

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The connection between music and politics has been interwoven for years within the music industry as a creative outlet that has been a both literal and figurative stage for musicians and groups to openly express and encourage real change within our society. Through deep lyrical meanings, events and overall social affiliations, music has had and will continue to possess the power to move large groups as well as leaving long lasting impacts on individuals. One of the most common ways in which music takes on political expression is in relation to social justice issues and significant events/crisis' that the world faces both historically and in contemporary settings.

The art of creating political music surrounds the persuasion of the people on a mass scale, Robert Bostrom of the American Communication Journal identifies that the ability to persuade is more effective when adopted by those with a 'knack' for creativity, as the expression of thoughts, feelings, and ideologies by differing from traditional routes has an enhanced cognitive effect on the mind. This clinical evidence further explains why acts of political music expression have had durable impacts of the industry and those who consume it, as seen in the expression of music on the topics of social justice.

The concept of 'fighting the power' has developed throughout the years of music expression, with its efforts mainly surrounding the bringing together of the masses to create change through inspiration. The use of music as a way to combat injustice is seen to be most influential towards young people (Daniel C. Byrd and Denise L. Levy 2013), in that their consumption of music is higher compared to older individuals, with its more frequent listening being a motivational tool. This is evident presently, in the actions of university students world-wide that are fighting for freedom in Palestine, and the artist Macklemore. The recent release of his song 'Hind's Hall' explicitly stating a wish for freedom for Palestine, has ignited university groups globally to create a stream of encampments on their campuses, catching the attention of law makers, police, and university heads. This present day example is a clear identifier of the relationship that is held between musical expression and the ability to influence politics. Following the numerous encampments, political leaders are unable to escape the feelings of these young groups, with songs like 'Hind's Hall' ringing in their ears, pressure for change of stance has never been higher.

Similar 'battle songs' have been seen historically, connecting music and social justice causes, with many having similar feelings of prevailing peace, as seen by John Lennon in his song 'Imagine', a condemnation of the state of world, encouraging listeners to remove themselves from individualised practices to focus on the improvement of the world around them. Phil Zuckerman identifies this song as generationally impactful, as well as being an atheist anthem, in which would be rejected by nations including America, a historically religious country. Zuckerman's identification of the contradiction between common beliefs being removed when listening and understanding the meaning of 'Imagine' demonstrating the power and overall influence that can occur when political messaging and music collide.

The use of musical anthems throughout the Civil Rights movement in America was a powerful tool used to express the aims of the efforts, as well as highlight the suffering endured by those that were marginalised. The movement surrounded the freedom and

equally treatment of African Americans, and with this came the inclusion of unique music outlets, such as gospel and folk music rising to popularity in this time period. Outlines by Stanford Universities Martin Luther King Research and Education Institute, the use of music 'played a critical role in mobilizing and inspiring' those fighting for change, in which ultimately had the power to place an unrelenting amount of pressure for large scale change to be made by governments. The African American struggle and acknowledgement of history was continuously highlighted in songs such as 'We Shall Overcome' by Carawan and Carawan, and 'In Struggle' by Carson.

The use of music in political expression also cannot be used as a tool to bring people together in hope and pursuit for change, it can also be expressed in as a direct criticism of society and its practices, as seen in the 2018 single by Childish Gambino "This is America". The single was a commentary of the experiences of Black individuals in the USA, with the title itself being a criticism, implying that the circumstances endured by non-white people in the country are common and a usual practice, implying that this is what America is truly like. In an analysis undertaken by Art Grayson of Harvard University, this single aims to amplify the 'beauty and ugliness, joy and violence' that are 'pillars of the Black experience', understanding that this song itself acts as a contradiction of the image that America aims to present to the rest of the world, a place of freedom and expression, in which is not truthful. Grayson further highlights that these issues of American culture 'are old, if not timeless' prompting the further need for deep scale change from the top down of our societies, in that this song is a reflection of the political and cultural state of a nation.

The impact of music on individuals can never be underestimated, and this rings true in the use of it as a response to specific events and social proceedings. Taylor Swift could be identified as one of the most influential musicians of the modern 'era', with her lyrical abilities as well as widespread following allowing her to hold immense power over a substantial number of people. This power was seen put into motion during the highly contentious 2018 Mid Term election, criticising the Trump administration and specifically Republican senator Marsha Blackburn, stating she was 'not willing to fight for dignity', as Blackburn was not in support of LGBTQIA+ and women's rights. This action by the pop star led to a string of comments and snake emojis being left on all of Blackburn's social media, as well as a public drop in her overall popularity. This power over the people was furthered in September of 2023, when Swift encouraged her fans to vote in an upcoming US election via Instagram, in which the post resulted in the registration of 35,000 new voters. Simone Driessen outlined that the power of fandom in musical genres such as pop are 'a space often overlooked when it comes to discussing politics' in that the ability to influence a great number of individuals solely based on their love and dedication to the art that person is able to create.

Artists have pulled inspiration from significant events for their music production for many years thought the industry as a way to show respect and raise awareness, with Australia being a playground for musicians and groups due to its tainted history of various injustices and poor political decision making. The single 'Beds are Burning' by known political music group Midnight Oil. The group has been continually identified as incorporating contentious topics into their lyrical content as a way to highlight uniquely Australian issues and both criticise and raise awareness. The hit song 'Beds are Burning' is based on the actions undertaken during the forceable removal of Indigenous Australians to create space for agriculture and

mining in rural areas of Australia, aiming to raise awareness for Indigenous land rights (Woods, 2014). The treatment of the Indigenous population of Australia has been highly contentious for all of the country's existence, with the displacement, forceable removal and overall discrimination being sewn into the lifeblood of Australia. The song was written by the request of a group of Indigenous people from effected regions as a way to raise awareness for what was being undertaken by the government. This criticism was highly effective as the experiences of the indigenous population were not often broadcasted to the general public, in doing this the group were able to bring greater attention as well as initiate the pursuit for the public to act.

As a traditionally colonial nation, Australia has been pulled into many British involved conflicts around the world, with the concept of fighting war purely as allies, creating some of the most iconic and inditing anthems about Australian war time. The Redgum classic 'I Was Only 19', a condemnation of the experiences of youthful soldiers in the Vietnam war, a war that faces less recognition than both world wars, identified the psychological trauma endured by these young men in the horrors of war, that they only endured in support of another nation. The lyrical content used by Redgum aims to highlight the stark differences between the uniquely Australian life these men were accustomed to, in comparison what they endured and experienced. The Australian National Film and Sound Archive identifies the song as aiming to help understand the individual plight of the soldiers as well as a reflection of the country's involvement in the war effort overall. Australia's involvement in the Vietnam war was highly contentious at the time, with the decision to use conscription as a means to obtain soldiers being denounced by majority of the Australian public. The Australian anthem 'Khe San' by Cold Chisel follows a similar narrative to the Redgum classic, identifying how popular the topic of the issue of the Vietnam war was in the 1970's and 1980's, with 'Khe San' going on to being one of the most popular songs around the nation. The use of rhyming and contentious lyrics aim to indicate the continual impact that Australia's involvement in the war had on its soldiers, the line 'carparks make me jumpy, and I never stop the dreams' is a clear signify that the horrors of war were inescapable for those involved.

The ability for music to influence the political stance of the world is often and underestimated point of view, however its power over masses has been proven time and time again. The psychological connection how music has the ability to connect and have greater impact on the brains of individuals makes it almost essential in how messages, views and goals can be spread to large groups of people in seemingly short periods of time. Without the use of political elements in the music industry, the world's discography would be highly reduced, as it personal beliefs always shine through as music is an overall art of self-expression, and has and will continue to be a leading narrative in the production of hits now and in the future.

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