Critical response group 3

Remember to keep responses short (approx. 200 words) and focused on the week's reading, supplemented by listening and/or viewing. Please write your response on your computer and copy and paste it in the space below. (Make sure to end with a discussion question.)

Critical response #3: Civil Rights movement

Brandon Burke

One issue in Reed’s first chapter of his book that surprised me about the Civil Rights Movement is that issue of internalized racism holding back African Americans. I had always thought of the sole enemy of the protestors as the White people in America, but I never thought of internalized racism as a huge barrier that prohibited complete progress. When trying to mobilize people, it is tough to get a big group together if people fear for their lives due to the belief of their own inferiority. With some African Americans living contently under the institutionalized racism in the country, it was easy for White opposition to easily point out the fact that if some African Americans could live with racism, then the rest of them could as well. Not only did this prove to be an obstacle to organized resistance, but it was an obstacle to one’s own realization of self worth and potential. Due to the creation of internalized racism, appreciation of one’s own blackness was and is hard to accept.

Marisela Martinez

In the Lynskey reading, an issue that I found to be surprising was the overlap of the Red Scare and Civil Rights Movement. Discovering that in the 1950s, the labeling of musicians such as Langston Hughes, Dorothy Parker, Orson Welles, and Pete Seeger as communists (Lynskey, 36) was not rare came as a complete shock. When being taught about the Red Scare, my history book never mentioned the intertwining of it with the Civil Rights movement. Thinking about it now, I realize that this was actually a very brilliant tactic used by segregationists although I find it disturbing that the paranoia blacklisted and silenced many. It is, however, wonderful to know that the Civil Rights Movement was able to overcome even more obstacles than are taught to or known by the general public.

Chris Barwick

For the most part, a large majority of the world famous protest songs are those that are malleable, have evolved over time, and are relatable in different societies around the world. For example, as we watched in this week’s documentary and as we read about in The Power of the People’s Song, We Shall Overcome has, “traversed decades and states, groups and individuals, men and women, black and white – the antithesis of solitary genius” (34). The song itself is pretty simple and repetitive, which allows it to be easily memorized. Additionally, the lyrics are fairly vague, which allows many people across the globe to interpret and use it as part of their movement. No matter what language it has been sung in or what the precise words or melody was, the message of the song has remained the same and has transcended decades. Is it important for protest songs to have this universal appeal that can be changed and adapted over time? Will modern rap protest songs have this same historic impact, or will they not spread globally for generations to come because they are fairly complex and specific to a certain movement? I find it difficult to believe that most modern protest songs will have the same historic impact as We Shall Overcome.

Kamaria Woods

After discussing the We Shall Overcome documentary, I thought a lot about the popularization of black freedom songs by white folks and how pulling these songs out of context (or into new contexts) could really hinder the impact of the song as it relates to a movement. The song We Shall Overcome, as sung during the instances discussed in the documentary, immediately served to save and strengthen a community directly affected by a ransack. In the situation discussed in the film, the tune begins as a hum and then evolves into a fully versed song through improvisation. As we discussed in class, the song's lyrics, when changed and used out of context by white allies, seemed to erase the power of the initial message by distracting from its origin. Although broadening a message seeks to appeal to a greater audience, I believe the power and intentions of a movement—Black Lives Matter, for instance—don't necessarily need to present ideas that are easy for the public to swallow. Revolution is radical change, and shouldn't necessarily be easy for anyone. I'd like to continue thinking about the roles allies play in spaces where oppressed people are absent, and how we can gain support for movements without having to shift our values in order to appeal to a larger audience.

Critical response #4: PRONK!

Marisela Martinez

While reading Reebie Garofalo's article, "HONK! Pedagogy: A New Paradigm for Music Education," something that caught my eye was the quote from Titubanda, a band from Rome stating that “If a person comes to us who can only play one note, we will assign him that one note. And at the point where he learns a second note we will assign him two notes” (p.18-19). I found this extremely intriguing because as Greg Moore puts it, HONK! is “an education stressing creativity and fun, unbound to the constraints of western art music, centered on community rather than vague concepts of ‘art’, where the experience is a greater objective than an ultimate performance.” (Garofalo, p. 24) This style of education being something that should be implemented in all education systems. To be exposed to different subjects and extra curricular activities without constraint or expectation would lead to a healthy mindset for children and an all around better way to learn. Instead of judging and grading based on performance, students should be graded on the willingness to branch out and try new things. Too often children are turned away or become
disinterested in things due to the constraints and pressures that come with learning/participating in new things, however, if the education systems were to be revolutionized and reinvented with the aim to resemble the approach that HONK! takes, children would be exposed to a plethora of new things that they would have never branched out and tried before.

Chris Barwick

I believe that Pronk is one of the more unique types of protest music that we have studied so far in this course. It is participatory, draws off of different cultural/musical roots, and drives a movement forward through the sheer volume and sound. Like Marisela, I also found the quote about Titubanda in Garofalo’s article, “HONK! Pedagogy: A New Paradigm for Music Education” to perfectly capture what makes this movement so special (p. 18-19). No matter what a person’s musical ability is, he or she is able to get involved with PRONK. Those involved in the festivities are truly participatory in the movement and are not just passive consumers of songs with a protest theme. One aspect about PRONK that I am a little confused about is their general message and reason for protest. In class and in the readings, PRONK is described as a movement designed to reclaim space. I think since the PRONK marches and festivities are vague, they might often be mistaken for a parade or celebration. Do you think it is important for the PRONK movement to distinguish themselves among the greater public and make it clear that they are not just marching in a parade?

Brandon Burke

The most interesting ideas behind PRONK & the HONK festival in general are the possibilities that these festivals may not be reclaiming space or honestly representing the struggles that these bands claim to be apart of. When it is said that “no sound is illegal,” it makes me realize that the festival’s existence altogether is a political statement. However, when I think of the majority of bands that were displayed in the video, they are often white or European. It seems that this is probably the main reason why the display is allowed to be put on. If the majority of bands were displayed underrepresented groups, it is possible that the festival would not be as lenient as it has been. I’m not necessarily saying that the people behind PRONK are racist, but it is an important issue to take into consideration when we see how these people are able to “reclaim public space,” without much push back from authority. Another issue with the festival that I have is that the bands inherit styles from some indigenous cultures or underrepresented cultures and do not play the music that would be played by these groups. I see this as sort of a robbery of the culture and a silencing of the actual struggle because the groups at PRONK sound like these movements, but sort of silence the actual issues.

Critical response #5: Nina Simone

Chris Barwick

Nina Simon is one of the more unique artists that we have studied so far in this course. Nina Simon does not fit neatly into one genre or one movement. Instead, she had a major influence in both the civil rights and gender equality movements. Instead of letting the dual discrimination (race and gender) cripple her, she explicitly addressed it. Her song “Mississippi Goddam” perfectly captures Nina Simon’s eclectic musical background and unique position in America as a black woman. The song contains a mix of classical, jazz, blues, and gospel sounds. The lyrics of this song also capture the unique blend of activism in both the civil rights and gender equality movements. She sings, “All I want is equality for my sister, my brother, my people and me” (1349). As Ruth Feldstein mentioned in the Journal of American History, Nina Simon’s song was not merely the background sound track to the movement and was not just a reflection of the pre-existing aspirations of political activism (1350). Instead, her song was uniquely powerful in reshaping the an element of the civil rights movement to also encompass a greater role for women. A discussion question I have is whether or not she could have had the same impact/approach if she was not an already well known singer? Could an average black woman speak out and challenge both sexism and racism? Do popular artists have a unique platform to change the dialogue of a movement more than the average protestor does?

Marisela Martinez

Nina Simone's music was revolutionary in the Civil Rights Movement. As Simone says in The Autobiography of Nina Simone, her music "cast a spell over an audience...create[d] a mood which carried over into the next song and then on...created a certain climax of feeling and then they [the audience] would be hypnotized," these words summarizing the effect that protest songs have on the audience (93). An example of this is Simone's song, "Mississippi Goddam." In this song, Simone conveys a mood that captures the listeners and does not let them go until the very of the song. What I found rather intriguing was Simone's perspective on her performing pre civil rights, for she stated that "The saddest part about performing...was -and still is- that it didn’t mean anything once you were off stage" (94). However, she later stated that, "With civil rights I played for a reason and when I walked off stage, those reasons still existed" (94). Although, as shown in the film What happened, Miss Simone, Nina Simone was in favor of violence and sang words such as, “Are you ready to smash white things, to burn buildings?” her role as an artist in the Civil Rights Movement was successful in aiding in the mobilization of people during the Civil Rights Movement.

DQ: Would Nina Simone's music be just as powerful in the Black Lives Matter Movement as it was in the Civil Rights movement or has it lived out its lifespan?

Kamaria Woods

I’m interested in the ways Nina Simone’s performance and lyrical work are rooted at the intersection of civil and women's rights. By translating her intersectional identity as a black woman in America into her art, she created a narrative that challenged gendered and racialized norms of performers in the 1960s. The reading accredits these aspects of her art to both her rural South upbringing and training in classical music. Nina Simone’s story was seen as an “American one” (Wilson, Newport the Music), and her work a sort of “melting pot” of genres. I appreciated how the reading didn’t isolate Simone as the the only musician to ever blend genres and musical backgrounds in her work, or to cause controversy over
her artistic/performance styles. Instead, the reading lies her uniqueness to the ways she took over genres and venues dominated by the presence of male performers, all the while challenging the stereotype of “natural” black talent. The documentary touches on this, too, Nina’s years of training before blowing up in the musical world. I was surprised, however, how those interviewing Nina Simone or hosting her performances rarely drew attention to her blackness, like I expected in the 1960s, until she began producing civil rights songs.

How did racial essentialism play into the ways Nina Simone was perceived as an artist? She talks in the documentary a lot about creating art and performing out of necessity, not as the results of a choice. How has this affected the messages/themes of her lyrics?

Brandon Burke

From the Feldstein reading on Nina Simone’s life and all that she went through, it was sort of no surprise to me that she had so many internal issues. In the reading it was evident that Simone wanted greatly to be a classical pianist, and when she could not achieve this I figured it would be a point of unhappiness. In the documentary we read journal entries in which she says that she was not very happy with what she was doing, but that her husband would not allow her to stop. Although according to Feldstein, Simone was volunteering her services for the CORE and SNCC, it makes me questions whether she joined this movement wholeheartedly or not. It is known that Simone’s feelings after the Birmingham bombing sparked her protest music era, but in her journal entries Simone says that she starts to resent herself as well. Whereas she is seen as a highly regarded and professional woman in the readings, the documentary sheds light on the aspects of Nina Simone. She is as a mother, and African American woman outside of the music. Does this documentary discredit the praise that she has received in texts like Feldstein and other articles praising her? How much does this tarnish or empower her legacy as an African American protest singer?

DQ: Is there a sacrifice made in doing protest music that results in the musician developing their own personal demons?

Critical response #6: South Africa

Brandon Burke

In the South African protest against Apartheid, music played an interesting role in becoming a call to arms. As opposed to the music that we’ve viewed in other protests as patient and calming, the music in the documentary “Amandalai!” was said to mirror the mood of the people which was vengeful. Even in organizing, South Africans, “urged the government to replace the word ‘native’ with ‘African’” (Redmond 224). This proved that as Apartheid continued on, Africans were not interested in having to integrate or consider being comrades with the white oppressors. I find it very frustrating how the people who fought Apartheid were expected to, “forget their story, their songs,” just because the ANC wanted to push toward integration (Malisa 306). To me this means that the ANC was trying to abide by respectability politics and seems to erase all the hard work done by the freedom fighters. Instead of trying to integrate and “move forward” with the inclusion of every race in South Africa, I think it would have been more powerful and pleasing if the ANC worked on serving the people who suffered under the aggressive regime of Apartheid. Could the ANC be seen as a sellout for trying to appease and include Afrikaans in the national anthem? How many South Africans would stand by the ANC?

Marisela Martinez

While reading “Songs for Freedom: Music and the Struggle against Apartheid” by Mark Malisa and Nandipha Malange, the description of the role that music served during the struggle for South African independence was very similar with how we described the role that music should play in order to be successful within a movement. In the Malange reading, the anti-apartheid music “belonged to the people” (Malange, 305) and “was an invitation to fight against a system which dehumanized blacks globally” (Malange, 305). In addition, the role of music is described as a way for victims to “tell their story, to protest” (Malange, 316) despite the “terror brought by the apartheid government” (Malange, 316). Anti-apartheid music was not only effective due to the fact that it was communal and gave power to the “powerless,” but was also successful due to the fact that it “convey[ed] what cannot [could not] be spoken or what might not be heard in everyday speech” (Shelemay, 382) and because it “challenge[d] inequitable power relations” (Shelemay, 383). The power of anti-apartheid music derived from the power that it had on others, songs like Senzeni Na?” and “Nkosi Sikelel’iAfrica” mobilized the people of South Africa and helped them continue in their struggle for independence showing that the anti-apartheid music was very successful since South Africans were successful in gaining their independence.

DQ: How would the South African fight for independence have been affected had their been no music?

Chris Barwick

The readings and viewing this week highlighted how music is a powerful tool that can be used to challenge inequitable power relations and structures (Shelemay 282). The songs we studied this week reflect the violent and turbulent conditions non-white people faced in South Africa. Sometimes these songs were very direct and addressed both the white and black community; however, other songs such as in “Dubul’ibhunu” directly pointed their message at the black community and promoted violence towards the white community. These songs reflect the daily chaos the black community experienced. A question that I have is how effective these songs were compared to non-violent songs and protests. South
Africa also had a long history of non-violent protests. Gandhi first formed his non-violent protest methods while in South Africa. Using non-violent protests such as economic boycotts, labor strikes, and non-violent songs leaders helped put economic and social pressure on the government to end the apartheid and to establish free elections. Both of the violent and non-violent approaches often defied the law in order to achieve their objectives. For instance, even Nelson Mandela (who was not a big supporter of violence) stated, “all lawful modes of expressing opposition to this principle had been closed by legislation, and we were placed in a position in which we had either to accept a permanent state of inferiority, or to defy the Government. We chose to defy the law” (235). Is one method more effective than the other at bringing about large, systemic change?

Critical response #7: Global hip hop

Chris Barwick

I believe that the movie The Furious Force of Rhymes perfectly captures the influence that hip hop has in protests around the globe today. This American art form has been adapted towards a number of different causes. This movie shows hip hop being used by Jewish people in Israel, French Arabs, East Germans, and West African feminists. Even though they do not speak the same language, they all share a common musical understanding. Often hip hop is used to unite different movements around the globe. A perfect example of this is “It’s Da Sound of the Police.” As Kimball discussed in the article Rapping the Arab Spring, the music has lyrics in multiple languages. Additionally, the video shows movements from around the world protesting police brutality.

Brandon Burke

The usage of hip hop globally as seen in “The Furious Force of Rhymes” and discussed in the various readings of the week surprise me not because hip hop is globally accepted, but more because it’s usage has been widely accepted by the people who founded the art. As said by Grandmaster Kaz in the documentary, it is acceptable for anyone to utilize hip hop as long as they respect hip hop. However, in the article of the Arab Spring, the rappers who were harassed for their practice of rap, threw western rap under the rug and said that it was way more vulgar and inflammatory than their rap. With this being said, I’m interested in how rap can be respected without being brave in aligning with western rap. Is deferring from western rap techniques incorrectly appropriating it, or is it considered true to the improvisational methods behind hip hop.

Marisela Martínez

As I watched the documentary, The Furious Force of Rhymes, I was shocked to see the extent to which the "struggle to change the world" (Baker 368) through hip-hop has spread across the globe. The film exemplified how hip-hop in France, Germany, Israel, and a variety of other countries played a role in the societies of said countries. The globalization of hip-hop and its ability to still connect with those who do not speak the language exemplifies how the intent of music can transcend languages due to the fact that meter, rhyme scheme, form, and unpredictability do not require language. Although the inability to speak a language may take away from the some of the meaning of the music, it does not take away from the listeners ability to identify the music “as weapons of social protest” (Bodden 1). However, even with translation, hidden transcripts may be lost within this and therefore music of another language is often not as powerful when it is translated into in another language other than that of the original.

Critical response #8: former Soviet Union

Marisela Martínez

Anthems in nations such as Russia and Estonia have been used in social movements, or “an ongoing, goal-directed effort to fundamentally challenge social institutions, attitudes, or ways of life” (Waren, 440) throughout the years. I found the use of singing itself extremely interesting in the Estonian independence movement since it cause the movement to become a “Singing Revolution” (Waren, 439). The power of the Estonian’s “collective voice” (Daughtry, 42) was able to be one of the primary tools in gaining their independence. In movements such as the Feminist Movement, the use of music aided, but was not the primary contributor to the resistance of institutions. From my point of view, the unique Estonian independence movement exemplifies the sheer power of music itself when it is used to unify people. This then leads me to my discussion question- was the sheer action of singing so powerful due to the importance of song festivals in Estonian culture, or does music possess that power on its own?

Chris Barwick

National anthems are very powerful songs in most countries around the world. As Benedict Anderson wrote about, these national anthems (or unofficial anthems) help to form an imagined community and help create an emotional connection among the greater community (Anderson 145). As we have studied this week, this is definitely the case in Eastern Europe. In Estonia, the use of an anthem helped unity people behind the movement to break away from the Soviet Union (Daughtry 42). I find it interesting that most of these anthems are the most powerful when they are song in a uniform fashion by a collective group. This brings me to my discussion question. Is uniformity in the way that a anthem is played and song essential for creating Benedict Anderson’s concept of an “imagined community”? If people adapt and anthem and put their own personal spin on the song, does the song have the same impact?

Brandon Burke

As we probably know at this point, the Soviet Union/Russia, has the history of being a very oppressive nation. To the support of this claim comes
the evidence presented in the reading and documentary regarding Pussy Riot. The group was sentenced to 2 years in prison for outlandishly bashing religion by performing a song while standing on top of the altar. As far as using music to break down censorship I feel as if it is a very bold and useful move to make, however the avenues of performing such music should not go as far as Pussy Riot went. With national anthems, I think that the strongest ones come from anthems that are actually coined during times of injustice. This fuels back to the South African anthem which aimed to apply to every person in the country. As far as the American national anthem goes, certain people of color do renditions of it since they feel as if the song in it’s untouched form can relate to them. My question is, what constitutes a widely accepted and inclusive national anthem?