

POLITICS AND MUSIC

By

Nyasia Harris

Submitted to the Department of Sociology
School of Natural and Social Sciences
in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts

Purchase College
State University of New York

May 2019

Sponsor: Chrys Ingraham, Ph.D

Second Reader: Eddie Varrell, Purchase Coach

Abstract

This study focuses on music and its role in politics. Music is used as a way for people to express how they feel whether it be about love, happiness, sadness, or depression; people are able to get their point across. In this study, I discuss how musicians use their platforms to discuss politics on how they feel about their government within their country. Politics play a significant role on how citizens live their lives and abide by laws placed upon them. The heart of politics is compromise, trying to come to a understanding or an agreement on solutions to fix the problems of society. In vocal music, musicians are often speaking on the problems in society together like politics seek to inspire the people whom they target in order to advance their ideas. This article aims to provide how music has a role within politics.

Introduction

Music is an outlet; a way in which certain people express their thoughts and are able to refrain from the feelings of oppression constructed by society. So many times we choose to remain conflicted underneath the dissension that this world causes us. The reason I say certain people is because not everyone is open-minded enough to allow themselves to be stimulated by something that isn't really tangible, but more like a feeling that runs through your veins. Music has been around since the day we were born. Many of us in today's society grew up on the sounds of music whether it is Rock and Roll, Hip-hop, Blues, Country, Jazz, etc; we have been exposed to music and it has become a part of who we are. It helps us to understand what an artist is trying to get across, why he or she is saying that and how it can affect society.

How does music play a role in politics? Music is used as a route for an escape, a thing for healing, a place for peace, joy, sadness, and empowerment. Politics are the activities associated with the governance of a country or other area, especially the debate or conflict among individuals or parties having or hoping to achieve power. So you see politics is more so the action but like every action, it has to stem from somewhere and be fueled in a sense and that's where music comes in to play as an influential tool, music has always influenced political movements. Music is consistently used in advertising and campaigning for political parties and makes all the difference. Could you imagine a dramatic film without any music to back it? It would be harder to connect and draw emotions from what's being displayed and I could imagine how much harder the actors would have to work without the help of a little music to set the tone. In vocal music, they are often speaking on the problems in society and like politics seek to inspire the people whom they target in order to advance their ideas. Political music has been the driving force of bringing awareness to what's going on in society. Political music has highlighted traumatic events, economic hardships, and experiences. I chose to address how music plays a role in politics because it causes constant conversation and it's a relevant topic within today's society. It is important that we speak on how much politics are making an impact upon the artists and people within society.

Through my study, I am going to incorporate my perspective on political music with five songs chosen from the 1970s to 2019 and a bonus song that will be created by myself. The songs will illustrate what people have gone through in this world and the impact of historical events. I speak on the issues of war, poverty, shootings, racism, inequality, and change in our community. Throughout most of history, there has been a lot of progress and a lot of setbacks. Some of the

progress highlighted in history is the overcome of slavery, the economic depression, the fight for women's rights, etc. Although we have overcome many of those challenges, we are still in the battle of fighting against ourselves and others. People are constantly fighting for their rights, humanity, for their identity, and for their country. The interaction between music and politics is so complex because even though it can be used as a tool to unite people, it can also be used to divide people as well. The relationship between music and politics has existed for centuries. From protest songs to voter campaigns, campaign rallies to musical endorsements: there has been no shortage of love between music and politics. "As a form of communication, music has always been used to express opinions about matters of the day" (Thomson). Political songs have helped contribute an emotional impact and shed light into educating people about what's going on in society. The political songs emphasized how we as a human race need to come together to make this world a better place and have addressed many issues of the world. Music surrounds us in our everyday lives. For example, many people are more likely to remember a catchy song than to remember a person's name. This is an example that shows us how impactful music is to the human brain. Music is embedded within us that's why we are so connected to it and we use it to enhance and advance one's ideas.

Literature review

This literature review will discuss the effects of political music within society. Racism, inequality, and poverty all play a major role in how political music is displayed. Throughout many of the findings, the authors and writers, all discussed how political music was groundbreaking within regular music and how its meanings impacted the world in many different ways. In this study, I will provide examples of the influence of political music and how

it was portrayed in society. I will incorporate current data that will back up my argument. The first article I will be discussing is by an author named Lydia Goehr called, "Political music and the Politics of Music". Lydia Goehr wrote an article about the impact of political music and incorporated many ideas from another author named Hanns Eisler. Within her section, Eisler states, " Revolutionary music, he asserted, is the music of critical argument. New forms can be used simultaneously to negate one set of ideals and affirm another. They can be used dialectically, to represent the contradictions of society". That quote was a great explanation of what political music really is and what it stands for. Political music breaks the barrier and speaking amongst the norms of society. Its music is created for everyone to be enlightened and educated. The strength of this article is its well-written message and direct point of how important political music is. The first book that I incorporated within this section is called *Popular Music Perspectives* by B.Lee Cooper. This book discusses how certain themes within popular music have made an impact on society. Cooper states,

Social change, human interaction, technology, and intellectual development constitute major points of interest that translate into audio examinations of public education, railroads; death, automobiles, and rebels. These ideas and themes are prominent in contemporary lyrics. Patterns in recordings that go beyond mere imagery are also significant in depicting American Society. Humor tradition and historical events can be discerned through answer songs, cover recordings, nursery rhymes adaptations, and novelty tunes. (5)

In this statement, Cooper mentions how popular music discusses certain themes within their songs. These themes highlighted what's important and what's going on in society. Many of those themes are displayed through many musical variations as stated before "cover recordings,

nursery rhyme adaptations, and novelty tunes”. Through these platforms, music is able to be spread amongst people from when they are babies until they are adults. The importance of political music is to make a statement, to address certain issues, to inspire, support and protect and also make changes in society.

Political Rap

This leads another article by Catherine Beighey and N. Prabha Unnithan called “Political Rap: The Music Oppositional Resistance*”. This article speaks on acts of discrimination and neglect, issues with inequality and expresses rage because of lack of power. In this section, this article deals with African American culture. In African American traditions, many African people would sing in order to overcome the amount of pain, heartbreak, and oppression they felt; often times they would sing on the fields as slaves. Eventually, singing conspired into Hip-hop. Thanks to Dj Kool Herc, rap was able to be created and used as a platform of self-expression. Dj Kool Herc is the first Dj and founding father of Hip-hop. Hip-hop/rap music was created around the late '70s and was used as a way of inspiring and uplifting each other to influence education and to appreciate their black race and culture. The article states, "While political rap artists are not politicians, they are involved in the production of cultural politics—its creation, circulation, and interpretation—which is tied to the struggles of working-class blacks and the urban poor." Rose (1991; 1994), McDonnell (1992), Martinez (1997), Lusane (1993), and Kelley (1994), all argue that rap is the voice of alienated urban African-American youth”(Beighey 134). Throughout many of these Hip-hop songs, many of the themes highlighted and encoded at the top themes for resistance was healthcare inequality, police brutality, mass media misrepresentations, and educational bias. It continues on with the loss of economic opportunities,

criminal justice discrimination and redefined black family. The list below will show the percentages and frequencies of analytic themes of songs.

TABLE 1: PERCENTAGE AND FREQUENCY* OF ANALYTIC THEMES
(N=306; IN DESCENDING ORDER OF OCCURRENCE)

Level of Expression	None	Implied	Clear	Extreme
Oppositional Resistance	31.7 (97)	24.5 (75)	30.4 (93)	13.4 (41)
The Re-defined Black Family	54.9 (168)	18.6 (57)	17.3 (53)	9.2 (28)
Criminal Justice Discrimination	77.5 (237)	8.8 (27)	9.2 (28)	4.6 (14)
Racial Genocide Conspiracy	79.1 (242)	7.5 (23)	5.9 (18)	7.5 (23)
Lost Economic Opportunities	84.3 (258)	7.8 (24)	6.9 (21)	1.0 (3)
Educational Bias	87.6 (268)	4.9 (15)	4.6 (14)	2.9 (9)
Mass Media Misrepresentations	88.6 (271)	3.9 (12)	5.2 (16)	2.3 (7)
Police Brutality	90.2 (276)	3.6 (11)	2.3 (7)	3.9 (12)
Health Care Inequality	98.4 (301)	0.3 (1)	0.3 (1)	1.0 (3)

*frequency is listed in parentheses

This list shows that re-defined black family is leading with clear levels of expression with 17.3% and 9.2 in extreme. Second is criminal justice discrimination with a clear level of expression with 9.2, 4.6 with extreme. The third theme that had a clear level of expression was lost economic opportunities with 6.9 and 1.0 in extreme. This list demonstrates how many themes are used within songs and shows their level of expression within songs whether it being clear, extreme, implied or none (songs that don't contain any kind of expression).

Black Lives Matter

Black Lives Matter is an organization created by black people which is represented as the international activist movement that addresses the violence and “systemic racism that is shown towards black people”(Wikipedia). Adding to that, another book that was incorporated within

this section is called *Black Lives Matter & Music Protest, Intervention, Reflection* by Portia K. Maulsby. This book illustrates the hardships that black people face on a day to day basis and how black people have used Black Lives Matter protest as a way of saying stop the violence of killing black people. Maulsby states, “Songs like J.cole’s “Be free” (2014), D’Angelo and the Vanguard “The Charade” (2014), The Game’s “Don’t Shoot” (2014), Janelle Monae’s “Hell You Talmbout”, Usher’s “Chains”(2015), Kendrick Lamar’s “Alright”(2015) and others provided a thematic soundscape the panelists could analyze and critique activists music flooding the airwaves and heralding new period of activism for the second millennium” (3). With the continuing rise of black killings of men and women, the Black Lives Matter Organization went back to the drawing boards onto thinking of strategies on how they should stop these killings. The Black Lives Matter movement represents themselves as a statement, a statement of letting the world know that black people are aware of what’s being done to them and have formed an organization to let the people know they will stand up and protest for what’s right. Black political music opened the doors for being able to express those oppressions and injustices. Black music shows many forms of social awareness amongst many of the black people and minorities in general. Black people use music as a way to inspire, uplift, motivate and connect with each other. She states, “Black Lives Matter and Music aims to highlight the distinctions between the ways politically and socially conscious individuals utilize black music culture and folkways by way of protest movements, music performances, material culture festivities, or pedagogy”. In this statement, she is saying that artists who are conscious of what’s happening to black people use their way of politics to spread their message to their platforms whether it be spread at protests, performances, culture festivities or educational aspects or events. Organizations like this

help educate people into understanding how the world works, and how they can get involved to make the world become a better place.

Ecomusicology

Ecomusicology is a field of study that bases its concern in dealing with the environment, music, and nature (Wikipedia). Adding to that, I also found that there is political music within the environment called ecomusicology. “Ecomusicology has become a “buzz” word in popular music studies of late, and in studies of the role of music in the environmental activism, along with zoomusicology and soundscape studies” (Mitchell). I retrieved this information from an article conducted from Australia called “Music, Politics, and Environment” by Tony Mitchell. Ecomusicology was created for bringing environmental science within the music realm. It’s a platform is used mostly from environmental activists and addresses environmental awareness and concerns for the world’s well being. Within this study, Mitchell included a study of Malcolm Williamson who was a supporter of saving the Tasmanian Franklin River from being dammed. Mitchell includes how “Initially an Australian Broadcasting Commission (as it then was) project involving all six of Australia’s capital city orchestras together with a television film featuring Australia’s natural environment, the ABC withdrew its involvement after Williamson insisted it express its support for the anti-Franklin dam activists” (3). This quote shows how politics come into play when it comes to addressing certain issues on television. It displays how in situations like this controversial issues are not given the chance to be brought to the light of the environmental issues that are occurring in Australia. Furthermore, throughout this article, an author named Richard Sutherland talks about a chance of incorporating music with humans and animals together for a “possibility of human-animal collaboration”(4). He mentioned how all

types of animal life (using their sounds) would be included within the songs and spoke about the challenge of incorporating that aspect without actually tarnishing the song. The weakness of this article is not enough info on the environmental issues and how music helps to incorporate more of bringing awareness to different environmental issues. Overall, this study should be examined because some people are not aware of what's going on in our society because it may not affect them but political music and its visuals help to bring out that awareness.

Methodology

Within this study, I conducted a content analysis, where I broke down significant meanings of the five songs chosen from certain eras and used the research that I found to help back up my argument about music's role within politics. I started with the following:

1970's - Edwin Starr- War

During the sixties and seventies, the war had played a prominent role in affecting the lives of the people. Music is used as a tool and stepping stone for speaking on the matters of the people and the world. Music brings many people together and during this time people of all races and genders; expressed the importance of peace, love, freedom, and equality.

“War a state of armed conflict between different nations or states or different groups within a nation or state”. The human race has been engaging in wars since the beginnings of time. War also played a major role within the seventies. “War, what is it good for”? Some may say that war is necessary to create peace which seems ironic in the fact that you would have to fight a war to in order to create peace. I feel that war will never create peace because violence begets more violence. Violence drives a person to the point of wanting to become violent towards another human being enough to want to war with them. The reasons people go to war

range from greed to ideology, power to resources and ultimately freedom. The fact of the matter is people who lack the resources, the money, the power naturally want to go to war to take away these things from people who have these things. Another reason as to why people go to war is because people feel that their freedom is in jeopardy. When people feel a sense of oppression their natural response is to fight against it even if it cost them their lives. The fear of being oppressed is so strongly ingrained in a person that they will do almost anything to avoid that situation. A person who experiences this type of fear is easily manipulated by another who seemingly has the solution to prevent their pending circumstance. Someone who has the ability to articulate and captivate an audience has the power to persuade people to believe their ideology in which is that war would be the best solution. "War what is it good for" this quote is song lyrics sung by an artist named Edwin Starr. This song was created and inspired because of the Vietnam war. In a section of his song he stated, "Oh, war, I despise cause it means the destruction of innocent lives war means tears to thousands of mothers eyes when their sons go to fight And lose their lives". In this statement, he exclaims how war isn't good for anything but destroying and killing lives. War does not bring peace it's a continuance of violence. This anti-war delivered a message of pro-peace. It expressed the anger and disgust for the Vietnam war. This song was the most popular and successful song in the seventies. To give a background story, originally this song was supposed to be sung by the Temptations but due to the fear of releasing this controversial song, the label was in need of a new act and recruited Edwin Starr to do the job. According to song facts,

"This is a protest song about the Vietnam War, although it makes a broader statement of need for harmony in our everyday lives. War was one of the first Motown songs to make a

political statement. The label had always been focused on making hit songs, but around this time Motown artists like The Temptations and Marvin Gaye started releasing songs with social commentary, many of which were written by Whitfield”(Songfacts). This just shows how important it was for this message of war to be displayed to the public despite its controversy. Through music, people like Edwin were able to express his opinion on politics and was more than willing to use his platform to address it.

1990's- Police Brutality -NWA Fuck The Police

This song applies to all that are oppressed such as a person revealing their sexuality, or going against the norms of society. In 1988, NWA's song titled, "F*** Tha Police" was released and hands down one of the most controversial and substantial hip-hop song ever. This was the first record to go double platinum without the help of any mainstream radio station, and the reason behind that was the socially conscious message within the song. "One week prior to the release of this album 88 LAPD officers raided two apartment buildings in southwest L.A. The cops smashed furniture, destroyed family heirlooms, ruined food, and clothing, and shamed and harmed residents of the apartments", referenced by Chris Moore's article on massappeal.com. As a result of this, the Red Cross stepped in to provide aid to the survivors. During this era, there was a 33% increase in citizens reporting and speaking out against police brutality that went unanswered (The Baltimore Sun). You can see why the phrase F*** Tha police resonated with so many people, it's been on the minds of everyone affected by police brutality in this era N.W.A. was just courageous enough to express it publicly which gave a voice to countless people across the world. Even though the lyrics showed a proud idea of violence towards the police, the "N.W.A" states that they were not condoning violence, however: documenting it.

These artists, “Ice Cube, MC Ren, Eazy E, Dr. Dre, and Yella didn't just point the finger at white police officers they actually had more aggression for black cops who in their eyes are intentionally violent to people of color to earn the respect of white officers. In Ice Cube’s verse, he says, “But don’t let it be a black and a white one/ cause they’ll slam ya down to the street top/Black police showing out for the white cop”(Genius). This was freedom of speech at its finest, but law enforcement didn’t see it that way and resulted in this group being unable to perform this song during their tour. N.W.A. later rebelled at their show stop in Detroit being fed up with the police confronting them backstage before every show ordering them not to perform their song F*** Tha Police. Before they could finish performing the hook undercover police rushed the stage to arrest the group, they fled but were quickly apprehended and arrested.

N.W.A. had a strong influence not only on the hip hop culture but the street life which was filled with animosity toward law enforcement that was later exposed for being brutal and injustice when a video surfaced of police beating Rodney King which ignited the 1992 Los Angeles Riots. It is said that “In April 1992, hours after the four police officers involved were acquitted at trial, the Los Angeles riots of 1992 commenced, causing 53 deaths, 2,383 injuries, more than 7,000 fires, damage to 3,100 businesses, and nearly \$1 billion in financial losses” (History). The single “F*** Tha Police”, may not have ended police brutality, but certainly sparked the conversation and forced American citizens to pay attention to the unlawful actions of law enforcement and empowered the victims of this to speak out and stand up for themselves. Within the black community, the police aren’t viewed as “good people” because of all the harm they cause towards black people because of their race. For the black community, police aren’t looked upon as the first call for help but instead fear for their life being possibly taken. Although slavery is

abolished, there are still many ways that black people are still slaves within the broken system of justice. Police brutality impacted many black people during this time and is even show in society today.

2000's- 9/11 Eminem White America

Grammy-award winning Marshall Bruce Mathers III, professionally known as Eminem wore many hats as not only a hip-hop mc but also a songwriter, record producer, record executive, film producer, and actor. Throughout all his accomplishments Eminem has often been titled the greatest and most influential artist of all time in his genre. Rolling Stone placed him in its list of the 100 Greatest Artists of All Time and labeled him “King of Hip Hop”. Four albums into Eminem's career he released a song on his project, “The Eminem Show”, called White America (guan). The term “ White America” in the urban dictionary refers to all Caucasian Americans, but is often used to refer to whites who live in the suburbs or to white rural middle-America, because urban whites do not live in communities as racially homogenous as suburban or rural whites, they are often exempted from the definition of this word. During the time this song was released in 2002 “war on terror” was being displayed and patriotism was at its peak. What was ironic was that even though America was fighting to protect our freedom they also were still looking to censor artists like Eminem who spoke against the government and exposed their hidden intentions. Eminem had a powerful influence on “white America” the white suburban children who may have not listened to hip-hop before and his music always exploited an ugly truth about the government and how they are brainwashing the people which is a perfect explanation to why the government wanted to suppress Eminem’s lyrics. During this time, there was a terrorist attack caused by an Islamic terrorist group that has scarred and left tragic

memories upon the world. “The attacks killed 2,996 people and caused \$10 billion in infrastructure and property damage” (Wikipedia). This date will always be remembered because innocent people lost their lives due to the actions of hateful and careless crimes.

2008- William- Yes we Can

In this song, I chose to write about change that needs to happen and the main influence for this year was Obama. With Obama chosen as president, for the black community that was a sign that change was bound to happen. November 4th, 2008 history was made as we welcomed our first African-American president into the White House, Barack Obama. Defeating Senator John McCain of Arizona to become the 44th U.S. president. This was a milestone in black history and changed the way African-Americans viewed themselves. With more than “71 million viewers on network and cable tv this became the highest-rated election coverage in almost three decades,” (Anderson). Not to mention nearly a quarter-million crowded into Grant Park in Chicago awaiting the results. A racial barrier was broken, and many Americans thought they wouldn’t live to witness this day. Obama was exceptionally well at campaigning bringing out vast crowds, and although he had a lot of support from African-American voters, throughout his campaign he catered to all races. Proving to have the support of white voters when defeating Mrs. Clinton in Iowa an overwhelmingly white state. He promised to end U.S. torture, affordable healthcare, removal of combat troops from Iraq, cut taxes for 95 percent of American families, repeal Bush tax cuts, restrict warrantless wiretaps, create green jobs, create foreclosure prevention fund for homeowners, provide a path for citizenship and more. Obama seems to know what America needed and his slogan “Yes We Can” gave Americans the assurance that if we all pull together anything is possible, enforcing change among the people. The economy was the

voter's main concern. In one of his speeches, he mentions how the American dream is based around opportunities, justice, equality, and prosperity. This speech made history and gave Obama the momentum he needed to carry him to the presidency especially when it inspired Will.I.Am a rapper, singer, songwriter founder and leader of the famous group Black Eyed Peas. What he did with Obama's slogan "Yes We Can" would help Obama break the internet getting his message across to millions of people. Will.I.Am was so driven by Obama's speech at New Hampshire primary election he created a song using Obama's audio from the speech with influential celebrities who interpreted the words as well. Those influential celebrities were John Legend, Ed Kowalczyk, Nicole Scherzinger, Herbie Hancock, Common, Scarlett Johansson, and Kareem Abdul Jabbar. The song was released as a promotional video for Obama's campaign shot and directed by Jesse Dylan. After the release of the music video "Yes We Can" Obama gained substantial support and surpassed Clinton, and his slogan became a popular phrase for all his supporters and over a million donated to his campaign. Although Obama was great at using social media and the first to incorporate Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat and Instagram as a means to reach people across the world. It's the music that helped gained the notoriety with the younger generation of voters. Obama gave us a slogan, Will.I.Am gave us an anthem that embedded Obama's message into our heads inspiring all of us to want change and feel like we could make a difference. And for the most part, the change did happen. Many of his achievements were that he rescued the country from the Great Recession, signed over the Affordable act which provided health insurance to those in need, ended the war with Iraq, ordered the capture and killed Osama Bin Laden, and the list goes on. It seemed as if finally, things were coming together and that as Americans we were learning to love each other past our race.

2018- Childish Gambino-This Is America

Gun violence is a major concern in America. According to New York Times, gun violence has been steadily on the rise since 2015 reaching at an all-time high of almost 40,000 deaths due to gun violence, with 60 percent being suicides in 2017; that was the highest in 50 years. Gun violence archive is what is used to track the number of gun violence incidents and does so in real time through media and law enforcement reports. According to this tool, the number of deaths decreased by 10 percent in 2018 which was said to be its first drop in 5 years referenced from the trace.org, however, that's excluding suicides. 2018 may hold the record for the first drop in deaths due to gun violence in five years but it also holds another record for most deaths in school shootings. According to race researchers, the article found that African-American men had 27 more deaths from firearm homicides per 100,000 people yearly across the nation vs. 2.1 for white men. As for suicides, researchers discovered that white men experienced nine more suicides from guns per 100,000 people yearly nationwide than African-American men 5.41 for black men oppose to 14.34 for white men. Homicide is the leading cause of death for young African-American men, way more than car accidents, suicide, and diseases combined, as said by Dr. Charles H. Hennekens, of FAU's School of Medicine, and other researchers. This is something that is often overlooked and very little action is often exercised in resolving or bringing awareness to this matter. Hip-hop hasn't been much help in resolving this matter either as the lyrics and music videos seem to be glorifying gun violence and promoting it as a way of life giving off the impression that black men are "dangerous thugs" making it easier in my opinion for law enforcement to get away with homicides against blacks or

put little effort in finding murderers of black victims. Social media serves as a tool to distract us from these injustices and Childish Gambino does an excellent job in the presentation of this in his music video to the song titled, This is America. In this song, Danny shows a visual representation of what has been done wrong towards black people such as the church shootings, certain poses, facial expressions, and a running scene. This visual helps give a break down of what a “black male’s” life looks like within this society. Throughout this section, I will give an explanation of each action that was seen as symbolic.

In this song he talks about gun violence and racism and not to take anything away from the lyrics, however; the way he choreographed and presented this message was exceptionally phenomenal and received ten million views in just twenty-four hours, and also received a Grammy for best song of the year. Many people took on the challenge of decoding this video because of all the hidden messages incorporated throughout the video, most say you have to watch it more than once to catch it all which makes sense for the number of views it received. Despite everyone’s impression on the song I decided to share my own. Childish Gambino seems to be playing the complex role of America himself from violence and the use of entertainment as a form of distraction. He wears pants and shoes that symbolize old Confederate uniforms as well as two gold chains that represent physical bondage and obsession with consumerism. Throughout the video, Gambino is doing viral dances with children that despite all the violence that takes place around them they are unharmed which makes the dancing seem like a method of survival being that Gambino is playing the role of America. After every gunshot/murder displayed you will realize someone wrapping a red cloth around the weapon used and running off with it which shows how red America values guns over human lives. This video and song gave viewers across

the world a great interpretation of what's going on on the world daily and definitely woke a lot of people up who may have not been aware of the violence and racism African Americans deal with on a daily basis. This video is now at 537 million views and made a positive impact enlightening not only the youth but everybody on what's wrong with America and how it operates to keep blacks where they are.

Nyasia Harris- Stereotypes (song addition)

“They want us to go but they took us away from our home/ All in all they could've left us alone/ Want us to cooperate with a gun to our face we don't know how to operate/ Calling us criminals want to have us locked away,/ shocked away, I don't know what to say/ Law all men are equal/but still treated not the same/ It's sad racism still exist/ shown with violence equals pain/ Without us there would be no cotton gins/ in which your underwear has cotton in/ Stop the sin oh lord please stop the sin/ Unlock the box that they want to lock us in/of stereotypes/ Tryna stay positive to avoid the fight/ while being unafraid/ Show our voices through our black lives matter parade, charlottesville August 12 a bad day that day. Some men overly crazed enough to take life's away. Honestly these days I get more scared for my brother, cause now people will smile in your face white they hate you undercover. It's sad to see that we can't all love each other , past our skin color, man I hope change will come”. In this song, I was addressing the issues within society and decided to use my platform to express how I felt in that moment and time. As an artist, I can relate to the musicians that I listed above because I'm aware of what's going on in my community and what's going on within my society and have decided to use my platform to spread my message.. Although I may not have a huge following, I still have the ability to share my thoughts amongst my peers and fans.

Findings

This literature review is based on the primary research question: What role does music play on politics? Within this study, I conducted a content analysis. As shown above, musicians use many common themes, such as inequality with race and poverty, as an action to bring about awareness and to let the world know these issues still exist. Within the five songs I've chosen to write about, I will give a brief analysis to what the songs are about and how they were involved in politics, whether they were backing, targeting, or questioning the way things were governed. Now I would like to take you deeper into each song, breaking down some of the lyrics and it's significant meanings. In NWA's song F**k the Police Ice Cube stated, "F**k the police coming straight from the underground/ a young n***a got it bad cuz I'm brown,/ and not the other color so police think they have the authority to kill a minority" (Genius). This was bold and direct statement made towards LAPD in an era where police brutality in LA was at an all time high. He's saying because of his skin color, he is a target and perceived to be a threat to society, and because of that police feel obligated to be aggressive and use excessive force sometimes resulting in the death when dealing with people of color. In Eminem's song "White America", he points out his awareness of his influence on white America mostly within the suburban areas. In his song he says, "See the problem is I speak to suburban kids/ Who otherwise would have never knew these words exist/ Whose mom's probably woulda never gave two squirts of piss"(Genius). In a lot of Eminem's songs, he targets politics and is very assertive while doing so. In those lines he's saying that the problem is that his explicit lyrics and message reaches a lot of the suburban kids that probably would have never knew of him if he didn't resemble them. Eminem is known to expose the ugly truths about our government and being that he's delivering this to a

predominantly white audience could be a problem to the way society is structured. Unlike the previous artist who spoke out against the government and its injustice, this particular artist Will.I.Am used his platform to support and help bring Barack Obama to presidency. Also unlike the previous artist, his lyrics to this inspirational song weren't his own; it was word for word Obama's speech at the Democratic National Convention in 2004. He concluded his speech by saying the following:

We got to make this land a better land than the world in which we live. And we got to help each man be a better man with the kindness that we give. I know we can make it. I know darn well we can work it out. Oh yes we can, I know we can can yes we can can, why can't we? If we wanna, yes we can can. (Genius)

In this quote, Obama is saying it's our responsibility as the citizens of America to make the world a better place, and by spreading kindness and love we can make each other better people. He knows it can be done if we the people choose to make that change, then he ends with his famous slogan, "Yes We Can". Childish Gambino broke the internet with his song "This is America" not solely on the lyrics but more so the presentation, although the lyrics were meaningful and assertive. This song mainly targeted gun violence and how America uses certain tactics to distract us from the chaos going on around us everyday. He delivered this message in a clever way saying, "Girl, you got me dancin' (yeah, girl, you got me dancin') Dance and shake the frame". In this line, the girl represents America and the frame represents injustices that occur around us everyday in America; shaking the frame distorts and blurs what's really happening making it hard to see (Yzola). "We just want the money, money just for you," is another line representing how entertainment and media serves as a distraction to more important issues at

hand (Yzola). During the Vietnam war, we lost “as many as 2 million civilians on both sides” which affected a lot of families and made a major impact on history (Spector). Edwin Starr took on the task of questioning what it all was for in his song “War”. He states, “it ain't nothing but a heart-breaker,/ (War) friend only to the undertaker,/ Oh, war it's an enemy to all mankind,/ The point of war blows my mind,/War has caused unrest,/Within the younger generation,/ Induction then destruction,/ who wants to die” (Genius). He talks about how war killed many people and has traumatized and broken the hearts of family and friends, and in result has become the enemy of human life. In war, people put their lives on the line to defend and protect their country. Within this song, Edwin Starr is stating how there has to be another way of being at peace instead of bringing and causing more violence, as I will further explained in the passage above.

Conclusion

As shown above, I've shown how politics have been used within music to illustrate what is happening around the world. Politics and music go hand in hand because politics deal with the laws and issues that deal with the people of society. Music on the other hand serves as a tool to distribute these messages and target the crowd intended. People may not always understand politics when delivered from a podium in a speech format, however; put it into a song with a few catchy melodies and a nice beat behind it and well that seems to not only make it easier to understand and relate to, but it also gets people emotionally attached and inspired. The artist tends to take advantage of this when including their thoughts and issues within politics. Depending on the artist's influence, their messages can come across thousands and spread into millions. Much of the politics that are spoken about within music are race, inequalities, the environment, families, power, and violence. Aside from instrumental music which only include

the instruments without any lyrics and used mostly in advertisements where a message is being given but needing the instruments to set the tone as well as movies in dramatic scenes to make the viewer anticipate what's to come or feel a certain emotion, however; once you add lyrics and vocals music is now and has always been politics when you combine the two. Music is the life within us that make all the better for change.

Work Cited

Anderson, M. D. (2016, March 21). What Has Having a Black President Meant to America's Youth? . Retrieved from

<https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/03/obama-and-the-kids/474462>

Childish Gambino – This Is America. (2018, May 06). Retrieved May 13, 2019, from

<https://genius.com/Childish-gambino-this-is-america-lyrics>

Ecomusicology. (2018, December 19). Retrieved May, 2019, from

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecomusicology>

Edwin Starr – War. (1970, June 10). Retrieved from <https://genius.com/Edwin-starr-war-lyrics>

Eminem – White America. (2002, May 26). Retrieved May 13, 2019, from

<https://genius.com/Eminem-white-america-lyrics>

Goehr, L. (1994). Political Music and the Politics of Music. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 52(1), 99-112. doi:10.2307/431589

Gun Violence Archive. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.gunviolencearchive.org/>

H. (2010, March 03). Riots erupt in Los Angeles after police officers are acquitted in Rodney King trial. Retrieved from

<https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/riots-erupt-in-los-angeles>

MITCHELL, T. (2014). Music, Politics and Environment. *Social Alternatives*, 33(1), 3–6.

Retrieved from

<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=sih&AN=96402375&site=ehost-live>

News, L. A. (2018, October 25). L.A. police brutality reports rose in 5-year span. Retrieved May 12, 2019, from

<https://www.baltimoresun.com/news/bs-xpm-1991-03-10-1991069058-story.html>

N.W.A – Fuck tha Police. (1988, August 09). Retrieved May 12, 2019, from

<https://genius.com/Nwa-fuck-tha-police-lyrics>

Orejuela, F., & Shonekan, S. (2018). *Black Lives Matter & music: Protest, intervention, reflection*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Political Rap: The Music of Oppositional Resistance. (2006). *Sociological Focus*, 39(2),

133–143. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00380237.2006.10571281>

Popular Music Perspectives. (1991). Retrieved May, 2019, from

[https://books.google.com/books?id=oc6nnRbAfwMC&pg=PA2&lpg=PA2&dq=political musci perspectives by](https://books.google.com/books?id=oc6nnRbAfwMC&pg=PA2&lpg=PA2&dq=political+musci+perspectives+by)

[cooper&source=bl&ots=OTxtw5oTfo&sig=ACfU3U3sgPekc6aMdLRBitJAc1muG8yKaA&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwisj7vaupziAhXIneAKHSwADiQQ6AEwEnoEAcQAQ#v=onepage&q=political musci perspectives by cooper&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=oc6nnRbAfwMC&pg=PA2&lpg=PA2&dq=political+musci+perspectives+by+cooper&source=bl&ots=OTxtw5oTfo&sig=ACfU3U3sgPekc6aMdLRBitJAc1muG8yKaA&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwisj7vaupziAhXIneAKHSwADiQQ6AEwEnoEAcQAQ#v=onepage&q=political+musci+perspectives+by+cooper&f=false)

Portal:September 11 attacks. (2018, November 16). Retrieved May, 2019, from

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portal:September_11_attacks

Travis, S. (2018, October 10). FAU study: Homicide top cause of death for young black men.

Retrieved May, 2019, from

<https://www.sun-sentinel.com/news/fl-xpm-2013-04-09-fl-fau-black-homicide-20130409-story.html>

The Intertwined Relationship Between Music And Politics. (2018, November 06). Retrieved May, 2019, from

<https://liveforlivemusic.com/features/the-intertwined-relationship-between-music-and-politics/>

US news from the Guardian. (n.d.). Retrieved May 12, 2019, from

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news>

V. (n.d.). Understand the News. Retrieved from <https://www.vox.com/>

Will.i.am (Ft. Barack Obama) – Yes We Can. (2008, February 02). Retrieved May 14, 2019, from <https://genius.com/William-yes-we-can-lyrics>

Yzola, A. (2018, May 09). Hidden Meanings Behind Childish Gambino's 'This Is America' Video Explained. Retrieved from https://youtu.be/9_LIP7qguYw