

**CONNECTION BETWEEN MUSIC AND POLITICS: AN OVERVIEW**

Emmanuel Emelike

**Abstract**

*Music plays prominent roles in all the social institutions of which politics is one of them and music and politics complement each other in many aspects. This work examines the corrective, commendatory, informative, recommendatory, didactic and medicinal roles music plays in politics; in other words, the paper highlights the undeniable relationship and romance that exists between music and politics. This work also will highlight some types of music and their political roles and influence.*

**Keywords:** Music, Politics, Governance and Humanity

**Introduction**

Music and politics mean many things to different people. Generally, music is defined as an art of sound in time that expresses ideas and emotions of rhythms, melody, harmony and colour. It is also seen as food for the soul and the Christian church sees music as the life wire of the church. Politics is defined as a set of activities associated with the governance of a country, state or an area involves in making decisions that applies to groups of members. It refers to achieving and exercising positions of governance – organized control over a human community. Both music and politics appeal to the emotions of the people and there is no doubting the fact that music plays a visible role in every social institution of which politics is one of them and without music life will be very boring at all levels and in every culture. Music plays corrective, commendatory, informative, recommendatory, didactic and medicinal roles in politics and to politicians. This article is aimed at x-raying the relationship or the marriage between music and politics and of a truth the importance of music to politics cannot be overemphasized.

**Music and Politics**

The very nature of politics is, like music, rooted in conflict and harmony. The heart of music is the interplay of the physical and the mental, as the compromise between them forms a cohesive whole. Compromise is also the heart of the political process, trying to find common ground and consensus solutions to problems of society through open communication. Both seek to inspire their targets and both have made great use of the other to advance their ideas.

The relationship between music and politics has existed for centuries. Sometimes harmoniously and other times not much. Historical records are full of examples of songs that loud the achievements of nations dating back to ancient Egypt. On the other hand, however, songwriters have turned to their craft when confronted with social and political unjustness, and give birth to songs to voter campaigns, campaign rallies to musical endorsements and musicians campaigning. There has been no shortage of love between music and politics.

### **Protest Songs**

As a form of communication, music has always been used to express opinions about matters of the day. There have been plenty of songs endorsing individual candidates and causes, but it seems rather than turn this into a history lesson.

The Oklahoma born singer-songwriter – poet sang in a plain dead pandrawl that perfectly captured the message he was speaking of fighting to keep America free. His guitar often spoke the words for him with the words “The Machine Destroys Fascists” emblazoned across it. In 1980 Fela Anikolopa Kuti sang a song tagged “Authority stealing” this was targeted against the then government of Nigeria and in 2004 Eedri Abdulkareem a hip hop singer sang against President Olusegun Obasanjo's government. The title of the song was “Nigeria Jaga Jaga”. Then in 2010, Olanrewaju Fasasi a Nigerian rapper known as sound sultan sang against President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan's administration while in the year 2018 a Nigerian rapper by name Folarin Falana sang against Buhari's government and the title was “This is Nigeria where Everybody is a Criminal”.

### **Music for Voting**

In 1990 Rock the Vote, a new non-partisan, non-profit music band was founded to promote voter registration among the American youths. Their marketing snazzy blend of big-name band and artist endorsements and political activism worked well out of the gate with their debut PSA featuring Madonna is dressed only in her underwear and the American flag. With most popular artists of all genres sharing the same message, a new generation realized that they could be a huge part of the process as well. In 1992 President Bill Clinton was elected after garnering a large lead among young voters, thanks, in part, to the 1993 National Voter Registration Act, which gave potential voters a chance to register when they visited the Department of Motor Vehicles. In 1999 they helped voters across the nation once again, helping create an online registration tool that anyone of age could easily use. This sort of bipartisan effort to make it easier for folks to do their civic duty is a noble example of the spirit of music being used to help society as a whole.

In 2004, Disco Biscuits bassist Marc Brownstein and his friend Andy Bernstein founded a nationwide non-profit Headcount. In many ways, Headcount was the next logical step forward along the path started by Rock The Vote. This new activist group takes registering to vote to the people, setting up shop at concerts and festivals around the nation. Keeping themselves non-partisan, Headcount has set up registration booths at concerts and festivals all across the country, using an ever-growing army of volunteers who see the value of a politically vocal population. Their methodology is a mix of old school registration booths and canvassing crowds with clipboards and more modern techniques like hosting concerts, online media campaigns and television ads. The end result, over 300,000 voters registered, is an achievement all involved are proud of.

The good work done by Headcount hasn't gone unnoticed by the rest of the music community. The list of artists who have acted as spokespeople and opened space at their

shows for the organization reads like a who's of the music world. A diverse array that includes mainstream acts like Jay-Z, Pearl Jam, Tom Petty and Dave Matthews stand alongside Brownstein's contemporaries from the jam scene like Phish, String Cheese Incident and Umphrey's McGee. Grateful Dead guitarist Bob Weir was an early advocate for Headcount, appearing in ads, urging his audience to participate in the election process, and now he serves on the board of directors. Here's a fun interview from Marc Brownstein early in the life of the now 12-year-old Headcount:

### **On the Campaign Trail (Today)**

Music is a vital part of every campaign stop. Every aspect of an election campaign stop is planned down to the tiniest detail. Candidates and their handlers plan not just what they're going to say, but how they're going to say it, what clothes they'll be wearing and exactly what they'll be standing in front of when they share the message.

From marching bands to rock anthems, candidates from every party seek to stir up the passions of potential voters using music. Any advertising executive will tell you that the right song played at the right moment will subliminally evoke emotions of trust and empathy in the listener. Music is such a key element of swaying the hearts and minds of people that quite often campaigns will rush to play songs they don't have permission to play. It seems like every election cycle features at least one artist having to stop an overzealous candidate with opposing views to stop using their material at their events.

Republican Party front runner, real estate developer and reality TV personality Donald Trump is no stranger to stepping on toes. He's brash and arrogant style and controversial proposals have fiercely divided the country and are his efforts to draw more people to his constituency, he has made few enemies, as well as a surprising friend or two. Adele, one of the world's biggest recording artist in the world, joined Neil Young, REM and Aerosmith in asking Trump campaign to stop using their music at his rallies. In the past, image-conscious candidates would quickly back down when artists would make such requests, but not Trump. His response was pure him.....he continued using her material for a few more days, presumably turning up the volume while giving them a one-fingered salute.

Not all the artists who made the music that Trump has been using during politics are upset with Trump. While Twisted Sister lead singer Dee Snider said he doesn't necessarily like his policies, he does enjoy Trump's confrontational style and has no problem with his band's song "We're Not Gonna Take It" to fire up the crowd.

There is no doubting the fact that politics has made many musicians popular and rich and also many musicians have made many politicians popular and acceptable to the people and vice versa. Songs can be used to portray a specific political message. However, there may be barriers to the transmission of such message; even overtly political songs are often shaped by and reference their contemporary political context, making an understanding of the history and events that inspired the music necessary in order to fully comprehend the message. For

example, in the year 2014, a young talented gospel singer called Isaac Onuoha (a.k.a Onyecarmy) who was born and bred in Aba was discovered by the All Progressive Party (APC) through Rochas Okorocha. They used him at all levels and stages of their campaign and today the young man is one of the richest gospel artists. Of a truth, the marriage between music and politics cannot be exhausted.

Furthermore, some forms of music may be deemed political by cultural association, irrespective of political content as evidenced by the way Western pop/rock bands such as The Beatles were censored by the State in the Eastern Bloc in the 1960s and 1970s while being embraced by younger people as symbolic of social change. This points to the possibilities for the discrepancy between the political intentions of musicians (if any), and reception of their music by wider society. Conversely, there is the possibility of the meaning of deliberate political content being missed by its intended audience, reasons for which could include obscurity or delivery of the message, or audience indifference or antipathy.

It is difficult to predict how audiences will respond to political music, in terms of aural or even visual cues. For example, Bleich and Zillmann found that “counter to expectations, highly rebellious students did not enjoy defiant rock videos more than did their less rebellious peers, nor did they consume more musical taste. Pedelty and Keefe argue that “It is not clear to what extent the political messages in and around music motivate fans, become a catalyst for discussion, [or] function aesthetically”.

However, in contrast, they cite research that concludes, based on interpretive readings of lyrics and performances with a strong emphasis on historical contexts and links to social groups, that "given the right historical circumstances, cultural conditions and aesthetic qualities, popular music can help bring people together to form effective political communities. Recent research has also suggested that in many schools around the world, including in modern democratic nations, music education has sometimes been used for the ideological purpose of instilling patriotism in children and that, particularly during wartime patriotic singing, can escalate to inspire destructive jingoism.

Plato wrote: “musical innovation is full of danger to the whole state, and ought to be prohibited. When modes of music change, the fundamental laws of the state always change with them; although this was written as a warning this can be taken as a revolutionary statement that music is much more than just melodies and harmonies but a much more important movement in the life of all human beings.

### **Hip Hop**

Hip hop music has been associated with protest since 1982, when "The Message" by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five became known as the first prominent rap record to make a serious "social statement". However, the first political rap release has been credited to Brother D and the Collective Effort's 1980 single “How We Gonna Make the Black Nation Rise?” which called the USA a “police state” and rapped about historical injustices such as slavery and ethnic cleansing. Later in the decade hip hop band, Public Enemy became

"perhaps the most well-known and influential political rap group" and released a series of records whose message and success "directed hip-hop toward an explicitly self-aware, pro-black consciousness that became the culture's signature throughout the next decade, helping to inspire a wave of politicized hip hop by artists such as X Clan, Poor Righteous Teachers, Brand Nubian, 2 Black 2 Strong and Paris.

The Hip-Hop group N.W.A has had their political take within their songs. Their most controversial song "F\*\*k That Police", shined a light on police brutality who used racially biased tactics in Los Angeles during the 80s and 90s with their memorable verse, "F\*\*k That Police", coming straight from the underground, young n\*\*a got it bad 'cause I'm brown and not the other colour so the police think they have the authority to kill a minority", lead them to receive arrest threats for performing police-bashing songs. Their song "Express Yourself" addressed the matters on the restrictive limits of rappers in the industry. In their music video, it shows how black people have no voice and are punished when they speak up. Marshall Mathers, also known as a rapper Eminem released an album called "Kamikaze" and it contained many political messages, most of them revolving around his disapproval of Donald Trump being elected president of the United States. He stated he was willing to lose fans over this criticism when he "And any fan of mine/who's a supporter of his/I'm drawing in the sand a line/you're either for or against," Victor Daniel. "Eminem Addresses Trump Rap in surprise Album "Kamikaze". New York Times.

During Donald Trump's presidential campaign, Kanye West took the opportunity to support the Republican candidate by urging his fans to vote for Trump. Although West was historically been against the Republican administrations, he has been one of Donald Trump's most vocal supporters. On April 27, 2018, Kanye West and fellow rapper, T.I released a collaboration called "Ye vs. the People" that consisted of West and T.I's opposing political views. The song, a conversation between the two rappers, became popular not for its musical touch, but because of the courage West and T., I showed by releasing a controversial song in time high political disagreement.

### **Reggae**

Reggae of the 1970s and the 1980s in Jamaica is one great example of influential and powerful interaction between music and politics. A top figure-head on this music was Bob Marley. Though Marley was not in favour of politics, through his politicized lyrics he was seen as a political figure. In 1978 Bob Marley's One Love Peace Concert brought Prime Minister Michael Manley and opposition leader Edward Seaga together (who are leaders that embraced two previously notorious rival gang leaders, Bucky Marshal and Claude Massop). Both of them joined hands with Bob Marley during the performance. This was the "longest and most political reggae concert ever staged and one of the most remarkable musical events recorded".

### **Popular Music**

Popular music found throughout the world contains political messages such as those

concerning social issues and racism. For example, Lady Gaga's song "Born This Way" has often been known as the international gay anthem, as it discusses homosexuality in a positive light and expresses the idea that it is natural. Furthermore, the natural disaster of Hurricane Katrina received a great political response from the Hip hop music community. The content of the music changed into a response showing the complex dynamic of the community, especially the black community, while also acting a sometimes contradictory protest of how the disaster was handled in the aftermath. This topic even reached beyond the locality of New Orleans, as the issue of the disaster and racism was mentioned by other rappers from other regions of the country.

Pop music is common for its sensationalized and mass-produced uplifting beats. Many artists take advantage of their large followings to spread awareness of political issues in their music. Similar to lady Gaga's "Born This Way", Macklemore's song "Same Love" also expresses support and homage to the LGBTQ+ community. Furthermore, Beyonce's album "Lemonade" has been hailed as awe-inspiring and eye-opening with many of the songs addressing political issues such as racism, stereotyping, police brutality and infidelity. These songs, aside from being catchy and uplifting, discuss serious issues in a lighthearted and simplified manner allowing people to understand while also commonly being influenced by the current political climate such as the violent attacks on the Bataclan Theater in Paris and the Pulse Nightclub in Orlando.

### **Conclusion**

The connection between music and politics, particularly political expression in song, has been seen in many cultures. Although music influences political movements and rituals, it is not clear how or to what extent general audiences relate to the music on a political level. Music can express anti-establishment or protest themes, including anti-war songs, but pro-establishment ideas are also represented, for example in national anthems, patriotic songs, and political campaigns. Many of these types of songs could be described as topical songs. The nature of that message can also be ambiguous because the label "political music" can be applied either to songs that merely observe political subjects, songs which offer a partisan opinion, or songs which go further and advocate for specific political action. Thus a distinction has been made, for example between the use of music as a tool for raising awareness, and music as advocacy.

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