

**WHEN ART BECOMES ADVOCACY:  
MUSIC IN THE #METOO MOVEMENT**

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## ABSTRACT

Music has been an undeniable propelling force in social movements throughout history, including in those that occur in the United States. Based on historical analysis and discourse analysis, I explored music used in past U.S. social movements, with a focus on the abolitionist movement, the Civil Rights Movement, the anti-war/pro-labor movement, and the four waves of feminism. I used these movements' music and their reception/discourse to contextualize music's role in more modern movements, such as in the #MeToo movement. Music can reflect the cultural context of the era in which it was written and released, thus making it an essential piece of understanding history as it happens. Music can reflect politics, social movements, power dynamics, and the feeling of an era.

The music created and shared throughout the #MeToo movement highlights the range of emotions that come with any healing journey: rage, despair, turmoil, hope, and peace. When artists and musicians share their own stories of sexual assault with the public, other survivors feel empowered to come forward and share their journey – a sense of community begins to develop among people who are survivors of sexual assault. Aided by social media and the digital age, music in #MeToo was shared on a global scale at a faster rate than ever before. This virality helped popularize the #MeToo movement almost overnight. #MeToo's legacy and music remain timeless and forever relevant, and this thesis intends to capture the role that music played in this historical moment.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

To my parents, who have supported me throughout my academic and artistic careers.

Thank you for always standing behind me and encouraging me to forge my own path.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION & CONTEXT

Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung believed that music should be an essential part of every analysis; music brings people together, bridges cultures, stirs controversy, and allows for deep emotional expression. Jung asserted that music has to do with the collective unconsciousness; music, in some way, “expresses the movement and feelings (or emotional values) that cling to the unconscious processes” (Letters, Volume II, 2020). Perhaps this appeal to the unconscious mind is one of the reasons that music can bring like-minded people together; music can establish a collective identity, a key factor in a social movement’s success.

Music is an undeniable, propelling force in many social movements, including those that occur in the United States. Because I was most interested in music’s role in the United States’ #MeToo movement, I focused my study on some of the United States’ historic social movements and their use of music.

My examination was qualitative as opposed to quantitative; I did not count items or produce numerical data concerning my subject matter. As I explain in the forthcoming chapters, previous scholarship has been done to highlight the importance of music in social movements (as mentioned throughout this paper), but there is a void in the literature regarding music’s role in modern social movements within the last five to ten years. This is where my research is unique, as this thesis evaluates the role of music in #MeToo (a modern social movement). I frame my analysis within a historical lens that

looks at the relationship between music and past social movements and the development of feminist theory and activism in the United States.

### **Feminist Movements in the United States**

In order to understand the genesis of #MeToo as a social movement, it is essential to understand the history of women's rights and previous feminist movements in the United States more broadly. The fight for women's rights in the United States is rooted in hundreds of years worth of history, but it can (more recently) be best understood in terms of "waves" of feminisms; each wave aims to address different feminist concerns.

In the United States, the first wave of feminism occurred during the nineteenth and early twentieth century, and was focused on women gaining basic legal rights; it can be marked by the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848. Organized by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, many of the Seneca Falls Convention participants were also heavily involved in the abolitionist movement, which called for an end to slavery in the United States (Pruitt, 2022). In fact, major African American activists and abolitionists at the time, such as Frederick Douglass, gave speeches at the Convention, which may have contributed to many of the resolutions of the Convention being passed. A total of eleven resolutions passed; they demanded women to be equal to men in various aspects of life (work force, religion, etc.). The Seneca Falls Convention concluded with the Declaration of Sentiments, which "affirmed women's equality with men, and passed a dozen of resolutions calling for various specific rights, including the right to vote" (Pruitt, 2022). This "right to vote" movement underscored the first wave of feminism in the United States, which focused only on the voting rights of *white* women. With the ratification of

the 19th Amendment in 1920, the major goal of the first wave was finally fulfilled, giving white women the right to vote.

The second wave of feminism in the United States began in 1963 after the publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, which articulated that women were not fully fulfilled by their roles as wives, mothers, and homemakers alone but longed for more meaningful opportunities, workforce experience, higher education, and more in order to fully fulfill their femininity (Friedan, 1963). Friedman's book was the catalyst for the second wave, which was further inspired by the Civil Rights Movement and protests against the Vietnam War (Hilden, 1982). Women's liberation and the term feminism gained traction in the public sphere and the National Women's Political Caucus in 1971 (Hilden, 1982). The United States' second wave was marked by major events such as: the Equal Pay Act, *Griswold vs. Connecticut* (1965), and *Roe v. Wade* (1973)<sup>1</sup>. The second wave can also be understood as a response to the role women played in World War II - while women took on larger leadership roles in both the household and workforce while the men were fighting in the war, they were now expected to return to their domestic lifestyle at home post-war. In addition to wanting greater opportunities in the workforce and in politics, this second wave also spearheaded racial justice

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<sup>1</sup> *Roe v. Wade* (1973) was a landmark decision of the United States Supreme Court, which granted women the right to have an abortion. The case was brought forth by Norma McCorvey (known by her pseudonym "Jane Roe") while she was pregnant with her third child in Texas, where abortions were illegal. *Roe v. Wade* also had several implications in terms of the "right to privacy" (which concerns matters including contraception, interracial marriage, and same-sex marriage). *Roe v. Wade* was overturned in June 2022, marking one of the biggest setbacks in United States feminist history and, at the time of this paper, has sparked major activist movements in response.



movements, anti-war activism, environmental activism, and more, as seen by the legal cases that defined that time period.

The dominant music genre during the second wave was folk music, which propelled the country's labor movement that occurred parallel to the second wave. Artists such as Bob Dylan, Mary Travers, Pete Seeger, and Joni Mitchell brought issues of work (and life) to the forefront of their art. Folk music eventually gave way to other genres including psychedelic rock (ex: Janis Joplin) and Motown styles emerged around this time as well. Second wave feminism had its own shortcomings, however, especially in its lack of intersectionality. The second wave centered around privileged white women, and left many groups of women out, especially women of color. In response to (or in answer to) the second wave of feminism, organizations such as the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO) and the Combahee River Collective were created (Thompson, 2002), attempting to address the (previously ignored) needs of women of color, lesbians, and others.

*The Feminine Mystique* also had its own set of racist and classist problems that were a bit skimmed over at this time. Friedan's book focused mostly on problems that concerned white, upper- and middle-class mothers and wives. As author bell hooks explained in her 1984 book *From Margin to Center*, Friedan had written her book as if women of other races, sexual orientations and classes (who were perhaps most victimized by sexism and oppression) did not exist (Hooks, 1984). Friedan conveniently left out the discussion of who would be called in to take care of children and maintain the home if more women like her (Friedan) were freed from their houses and given equal access to

white men (Fetters, 2013). Friedan did not speak of women who did not have husbands, women without children, or women without homes either. Friedan, while explaining how fulfilling it would be to be freed from housewifery, did not tell readers whether it was more fulfilling to be a maid, prostitute, or factory worker (roles predominantly filled by lower-class women and/or Black women at this time) (Hooks, 1984). Over the years, both Friedan and her references for the *Feminine Mystique* have come under scrutiny for a variety of reasons, including those mentioned above. While the book was seen as a progressive step forward by many, it also erased and perpetuated complex and oppressive realities for others, including Black women, lesbians, and working-class women.

By the 1990s, while some issues surrounding women's rights slightly improved, major problems persisted. Most notably, sexual harassment in the workplace and a lack of women in positions of power were the primary concerns at the initial dawn of the third wave. Rebecca Walker (daughter of second wave leader Alice Walker) announced the "third wave" of feminism in 1992 as Anita Hill appeared before the Senate Judiciary Committee with accusations of sexual harassment against Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas (Zack, 2005). This event set the tone for the third wave - a spirit of rebellion instead of reform was adopted, and women were encouraged to express their sexuality and individuality (Pruitt, 2022). Many from the third wave even rejected the word "feminist" itself in order to distance themselves from the second wave.

Pop music underscored the themes of the third wave, and "Riott grrrl" groups such as Batmobile, Bikini Kill, and Team Dresch pioneered the music of this time which highlighted major issues that the third wave aimed to target, including sexism, racism,

rape, abuse, and more (Sheffield, 2020). The third wave was known for softly introducing an intersectional approach (coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw) (Columbia Law School, 2017) to women's movements, noting that many types of oppression (gender, class, race, etc.) can overlap and interact. For example, an issue such as criminal justice, that affects both women and Black people, will impact the lives of Black women in a unique and specific way; this group (Black women, in this example) feels the impact of criminal injustice as Black people *and also* as women. Without frames that enable us to acknowledge *all* the different forms of oppression, social movements may end up excluding certain groups (Crenshaw, 2016).

In addition to the soft emergence of intersectionality, the third wave can also be characterized by feminist theories and adjacent themes such as sex positivity, ecofeminism, and even aspects of transfeminism. Women of the third wave, who grew up during the second wave, aimed to create a new type of feminism that included these new ways of being a feminist (Baumgardner and Richards, 2000). Building off of some of the second wave's shortcomings while also tackling a wider set of feminist issues, the third wavers turned to up-and-coming digital tools such as blogs and ezines to connect on a larger scale. This was the genesis of digital feminism, a new iteration of feminist activism which uses digital tools (social media, online platforms, etc.) to spread awareness, mobilize activism, and disseminate information. Digital feminism is a core part of the newer, fourth wave of feminism in the United States.

The current "new wave" (fourth wave) of feminism emerged from the digital age, where social media acts as a new medium for activism, social movements, and discourse.

The fourth wave, which began around 2012, further separates itself from prior waves in the sense that historically excluded groups of people, including women of color, can be heard online and therefore included in the conversation(s) (Mann, 2014). The focus on empowerment of women (including transgender women, non-binary people, and LGBTQIA+ women) and dismantling gendered norms and the marginalization of women in the United States are the major goals of the fourth wave, a wave that interacts online with other feminist and social justice movements on a global scale as well. This idea of digital feminism allows people to express their opinions in first person, and has allowed alternative media methods (such as music) to be shared on a massive scale at a faster rate than ever before (Mann, 2014).

The #MeToo movement is synonymous with the fourth wave of feminism in the United States. The phrase “me too” originated in 2006 from Bronx activist and survivor Tarana Burke. The phrase was a call to other survivors to share their stories and create a collaborative path of healing (Burke, 2022). In 2017, the #metoo hashtag went viral and shook the world to come to terms with the prevalence of sexual violence. Seemingly overnight, the movement became global in nature (and reach), and millions of survivors came to the forefront. Specifically, many musicians, actors, and other entertainers used this moment to speak about their sexual assault experiences on set, in the recording studio, and in general, thus kicking off almost a version of #metoo in the entertainment industry and therefore in front of the public eye.

## CHAPTER 2

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### **Social Movement Theory**

The purpose of this thesis is to explore music in past U.S. social movements to better understand its role in modern movements such as #MeToo. Thus, understanding Social Movement Theory is essential. Most theories of social movements are referred to as collective action theories, given the important and purposeful nature of collective action in social movements (NSCC, 2021). McCarthy and Zald (1977) claimed that one way to measure a social movement's potential for success is through resource mobilization, or the ability of a movement to acquire resources and mobilize individuals. Resources can include money, time, and/or other means of support. These scholars called their theory Resource Mobilization Theory.

In her comparative studies about social movements, Merlyna Lim (2018) broke down the making and development of social movements into three elements: roots, routes, and routers. By tracing the varied *roots* of the wave of global protests since 2010, Lim provides a broad context for analyzing the media and communications of modern social movements. The second element, routes, identifies the *routes* that social movements take and how media and communication are intertwined with these routes, or paths of development, from the time a movement is born. Routes also explore the mechanisms that occur at every stage of social movements' life cycles. The final part, routers, investigates the roles of fixed vs. mobile, human vs. nonhuman, digital vs. analog, and permanent vs. temporary *routers* (communication processes) that make up

social movements and help them develop. Thus, in Lim's analyses, roots, routes, and routers intertwine to deepen our understanding of the complexity of media in contemporary social movements (Lim, 2018).

Costanza-Chock (2016) identified three major questions in her analysis of media cultures and social movements (specifically, the Occupy movement): (1) What media platforms, tools, and skills are most widely used by movement participants? (Practices); (2) What role do experienced practitioners play in movement media practices (Expertise); and (3) In what ways does the movement media culture lean toward open or participatory, and in what ways toward closed or top-down? (Open/closed). These questions remain essential in understanding social movement throughout history. Furthermore, with the rise of social media and online activism, the platforms and tools used to mobilize social movements have drastically changed over time. The internet and social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram played an invaluable role in the growth of the #MeToo movement, since many stories were shared through these mediums and were reposted or re-shared on a massive scale in such little time.

This scholarship on social movements and their communication/media practices deepened my understanding of how interconnected every stage of a social movement is. From conceptualization to production to execution, the path in which social movements develop are heavily related to the cultural context they occur in and are heavily impacted by external factors and technologies as well; social movements of the last ten years, for example, look a lot different than social movements that occurred before the dawn of the internet. This is because modern social movements must be conceptualized and produced

differently in order to reflect the medium in which they will be received (digitally) and the audience that will receive it (global audiences, often instantaneously). In this sense, social movements' success depends on the way(s) in which they can keep up with the times and adapt.

### **Feminist Theory**

Feminist theory can be explained in a variety of ways, but at its core, it shifts assumptions and analytics away from the male viewpoint to the lived experience of women. Feminism calls to end sexism in all forms, and explores how gender inequalities have shaped social roles, relationships, politics, and more (Beasley 1999). Feminist theory can also be used to understand how media (and therefore music) is made, produced, and received.

Feminist theories have been around since the late 1700s; publications such as Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and "The Changing Woman" ("The Changing Woman, 2005) as well as speeches such as Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I A Woman" (Truth, 2005) are only a few early examples of feminist language and theories. In her speech, Sojourner Truth actually addresses the fact that women have limited rights due to men's flawed perception of women; Truth argued that if a task supposedly limited to men could be performed by a woman of color, then any woman of color could perform the same task<sup>2</sup>. These sentiments were echoed in Susan B. Anthony's

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<sup>2</sup> This speech was also crucial in giving voice to the way of Black women, who are doubly oppressed and obscured in this moment. Truth's speech foreshadows the course of the third wave of feminism and its continuations to #MeToo.

1872 speech after she was arrested for illegal voting; Anthony questioned the male-gendered language of the Constitution and pointed out that women could be punished under the law (such as for voting before it was legalized) but were unable to use the law for their own protection or prosperity (women could not own property, maintain custody in their own marriage unions, etc.). However, contemporary feminist philosophy and scholarship did not fully emerge until the 1970s, when women began taking on leadership roles in higher education, the workforce, and more (McAfee, 2018).

During the second wave of feminism in the United States, feminist theories attempted to explain women's oppression globally, attempting to follow a grand theoretical approach similar to the likes of Marxism (Carlson and Ray, 2011). Since then, however, there have been two major shifts in the field: "(1) from universalizing to particularizing and contextualizing women's experiences and (2) from conceptualizing men and women as categories and focusing on the category 'women' to questioning the content of that category, and moving to the exploration of gendered practices" (Carlson and Ray, 2011). That is, although many women share similar struggles, there are particular struggles that certain women face more often due to factors such as class, race, demographic, and more. Social media and the digital age have allowed for these experiences to be brought to light. Furthermore, what makes a person a woman has changed over the years with the wider acceptance of transgender women and nonbinary people. What makes something "feminine" or "masculine" is no longer strictly defined or adhered to, thus reshaping the way feminist theories are understood and taught.



Feminist theory can still be used to explain how institutions and individuals function with normative gender roles and assumptions. In the #MeToo movement, specifically, one can understand the role of survivors, the culture of silence, and the victim-blaming that occurred through this lens. Since women continue to be the minority in many workplaces and industries, they are often seen as less than their male counterparts; history itself shows how women have been considered inferior to their male counterparts for centuries (this is also explained further in the contextual chapter). Furthermore, especially when it comes to sexual harassment and assault, many women tend to blame themselves for what happened and/or not share their experience for fear of being blamed and shamed. This sexist exploitation and oppression is exactly the type of behavior that feminism aims to end (Arinder, 2020), especially in the United States' patriarchal society.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

#### **Social Movements**

Contemporary societies are accustomed to the emergence, decline, and resurgence of social movements (Aslanidis, 2012), which can be loosely defined as the ongoing, collective actions of people working together for social change and/or a common goal (Snow, et al., 2004). Through a sociological frame, Dunfey defines social change as the transformation of society and/or culture through “changes in human interactions and relationships” (Dunfey, 2019). Thus, oftentimes, social movements are accompanied by protest and/or social disruption. In our daily media consumption, images of demonstrations, protests, and picket lines are standard. Since the 1980s, surveys have shown that protest participation is on the rise for Western countries (Norris, 2002). Social movement organizations and groups connected by shared purpose(s) have been able to create transformational societal change for decades; the women’s suffrage, civil rights, and LGBTQIA+ movements are just a few that come to mind. Social movements have touched every social institution imaginable, including religion, business, and even military affairs.

Some scholars argue that social movements are actually a novel phenomenon that emerged in the mid-nineteenth century in Western culture (Tilly, 2004). Social movements can be characterized by three main features: a campaign - a “sustained, public effort” geared at making collective demands from public authority; a “contentious repertoire” - the use of actions such as demonstrations, public meetings/gatherings, etc.;

and the public display of certain attributes, such as unity, commitment, and power in numbers (Tilly, 2004). In the wake of social media and digital activism, actions such as public meetings, gatherings, and demonstrations look a bit different. Social media has allowed people to connect and gather in numbers larger than ever before in very short time.

Social movements happen at various levels; while some social movements may be focused on a more local level (example: members of a neighborhood campaigning for better police patrol/safety), others reach a national or even international level (example: the evolution and distribution of the #MeToo movement, which now has global reach). Some social movements even branch off into smaller movements/initiatives, while others adopt various causes and initiatives as they move along. Little, McGivern, and BC Open faculty contributors offer five types of social movements to consider: reform movements, revolutionary movements, redemptive movements, alternative movements and resistance movements (Little & McGivern, n.d.).

Reform movements are campaigns that seek to change a certain societal structure. Movements against nuclear weapons/war, gun control, and even Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) fall into this category (Pacific Policy Research Center, p. 5, 2020). MADD aims to tackle the specific issue of driving under the influence and the actions that lead up to it, thus confirming its role as a reform movement. Revolutionary movements wish to change or completely overhaul all aspects of a society; anti-colonial movements, counter-culture initiatives, and even anarchist movements are all examples of revolutionary movements (Pacific Policy Research Center, p. 5, 2020). Anti-colonial

movements, for example, aim to fight back against imperial rule, which is an entire societal way of being for many countries. Thus, by trying to completely overhaul all aspects of this type of existing society, anti-colonial movements fit into the revolutionary movement category. Redemptive movements find meaning in inspiring inner change and/or spiritual and personal growth among individuals rather than a large group/society at large. Redemptive movements include certain Christian groups, Narcotics Anonymous (NA) or Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), among others (Little & McGovern, n.d.). Both NA and AA focus on bringing small groups of people with similar struggles together in hopes to inspire personal growth, foster understanding/patience, and to heal from addiction; they are not fully focused on changing society's view/structure on these issues, rather, they were created to work on an individually-redemptive level. On the other hand, alternative movements focus on specific changes to individuals' beliefs and behaviors through means of self-improvement or personal development. Planned Parenthood is an example of an alternative movement (Pacific Policy Research Center, 2020), as it focuses on bringing specific education and access to individuals who may not otherwise be able to have it, and therefore allow many people to live healthier and more fulfilling lives.

Many modern social movements, however, can and should be understood as a combination of the above types of movements. Especially in the wake of social media,

digital feminism<sup>3</sup>, and hashtag activism<sup>4</sup>, movements such as #MeToo encompass more than just one of the above movement types. I argue that, although the goals of #MeToo align with various types of social movements described above, #MeToo can be best understood as a reformative movement. #MeToo was originally created to specifically address sexual assault and misconduct both in and out of the workplace. #MeToo's initial goal was to encourage victims to share their stories in hopes to garner community support and call out perpetrators. Inspired by this primary goal, the #MeToo movement includes various initiatives aimed at policymakers: removing barriers to employment, empowering survivors, creating greater accountability in the workplace, strengthening enforcement of sexual harassment laws, educating the public regarding sexual harassment, increasing funding for survivors and support organizations, and supporting research around sexual harassment occurrences, among other initiatives (Frye, 2018).

### **Communication in Social Movements**

Used as a means to attract and mobilize participants as well as to amplify a movements' goals to a broader audience, communication is an essential piece of all social movements (McCluskey, 2012). Communication in social movements can occur through

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<sup>3</sup> The digital age has allowed for new, computer-mediated waves of feminism that encourage and amplify the voices and stories of all women, including women of color, transwomen, and other voices that have been historically silenced and/or ignored. Digital feminism does not require access to a specific forum or organization for these women to make an impact, rather, it allows many (historically marginalized) groups to make an impact (Clark, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> Hashtag activism refers to a new wave and method of digital activism using Twitter's (or another social media platform's) hashtags as a guiding force. Hashtag activism began around 2011 when #IranElection served as a unifying tool for Iranians to protest their election, but set off a wave for various subsequent movements such as #JusticeforTrayvon, #BlackLivesMatter, #MeToo, and more (Jackson, et al., 2020).

a variety of mediums, but is typically expressed in “personal and interactive group processes and through technology channels” (Peruzzo, 2014). By nature, communication in social movements permeates social dynamics, but it also has its unique specificities (Peruzzo, 2014), as this chapter will explain.

Horizontal communication is one form of communication in social movements; it is identified by these characteristics: production tools that are inexpensive and widely available (different from corporate media, which tend to be concentrated in a few hands); circulation that is many-to-many rather than one-to-many; content filtering and selection that is performed socially or by transparently delegated editors rather than executives or elites; decision making that is participatory in nature and based on a general consensus rather than hierarchical or forced (Costanza-Chock, 2006). Communication scholars have identified several terms that cover similar ground, including: alternative media (Atton, 2002), radical media (Downing, 2001), citizens’ media (Rodríguez, 2011b), and more.

Alternative media, according to John Downing, is media “that expresses an alternative vision to hegemonic policies, priorities, and perspectives” (Downing, 2001). Atton asserts that alternative media should be produced from small-scale, counter-hegemonic groups and individuals (Atton, 2002b). In Jürgen Habermas’ idea of the public sphere, all participants are considered equal, participation is open to everyone, and any issue can be raised for debate (Habermas, 1991). However, this particular view does not note the historic and continuing exclusion of women and people from minority groups in public spheres. Therefore, in response to Habermas’ view, philosopher Nancy Fraser argued the importance of multiple public spheres; members of subordinated

groups can first discuss their issues and concerns among themselves before bringing those issues into the larger public sphere (Fraser, 1990). Alternative media associated with these counter-public spheres are essential in communicating goals, developing the identity and needs of the group, and challenging the dominant public sphere.

Furthermore, alternative media have been viewed as a manifestation of participatory culture, a culture in which people are not consumers only but contributors and/or producers as well. Participatory culture is believed to improve civic engagement and creative expression, both of which are essential to the success of any social movement (Sandoval, 2009).

The term “radical media” was originally introduced by John D. H. Downing in 1984, when he published a study of rebellious communication’s role in social movements while emphasizing alternative media’s political and goal-centered activism (Atton, 2002). Radical media are communication outlets that center around action-oriented political agendas and use existing communication infrastructures; radical media are unique from traditional mass media outlets through its reformist culture, progressive content, and the democratic aspects of its production and distribution (Downing, et al., 2001). However, some critics point out that the authenticity of the content/radical media is difficult to verify; furthermore, its long-term perishability and the questionable nature of social actions led by the media are worth considering as well. While radical media are often closely linked with other forms of alternative media, it is unique in its ideological and behavioral practices; it is typically small-scale, manifests in many different forms, and brings forth an alternative to hegemonic perspectives and policies (Downing, et al.,

2001). Downing argues that radical media's strength lies in its two-way communication style; while mass media has decreased production participation due to obstacles such as cost and hierarchical structures, radical media involves self-motivated individual participation, thus creating a space for "rebellious expression" compared to mass media (Downing, et al., 2001). Some examples and modes of radical include, but are not limited to: community access television, online media/Web 2.0, and community radio.

Coined by Clemencia Rodríguez, the term "citizens' media" (Rodríguez, 2011b) refers to media/content that is produced by private citizens<sup>5</sup> and/or individuals who are not necessarily professional journalists or other media professionals. Citizens' media is another type of participatory media; citizens' media is characterized by marginal practices and action-driven missions that challenge traditional mass media (Downing, et al., 2001). Citizens' media is perhaps a response to traditional mass media's neglect of the public interest as well as its underlying political agendas and partisan portrayals of news. In this sense, citizens' media can also be understood through the way(s) in which audiences become active participants in the media through various resources of new media technologies, such as the internet. By producing their own news content and media, citizens are able to take back the power from large companies and corporations that have historically produced media for these citizens as well as on their behalf. Some examples of citizen-produced media can include blogs, podcasts, vlogs, community radio,

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<sup>5</sup> The term "citizen" here is used to describe an individual who is actively engaged in shaping their community, rather than the traditional understanding of a "citizen" as a person that has received legal status as a member of a state. The definition of "citizen" used here is based on Mouffe's theory of radical democracy (Rodríguez, 2001).



zines, and more. Especially in social movements such as #MeToo, when personal survival stories are central to the movement, citizen-produced media and alternative media are essential because they allow individuals to tell their stories in their own time, from their own point of view and comfort level. Large corporations and news companies cannot capitalize off of their stories as quickly in this way, and it gives individuals a sense of ownership over their story and the way it is told (in some cases).

Each type of communication media discussed above is vital to the success of social movements. Research shows that social movements typically experience difficulties using mainstream media as a communication medium because mainstream media can systemically “distort, stigmatize, or ignore social movement viewpoints” (Stein, 2009). Therefore, social movements may gravitate toward alternative media to communicate and assemble. In the digital age, social media, various websites, blogs, and other digital spaces have acted as public spheres in their own right, acting as a place for people to connect, share stories, find common goals, and more. In many ways, corners of the internet can act as mediums for alternative media, encouraging users to think radically through decentralized platforms (4chan, Mind, and Peertube are examples) as well as mainstream ones. In the #MeToo movement, social media became one of the main communication mediums for survivors and activists to connect and share stories. After the #MeToo hashtag took off on Twitter, countless people took to other social media platforms (such as Instagram, Facebook, Reddit, etc.) to share their stories and start a dialogue around sexual assault and harassment in the workplace and beyond. Social media provides instant connectivity, and it is impossible to say whether the #MeToo

movement would have taken off the same way without it. Nevertheless, the role of communication and media in the movement's success was (and continues to be) invaluable.

### **Music in Social Movements**

In the United States, social movements have used music as a tool for centuries. In almost every social movement in the United States, music is a propelling force. Music used in social movements and protests, also referred to as political music, is music that engenders what C. Wright Mills called a "sociological imagination" because it helps audiences to understand the systemic nature of injustice and oppression, "in what might otherwise be felt as *individual* stories or problems" (Rosenthal and Flacks, p. 20, 2011). Protest music identifies structural arrangements that normalize exploitation and marginalization of one group over another group. Protest music makes us ask the question(s): who has the power? Who does the work? Who makes the money from this work? Who makes (our) decisions? Protest music addresses personal problems or situations that may feel singular, but in reality, are collective (Rosenthal and Flacks, p. 20, 2011). Therefore, "political music implies, suggests, or openly states that existing arrangements are not natural, normal, or eternal, but the result of previous human decisions and arrangements, *and thus susceptible to change*, especially if those in a similar position band together to oppose those arrangements" (Rosenthal and Flacks, p. 20, 2011). Thus, many social movements employ (political) music to propel their cause forward by prompting listeners to sustain their commitment, unite people toward a

common goal, establish collective identities, and addressing the structure(s) and function(s) of society at large (Rosenthal and Flacks, p. 9, 2011).

While there are countless social movements and types of music that could be discussed here, I have decided to narrow down my analysis to some of the major movements from the early 1800s to the early 2010s. Specifically, some of the major social movements in the United States that have utilized the power of music include: the slavery/abolitionist movement (late 1700s until 1865), the Civil Rights movement (early 1950s until late 1960s), the US Labor Rights movements (1960s until 1970s), and various feminist movements/waves including #MeToo (mid 1800s up until present).

### ***Slave Spirituals & Music in the Abolitionist Movement***

One way in which early U.S. history can (unfortunately) be identified is through the perpetuation of slavery. The Black inhabitants of the colonial U.S. left few written records of their cultural activities; after all, they were forcibly integrated into an alien society and made to adopt a new language, culture, and overall way of life (Southern, p. 25, 2006). What we now know of slave spirituals and music culture at this time largely comes from colonial newspapers (p. 26) in addition to town reports and other documents. Nevertheless, the culture of Black music among slaves was oftentimes stylistically rooted in psalm singing and religious music. Given that the majority of slaves could not read or write, music was a form of (oral) history in addition to a way of coping with the traumatic experiences associated with being a slave in colonial America. Thus, slave spirituals embodied the sociological imagination that Mills (Mills, 1959) described in the sense that they allowed enslaved people to think deeply about the power dynamics and orders of

that time. Furthermore, these songs enabled enslaved people to develop a sense of collective identity and solidarity with one another. Slavery was not one slave's problem, rather, it was (and still is) a deeper social, racial, and political issue that is rooted in centuries of harrowing history. Slave spirituals helped enslaved people confront these issues in one of the only ways they could communicate - through song. Music continued to be a propelling force throughout the 1800s, specifically for the abolitionist movement.

In his 1843 song book titled "Anti-Slavery Melodies: For the Friends of Freedom," Jairus Lincoln explained the importance of music in both abolitionist meetings and rallies alike. He emphasized that, like the temperance movement, the anti-slavery movement should be encouraged to use music as a protest tool in order to strengthen the movement. Lincoln urged that "there are many who have not the gift of speech-making, but who can, by song-singing, make strong appeals, on behalf of the slave, to every community and every heart" (Lincoln, 1843). Following the publication of Lincoln's song book, other African American music started to make its way into the Colonial America public sphere, specifically in aid of abolitionist efforts. Published in 1867, *Slave Songs of the United States*, a collection of African American music (136 songs, to be exact) was published. The songs in this book were collected by Northern abolitionists including William Francis Allen, Charles Pickard Ware, and Lucy McKim Garrison (Crawford, p. 416, 2001). Notable songs from this book include "Michael Row the Boat Ashore" (#31), "Rock My Soul" / "Bosom of Abraham" (#94), and "Down in the River to Pray" / "The Good Old Way" (#104). Overall, this book marked a milestone in both African American music and folk history alike (Darden, p.71, 1996), as these were some

of the first examples of colonial American political music. For example, “Michael Row the Boat Ashore” was once sung by former enslaved people whose owners had left before the Union navy arrived and enforced a blockade. Abolitionist and St. Helena Island (South Carolina) plantation supervisor Charles Pickard Ware wrote down the song as he heard freedmen sing it. Ware’s cousin reported in 1863 that this was the song the freedmen sang as they rowed Charles Pickard Ware across Station Creek (Epstein, 2003):

Jesus stand on t' oder side. / I wonder if my maussa deh.

My fader gone to unknown land. / O de Lord he plant his garden deh.

He raise de fruit for you to eat. / He dat eat shall neber die.

When de riber overflow. / O poor sinner, how you land?

Riber run and darkness comin'. / Sinner row to save your soul.<sup>6</sup>

The term “spiritual” itself is derived from the King James Bible translation of Ephesians 5:19, and this form of song was often found in the informal gatherings of enslaved people in outdoor meetings and “praise houses” (Library of Congress, 2015) throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Spirituals also come from the shuffling circular dance that early plantation slaves would chant, clap and dance to called the “ring shout” (Library of Congress, 2015).

Some of the most famous spirituals include “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,” “Jesus Leads Me All the Way, and “Deep Down in My Heart.” The exact date when “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” was composed is unknown, but we know it was composed by

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<sup>6</sup> There are many versions of this hymn, but this one is allegedly one of the first published versions. It is a series of unrhymed couplets.

Wallace Willis. Willis was a Choctaw freedman in what we now know as Choctaw County (a previous “Indian”<sup>7</sup> territory) in the (now) Hugo, Oklahoma area (Eversley, 2006). Scholars believe that Willis created the song after being inspired by tolling the Red River himself. The Red River perhaps reminded him of the Jordan River and of the Prophet Elijah being taken to heaven by a chariot as told in the Bible (2 Kings 2:11) (Overall, 2019). This is unsurprising for a slave spiritual in the sense that many of them were inspired by aspects of religion, specifically Christianity. The song embodies many other characteristics of a spiritual as well, including its use of imagery and repetition. The main poetic element of this song is repeated throughout (“Coming for to carry me home”), and it alternates with other stanzas throughout. In this sense, “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” is also a “call and response” song, as many spirituals as well as religious songs are. Call and response” singing happens when a singer calls out a line and the rest of the group/audience responds, usually repeating the line in a stock verse form or responding with the existing chorus. Usually, the singer who calls out the first line will then drop back to join the audience at large, and someone else will introduce the next line. This style of song is spontaneous and does not have any particular leader; this style encourages full audience participation to work together (in various roles) to create a song and build the communication (Sanger, p. 40, 1995).

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<sup>7</sup> The use of the term “Indian” territory here is in reference to how indigenous lands and peoples were referred to and understood by early (white) American settlers and colonizers. The use of the term “Indian” by early Americans does not refer to the people or land of India itself. The Choctaw are a Native American people originally based in the Southeastern United States, and many members of the tribe were forced to relocate by the early American government during colonization. We now understand this part of history as the Trail of Tears (Pauls, 2017).

“Jesus Leads Me All the Way” is also a call and response song, and was written to be performed along the “ring shout.” The ring shout is a (religious) dance form indigenous to large parts of Central and West Africa and involves dancers moving in a counterclockwise circle. Sterling Stuckey explained that “the dancing and singing were directed to the ancestors and gods, the tempo and revolution of the circle quickening during the course of the movement” (Stuckey, p. 12, 1987)

There are specific pauses in the song between the soloist and the choir in which hand clapping and chanting occurs, as both of these actions were common among plantation slaves. The sentiments of this song include relying on Jesus to guide the singer in their troubles and tribulations; furthermore, the recording of the song allows the listener to understand the evident comradeship that develops throughout the song as well. The song begins with the soloist invoking Jesus’s help and guidance, and the choir joins on the lyric “all the way” (*Jesus Leads Me All the Way*, n.d.). The style and content of this song allows for the singers involved to exchange energy with one another and perhaps establish a cognitive connection in their collective struggles and hopes alike.

“Deep Down in My Heart” was another slave spiritual that, similar to the previous two, transcended both sorrow and hope through its rich meaning and lyrical structure. Recorded and performed by W. M. (Billy) Givens, the song itself invokes quite a few characteristics of folk music (*Band B1*, n.d.). This song was the type of song that would have been sung at church gatherings rather than on a plantation, perhaps, given that it was written more for a solo singer rather than a group/call and response style. The song talks

about the love that the singer has for the people around them - their preacher, deacon, brother, savior, and everybody in general:

Lord you know I love everybody, / Deep down in my heart.

Amen, Amen. Amen.

Lord. you know I love my preacher, etc.

Lord you know I love my deacon, etc. . . (*Band BI*, n.d.)

This song, also referred to as a “mourner’s prayer,” represents some of the earliest mixing of English with African languages (*Band BI*, n.d.). This mixing is significant, given that forced relocation during this time (1800s and prior) often resulted in the erasure of a community or tribe’s entire culture and way(s) of living. Forced to adopt a new culture and lifestyle, often aspects of one’s identity (including language) were forgotten or forbidden. Thus, this song and its performances were significant also in the fact that it brought aspects of traditional African languages to its style and lyrical performances. This act is political in itself; preserving one’s culture and identity when it is forbidden or looked down upon is an act of personal protest.

Another group of musicians and music that was popular around this time was the Hutchinson Family Singers. Active from the 1840s until the 1880s, the Hutchinson family of singers was originally comprised of the thirteen children of Jesse and Mary Leavitt Hutchinson in Milford, New Hampshire. The family’s repertoire included popular music of the time, such as glees, songs from the famous Rainer family, ballads and solo songs with American themes, and more (Garrett, 2013). They sang songs in support of pertinent issues at the time including abolition, women’s suffrage, and other socio-



political events. They toured the country as well as the British Isles, and even performed for United States presidents and politicians. Thus, the Hutchinson Family introduced some core characteristics of mainstream popular music (solo performances, ballads, etc.) to the genre itself in addition to the nation, thus setting a precedent for early American (political) music (Garrett, 2013).

### ***Music in the US Civil Rights Movement (early 1950s - late 1960s)***

Throughout the abolition movements and beyond, various generations of Black Americans continued to resist oppression through one of the few communication outlets available to them - song (Sanger, p. 32, 1995). This sentiment continued throughout the United States' Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, as activists claimed the movement could benefit from drawing on the strategies of song used in the past. They found "singing, and the old songs, as particularly appropriate for their rhetorical needs" (p. 32). In fact, some of the songs used in this movement were derived from slave spirituals or other freedom songs from the past. Instead of relying on popular songs at the time, including parodies of songs and songs popular among young people, activists turned to songs based on rhythm and blues (a popular music genre that combines gospel, jazz, and blues influences) in order to ease tension and create a sense of informality. Songs from the Black tradition, the freedom songs, were "deemed more universally appropriate and appealing" (p. 32), and freedom songs that included religious undertones were also utilized. This type of music encouraged the Black community at this time to "redefine how they saw themselves— they chose to celebrate being Black" (p. 32) Perhaps

a form of protest in itself, the outward celebration and embracing of this identity was a propelling force throughout this movement.

However, the journey to the creation and utilization of music in the Civil Rights Movement was not an easy one; activists quickly found that the singing style traditionally associated with African American music was alien to so many of them. This style of music was extremely emotional and passionate, oftentimes encouraging participants to release deep emotions and intense feelings (p. 32). This talk about emotional release seemed like it could add immense value to the Civil Rights Movement and its progress, and therefore it was utilized by various activist efforts including meetings. SNCC<sup>8</sup> field secretary Charles Sherrod captured the emotional forces present at activist meetings when he recounted:

The church was packed before eight o'clock. People were everywhere . . . . When the last speaker among the students, Bertha Gober, had finished, there was nothing left to say. Tears filled the eyes of hard, grown men who had seen with their own eyes merciless atrocities committed. . . . And when we rose to sing "We Shall Overcome," nobody could imagine what kept the church on four corners. . . . I threw my head back and sang with my whole body (p.32).

Singing, to activists, was a manifestation of their souls and stressed a sense of spirituality they believed was alive in the singing (Sanger, p. 36, 1995); even Fannie Lou Hammer,

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<sup>8</sup> The SNCC, known as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, was formed by a group of young Black college students after their initial meeting at Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina in April of 1960. The group was formed to practice peaceful, direct action protests. SNCC participated in some of the major civil rights events that occurred throughout the 1960s (National Archives, 2016).

one of the most significant civil rights leaders, insisted that singing “is very important. It brings out your soul” (p. 36). In addition to the emotional and spiritual importance of music in the Civil Rights Movement, music itself also acted as a building block for a sense of community among activists. Songs used in this movement were largely meant to be sung by a group of people rather than a solo artist; the freedom songs themselves were designed as “call and response” songs, a style prevalent in Black music (including slave spirituals, as mentioned above) that encouraged full audience involvement (Sanger, p. 40, 1995). The legacy of call and response songs continue even up until the present day, as this type of song is still widely used in schools, military groups, and even social movements at large. Many folk songs of the 1960s and 1970s are call and response songs, as will be discussed later on.

There are certain songs that can be tied to the Civil Rights Movement and its ongoing efforts, including “We Shall Overcome,” James Weldon Johnson and J. Rosamond Johnson’s “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” Sam Cooke’s “A Change is Gonna Come,” Mahalia Jackson’s “How I Got Over,” and Billie Holiday’s “Strange Fruit,” among many others. These songs are particularly helpful for understanding certain aspects of the Civil Rights Movement because they each provide a somewhat unique lens to the movement.

“We Shall Overcome” is actually lyrically descended from a published hymn called “I’ll Overcome Someday” by Charles Albert Tindley in 1901 (Bobetsky, 2014). It is considered one of the most important songs that underscored the Civil Rights Movement. One of the reasons that this song became such a unifying force during the

Civil Rights Movement was because it is easily singable; the melody is easy to remember, and one does not have to be a trained musician in order to sing it. Furthermore, the lyrics (“Deep in my heart, I do believe we shall overcome someday”) are simple yet relatable (Brown University, 2022). The song does not acknowledge a certain religion or have some sort of claim, rather, it talks about seeking justice, which is a message that people across all traditions, races, and systems of belief can relate to.

Often referred to as “The Black National Anthem,” the hymn “Lift Every Voice and Sing” was written as a poem by James Weldon Johnson, an NAACP leader, in 1900 (NAACP). His brother, John Rosamond Johnson, composed the music for the lyrics, and the song was first performed in Jacksonville, Florida by a choir of schoolchildren at a segregated school where James Weldon Johnson was principal. The song was performed at the school to celebrate Abraham Lincoln’s birthday, but its themes of hope, liberty, and freedom echoed across the decades to come:

Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us,

Sing a song full of hope that the present has brought us;

Facing the rising sun of the new day begun,

Let us march on ‘til victory is won. (Lift Every Voice and Sing)

The music and lyrics of this song, which invoke religious pleas/the spirit of God and the promise of freedom, ended up being adopted by the NAACP as a rallying cry during the Civil Rights Movement (NAACP).

Released in 1964 by Sam Cooke, “A Change is Gonna Come” was inspired by a family trip in which his family was turned away from a whites-only motel in Louisiana

(Guralnick, 2005). Its timeless messaging of anticipating change and the challenges of living while being “too afraid to die” have echoed throughout the decades since the song’s release, and the song was even performed at George Floyd’s funeral in 2020. Cooke sings about his prevailing belief that, no matter how bad things may seem, he has to believe (and has started to see) that change is going to come.

Mahlia Jackson’s recording of “How I Got Over” also became a major song throughout this time. Similar to previously mentioned songs, “How I Got Over” is actually a Gospel hymn and was originally composed and published in 1951 by Clara Ward (Ward-Royster, 1997). It became associated with the Civil Rights Movement specifically after Mahlia Jackson performed it at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in 1963 for over 250,000 people (Ward-Royster, 1997). The song was not based on hope or liberty as much as previously mentioned songs were, in fact, it was inspired by an experience that Clara Ward had with her family and members of their singing group while traveling throughout (racially segregated) southern states in the United States. While the group was driving to Atlanta, Georgia, they were attacked by a group of white men who were enraged to see Black women riding in a luxury car. This harrowing experience was the force behind “How I Got Over,” as it literally describes how Clara and the group got through the experience and were able to move on.

“Strange Fruit,” a song written and composed by Abel Meeropol under his pseudonym Lewis Allan, was recorded by Billie Holiday in 1939. The lyrics of “Strange Fruit” were derived from a poem that Meeropol published in 1937, which protests the lynching of Black Americans by comparing the victims to the fruit of trees. Lynching

was most prominent at the turn of the 20th century in the United States, and most victims were Black people (Myrdal, 1944). Some refer to this song as a declaration in itself, and as the “beginning of the civil rights movement” as we now know it (Nasaw, 2000).

“Strange Fruit” was performed as a protest song throughout New York City in the 1930s, including at concerts at Madison Square Garden, integrated night clubs, and more. Billie Holiday’s version was even inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame in 1978 (Allen, 2015). Although “Strange Fruit” became a popular song and is still widely known today, its lyrics are quite harrowing. This ability to weave dark moments of history with likewise darker tones of piano and jazz music truly creates a musical and lyrical masterpiece:

Southern trees bear a strange fruit

Blood on the leaves and blood at the root

Black bodies swinging in the Southern breeze

Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees . . . (Strange Fruit)

While songs such as “We Shall Overcome,” “Lift Every Voice and Sing” and “A Change is Gonna Come” are more centered around fostering hope and the promise of liberty, songs such as “How I Got Over” and “Strange Fruit” are more focused on highlighting the actual atrocities that many Black people faced during this time, thus creating a collective identity among activists to propel their work forward. Both of these perspectives allow us to understand some of the major music of the Civil Rights Movement through various lenses, and come to terms with how important music was for the movement, activists, and history itself.

### *Anti-War / Pro Labor Movements & The Folk Era (1960s - 1970s)*

American<sup>9</sup> folk music does not have a specific origin, rather, it grew organically out of communal tradition and social justice efforts rather than for entertainment or profit (Ruehl, 2018). Some folk songs date so far back that they are now considered oral histories, while other folk songs can be tied to specific events in the United States. At its core, folk music was made for the working class, and the subjects covered in folk songs range from civil rights, economics and war to work, satire and even love songs. Throughout history, folk music has risen when people needed it most (see “We Shall Overcome,” for example). Many folk songs center around struggle and hardship, but they also present messages of hope (Ruehl, 2018).

Throughout the 1930s in the United States, folk music surged when the stock market crashed and most of the United States was facing unemployment, hunger, and displacement. The Great Depression, World Wars, and the Dust Bowl were only a few of the catastrophic events that overtook the United States at this time, and many people felt like there was no way out. In the 1960s again, United States workers found themselves struggling to make ends meet while working excessive hours in poor conditions. Confronted with labor struggles, the aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement, and even the Vietnam War, folk singers took to coffee shops and other local venues to sing about the issues defining this time. Folk music offered political critique and commentary while also fostering hope for a changed future (Ruehl, 2018). Three songs to consider from this

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<sup>9</sup> The use of the word “American” here refers specifically to the United States but also to the genre proper. American folk music is a specific genre widely recognized by the music industry, but its usage is typically tied to the United States and U.S. social movements.

era include “This Land is Your Land” (Woody Guthrie), “Big Yellow Taxi” (Joni Mitchell), and “Born in the USA” (Bruce Springsteen).

“This Land is Your Land,” published by folk music icon Woody Guthrie in 1945, was written as a satiric response to “God Bless America” (Anderson, 2016). His daughter, Nora, claims that Woody originally wrote the line “God blessed America for me” as a parody of Irving Berlin’s “God Bless America”; that lyric eventually became the now-familiar “this land is made for you and me” (Anderson, 2016.):

This land is your land, this land is my land  
 From California to the New York Island,  
 From the Redwood Forest, to the Gulf stream waters,  
 God blessed America for me.

[This land was made for you and me.] (This Land is Your Land)

The melody of “This Land is Your Land” is very similar to a Baptist gospel hymn called “Oh, My Loving Brother” that was recorded by the Carter Family as “When the World’s On Fire” (Cray, 2004). Guthrie used the same melody for both the chorus and the verses; however, Guthrie’s song had a different melodic structure: ABAC. ABAC refers to when an artist repeats the beginning of the melody (“A” section) for their third line as well. The 1944 recording of this song also dropped two verses that were rather critical of the United States: verse four (which discussed private property) and verse six (which discussed hunger):

Nobody living can ever stop me,  
 As I go walking that freedom highway;



Nobody living can ever make me turn back

This land was made for you and me.

In the squares of the city, In the shadow of a steeple;

By the relief office, I'd seen my people.

As they stood there hungry, I stood there asking,

Is this land made for you and me? (This Land is Your Land, early version)

Early versions of the song, such as the one above, are often not performed at official functions, in schools, etc. The verses that are critical of America are protest lyrics; they highlight the vast income inequalities that existed (and still exist) throughout the nation, and they bring attention to the millions who suffered during the Great Depression.

Guthrie seems to insist that the United States was made— and could still be made— for you and me. Most of Guthrie's other songs continue this sentiment and reflect Guthrie's (and much of America's) lifelong struggle for social justice. "This Land is Your Land" continues to be a staple in American protest music even today; the song has been recorded and performed by various well-known artists, including Pete Seegar, Bruce Springsteen, Bob Dylan, The Kingston Trio, and more (Dave, 2008). The song was even performed at former President Barack Obama's 2008 inauguration.

In 1940, Guthrie embraced an anti-war phase after the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was passed the year prior. Guthrie wrote songs that praised the Soviet invasion of Poland, attacked then-President Roosevelt's loans to Finland to defend against the Soviets, and criticized lend-lease aid to the United Kingdom (Kaufman, 2010). Other (folk) artists during this era shared similar feelings to Guthrie, including Joni Mitchell.

Canadian singer-songwriter Joni Mitchell wrote “Big Yellow Taxi” on her first trip to Hawaii. As she explained in a 1996 interview, she arrived at her hotel and, from her room, saw beautiful, green mountains in the distance. “Then, I looked down and there was a parking lot as far as the eye could see, and it broke my heart [...] this blight on paradise . . .” (Hillburn, 1996). The song expressed deep environmental concerns surrounding (over)development and climate change:

Don't it always seem to go / That you don't know what you've got 'til it's gone?

They paved paradise, put up a parking lot (Chorus)

The song is a call to action; it asks listeners to stop the damage we are inflicting on the environment and to increase human awareness of this damage. The song highlights that we are not always able to appreciate what we have until it's gone, and this includes a healthy environment and climate. Sometimes, we value what we have in retrospect. This is represented in the image of the singer's lover leaving in a big yellow; the singer was careless with the relationship and caused irreversible damage (*Big Yellow Taxi*, 1970). Now has to watch her lover drive away in a big yellow taxi and there is nothing she can do about it:

Late last night, I heard the screen door slam /

And a big yellow taxi took away my old man (Verse 4)

Similar to both Woody Guthrie, Joni Mitchell, and various other folk artists, Bruce Springsteen used his music as a medium for activism and social change. Born in 1949, the singer-songwriter and activist has been a staple in American protest music for the past five decades. Known as both a rock n' roll artist, folk revivalist, and 'working-class

hero,' (Springsteen, n.d.) Springsteen has carried the activism torch from the likes of Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, and Bob Dylan. His 1982 masterpiece "Born in the USA" is perhaps one of the most famous and controversial songs of his entire career; for some listeners, it is pro-American, while for others it is an aggressive critique of American society and government. Ultimately, however, the song's contradictory musical form and lyrics content combine to produce a "collective rhetoric effect" (Schnieder, 2014); that is, the song does not argue for a specific political ideology, rather, it is a multilayered reflection of the paradoxes of national belonging and its implications (Schenider, 2014):

Come back home to the refinery / Hiring man says,  
 'Son, if it was up to me' / Went down to see my V.A. man  
 He said, 'Son, you don't understand (Verse 3)

I had a brother at Khe Sanh / Fighting off the Viet Cong  
 They're still there / He's all gone  
 He had a woman he loved in Saigon /  
 I got a picture of him in her arms now (Verse 4)

Each Guthrie, Mitchell, and Springsteen have greatly contributed to the folk genre as well as the anti-war and pro-labor movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Both Guthrie and Springsteen specifically target labor rights and anti-war sentiments in the aforementioned songs, while Mitchell tackles the issues of development and climate change. Each of these songs allows listeners to understand and dissect the major social issues occurring in the United States at this time, as well as to witness firsthand the way(s) in which music acted as a call to action to propel these movements forward.

*Music in the US Feminist Movements (The First Three Waves)*

In each feminist wave in the United States, different types of music and performance emerge in accordance with the goals of each wave. The first wave of feminism, which occurred shortly before the abolishment of slavery in 1865, was underscored by both music related to slavery/abolitionist efforts as well as women's voting rights, given that this was the main goal of the first wave.

Notable songs from the first wave include "Human Equality" and "Dare You Do It? / Battle Hymn of the Republic." "Human Equality" was written by social activist William Lloyd Garrison and sung to the tune of 'A Man's a Man for a That' (written by Scottish poet Robert Burns) (Ramnath, 2021):

Though woman can never be man,  
 By change of sex, and a' that,  
 To equal rights, 'gainst class or clan,  
 Her claim is just, for a' that!  
 For a' that and a' that;  
 Her Eden slip, and a' that;  
 In all she makes a living soul  
 She matches man, for a' that! (Human Equality)

The lyrics of this song emphasize how women deserve equal rights to men, and how their claims should be just as valid as men's are. Although the song does briefly mention both "class" and "clan," it is still important to mention that the goals of the first wave were most concerned with middle- and upper-class white women. Nevertheless, songs like this

were significant both in their messaging and in the fact that many were written by men. (White) men became important players in women's suffrage because they represented a large (and powerful) makeup of the population, thus helping to propel it forward even more so.

"Dare You Do It?" was featured in the *The Suffrage Song Book*, which was published by Henry W. Roby in 1909. This songbook includes some of the major pieces from this time, and most of the songs have similar themes of equality, self-assertiveness, and pleas for women's voting rights. "Dare You Do It?" calls out men for failing to realize the value of women in the public and political sphere (Roby, 1909):

Whence came your foolish notion

Now so greatly overgrown,

That a woman's sober judgment

Is not equal to your own?

Has God ordained that suffrage

Is a gift to you alone

While life goes marching on? (Dare You Do It? / Battle Hymn of the Republic)

Many songs from the first wave used music/instrumentals from popular U.S. songs at the time such as 'America' and 'Yankee Doodle' and added new lyrics more in line with women's suffrage. These songs were sung at parades, parlors, rallies, and even prisons (Ramnath, 2021). The marches and rallies were often accompanied by drums, which gave the sense that women were marching to their own war to have their demands accepted (Ramnath, 2021). Suffragists were also encouraged to pen their own music at this time as

well; some used their real name, while others used aliases. The first wave was predominantly focused on the voting rights of white women, and there were not as many women of color involved and embraced by the first wave.

The second wave of feminism in the United States, which occurred during the 1960s until the early 1980s, was underscored by powerful music with lyrics that alluded to the (physical, mental, and emotional) liberation of women from their roles as homemakers and mothers alone. Prominent female artists at this time include Helen Reddy, Lesley Gore, Dolly Parton, Patti Smith, and Loretta Lynn, among others. Although the music from this wave spans across many genres, common themes of women's liberation and freedom are apparent. While the anti-war and anti-government music of the 1960s might have found its way into the top hits charts at this time, they did not include any viewpoints or perspectives from the feminist journey (Morris, 2018). "I Am Woman" (Helen Reddy) and "You Don't Own Me" (Lesley Gore) were perhaps among the only songs that offered a feminist perspective by the 1960s. While songs such as those by Reddy and Gore were significant at the time, they still missed the mark in terms of intersectionality and the inclusion of historically marginalized women's voices. Nevertheless, they both still highlighted themes of self-worth, determination, and ambition—traits that women were discouraged from pursuing at this time. Thus, this music embodied Mills' "sociological imagination" in the sense that it aimed to unite women in their common struggles. Helen Reddy's "I Am Woman" juxtaposes the courage and progress of being a woman at this time with how much farther there still was to go when she sang:

. . .Oh yes, I am wise / But it's wisdom born of pain

Yes, I've paid the price / But look how much I gained

If I have to, I can do anything / I am strong (strong)

I am invincible (Invincible) / I am woman (I Am Woman)

Lesley Gore's "You Don't Own Me" takes on a more defiant tone than "I Am Woman," but in the best way. During the 1960s and 1970s especially, women did not have access to what we now consider everyday tasks. Until 1974, women could not even have their own checking account. Before the 1970s, women were legally subordinate to their husbands and it was merely impossible for women to initiate a divorce. In many senses of the word, women were "owned" by the men in their lives; unable to do their own banking, excluded from many aspects of the workforce<sup>10</sup> (including leadership), and prohibited from initiating a divorce, women were secondary citizens to men. "You Don't Own Me" hints at this, but also at the idea of a young woman's desire to be free and pursue her own passions, which was huge for this time:

You don't own me / Don't try to change me in any way

You don't own me / Don't tie me down 'cause I'd never stay/

I don't tell you what to say / I don't tell you what to do

So just let me be myself / That's all I ask of you (You Don't Own Me)

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<sup>10</sup> The Pregnancy Discrimination Act (which amends Title VII) prohibits the discrimination of pregnant people in the workplace. You cannot be fired, laid off/terminated, or denied a job promotion if you are pregnant. Before this act, women could be fired, terminated, laid off, or cut from the hiring process if a company or hiring party found out you were pregnant (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, n.d.).

Large concerts gained popularity around this time, as thousands of women could congregate at a concert to listen to empowering music and share their experiences. At these concerts, women were the majority, not the minority; they did not have to seek out a dark, smoke-filled bar full of men to see live music, rather, women could go to a concert hall and see female artists on the big stage (Morris, 2018). While most of the music at this time still focused on the straight, white woman's experience, some strides were being made in preparation for the rebellious third wave on the horizon. Olivia Records, founded in 1973, was the first national women's music network (it is now a lesbian lifestyle company). Olivia Records released songs that acknowledged the harsh realities that women experienced at the time as well, including topics surrounding racism and homophobia. The genesis of Olivia Records was a reaction to the United States' counterculture and gay rights movements of the 1970s as well as to the heteronormative undertones of the early 1960s feminist movements/initiatives (Jay & Young, 1979). This set the stage for the third wave's music.

Riot grrrl and rebellion were the name of the game for the third wave of feminism in the United States. Riot grrrl, an underground feminist punk movement that grew throughout the 1990s, was a response to the second wave feminists' rejection of the word "girl" (Fateman, 2013). Zines, flyers, and videotapes were the main mediums through which this movement was built. The first collectively produced riot grrrl concerts occurred in July of 1991 in Washington, D.C., where bands Batmobile and Bikini Kill had convened for the summer (Fateman, 2013). Music was still a male-dominated industry at this time (and it still is), so feminists would look forward to their weekly zine



to keep up with current events and revel in riot grrrl culture. One of the defining characteristics of this wave was the soft emergence of intersectionality (Keenan, 2015); in fact, Bikini Kill singer Kathleen Hanna wrote in her notebook titled “Riot Grrrl Test Patterns” that: “THESE ISSUES MUST BE INCORPORATED FROM THE BEGINNING: anti-racist, anti-heterosexist, [anti]- classist work cannot be ‘written in’ the margin, they MUST BE CENTRAL” to the movement (Keenan, 2015). Hanna’s handwritten note forecasts intersectionality as a major issue to third wave feminism, both in music and activism as a whole.

The shortcomings within riot grrrl were obvious, though. Punk had a predominantly white demographic and relied on stereotypically white resources and aesthetics (Fateman, 2013). That is not to say that all punk girls were white, but this certainly painted the spirit of riot grrrl in a singular way. The third wave of feminism and the rise of riot grrrl and punk culture was forced to come to terms with issues surrounding race, and by 1995, feminists had had enough. In her compiled zine “Evolution of a Race Riot,” Mimi Nyugen called for submissions so that historically marginalized women could take “back the conversation @ race & re-centering it around ourselves, not as voiceless victims or objects-to-be-rescued of white punk antiracist discourses” (Nyugen, 1997). Thus, Mimi Nyugen created a resource for people of color who were involved in punk rock and punk culture to have a voice and exchange ideas. This was certainly a step in the right direction, as previous feminist waves hadn’t done much to include women of color in their campaigns and narratives.

Similarly, around this time, music became a tad more inclusive and self-aware as well, though certainly still had a long way to go. Third wave feminism and its music encouraged women to fight for an array of social issues rather than for just legal equality to men. Many famous songs at this time took back the power of terms that were previously seen as negative, such as “bitch.” Furthermore, many of the songs at this time fought against traditional gender attributes (see: Ani DiFranco’s “Not a Pretty Girl” for example) and even encouraged women to view themselves as empowered survivors rather than victims (perhaps alluding to the fourth wave). Some songs to consider from the United States’ third wave of feminism are U.N.I.T.Y. (Queen Latifah), “Cherry Bomb” (Bratmobile), and “Rebel Girl” (Bikini Kill).

U.N.I.T.Y., a single by hip hop artist Queen Latifah, was released on January 6th, 1994. The song’s main focus is on confronting the disrespect toward women in society, and it also addressed issues of domestic violence, street harassment, and even slurs against women in the hip hop industry and beyond. Radio and television stations would not censor the words “bitch” and “hoes” throughout the song, because censoring these words would undermine the whole meaning of the song (Genius). Similar to the reclamation of other slurs by the riot grrrl movements and the third wave as a whole, U.N.I.T.Y. encourages woman to take back the power and assert their own self-worth:

A man don’t really love you if he hits ya,  
 This is my notice to the door, I’m not takin’ it no more  
 I’m not your personal whore, that’s not what I’m here for  
 And nothing good gon’ come to ya til you do right by me

Brother you wait and see (Who you callin' a bitch? Uh!) (U.N.I.T.Y.)

U.N.I.T.Y. and Queen Latifah herself were significant at this time for a variety of reasons; most notably, the song was a response to the emergence of gangsta rap and the overt sexist language and visuals that the genre relied on. Queen Latifah, a Black woman, was also one of the first politically conscious female rappers, and most of her music remained rooted in self-awareness, self-worth, ambition, and determination throughout her career. This type of political consciousness emerged as a theme of the third wave of feminism, and can be seen in a large portion of the music from this time.

While Queen Latifah is best known as a solo artist, Bratmobile and Bikini Kill are two bands that were one of the first-generation riot grrrl bands. Bratmobile was a United States punk band that originated in Olympia, Washington. Allison Wolfe and Molly Neumann met while they were neighbors at the University of Oregon; both women came from activist families and continued this work through their music. Allison and Molly, along with Erin Smith (on guitar and back-up vocals) brought Bratmobile to many underground concerts and venues to perform throughout the 1990s. Active from 1991 to 2003, Bratmobile was influenced by various musical genres including pop, surf, and even garage rock (Marcus, 2010). Their debut album *Pottymouth* became synonymous with riot grrrl and third wave feminism in the United States. Music reviewer Stewart Mason said that *Pottymouth* “is about the early-'90s indie scene, about the D.I.Y. life in the post-Nirvana age where it seemed like anything could happen” (Mason).

One song to consider from this album is “Cherry Bomb,” which simultaneously calls out, mocks, and even celebrates rock music’s view of female sexuality. This song is

actually a cover of the song by the all-female rock bands *The Runaways*. “Cherry Bomb” was their signature song from 1976, and was composed by frontwoman Joan Jett along with manager Kim Fowley (Genius). Bratmobile’s cover of this song is quite symbolic, as it was sort of a passing of the torch from one female punk/rock band to another. Nevertheless, the lyrics of “Cherry Bomb” hit the nail on the head in terms of the spirit of the third wave - sarcastic, naughty, and playful all at once, the lyrics aim to reclaim female sexuality and power:

Hey straight girl what’s your style,  
 Your daddy’s dreams don’t make you smile  
 I’ll give ya something to live for  
 Have you, grab you ‘til you’re sore (Cherry Bomb)

A “cherry bomb” is a small explosive device that was once popular with kids, but in context of this song, the term “cherry bomb” refers to an underage girl who causes a lot of trouble. The song implies that the girl taunts her parents with her bad behavior, rebellion and promiscuity. Throughout the third wave, this spirit of rebellion carried the movement forward; women were embracing their sexuality and inherent desires on both private and public scales despite what others said or felt about them.

Bikini Kill and their song “Rebel Girl” have a lot in common with both Bratmobile and “Cherry Bomb”; similar to Bratmobile, Bikini Kill was formed in Olympia, Washington in October 1990 while three of the members attended the same college. The band consisted of songwriter Kathleen Harris, guitarist Billy Karren, bassist Kathi Wilcox, and drummer Tobi Vail. Known as one of the most prominent riot grrrl

bands, Bikini Kill was known for their fiery performances and hardcore-influenced music. During their live performances, Hanna's signature move would be to ask the girls in the crowd to come to the front, right by the stage. Hanna said that her career in general has been aimed at creating more space for herself and other women in the room, and this gesture represents that (Brocke, 2014).

"Rebel Girl" is an ode to feminist solidarity (Rose & Ross, 2014) and considered by many to be riot grrrl's "one definitive anthem" (Breiham, 2013). There are various studio versions of this song, and one version was even produced by Joan Jett, who eventually toured with the band. Similar to the previously mentioned songs of the third wave, "Rebel Girl" reclaims the power in slur words such as "dyke," which is a traditionally homophobic term used to describe a lesbian. The song's lyrics flip the script on traditional heterosexual tropes of pop music as well; the lyrics of "Rebel Girl" are from a lesbian perspective - it is both a tribute and love song for another woman (Raha, 2004):

When she talks, I hear the revolution

In her hips, there's revolution

When she walks, the revolution's coming

In her kiss, I taste the revolution (Verse 2, "Rebel Girl")

That girl thinks she's the queen of the neighborhood

I got news for you, she is

They say she's a dyke, but I know

She is my best friend, yeah (Verse 3, "Rebel Girl")

All in all, “Rebel Girl” is an anthem that perfectly captures the spirit of the third wave; reclamation, rebellion, and progress were the cornerstone of the movement, which paved the way for the fourth wave and subsequent #MeToo movement. As Bikini Kill highlighted, “Riot Grrrl is because I believe with my wholeheartmindbody that girls constitute a revolutionary soul force that can, and will, change the world for real” (Darms, 2013).

Each of the four waves and their subsequent music foreshadow the next wave in various ways. Each wave, while it addressed its own set of issues, continued to pave the way for women’s rights in the coming years. Ultimately, especially in those songs written by women, the lyrics and discourse of this feminist music foreshadow the politics of confrontation that are central to the contemporary #MeToo movement.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **METHODOLOGY**

As an undergraduate, I took a course called “Popular Music, Protest, and Social Change” which was one of my first exposures to the topic of political music in social movements. My final project for that course was to record a podcast about a particular song’s role in a social movement, so I chose John Legend’s “Preach” and explored its role in the March For Our Lives movement as well as in the U.S. gun violence epidemic in general. Through my research for that final project as well as through the course’s modules, I became familiar with some of the foundational pieces of music in various social movements as well as the way audiences ingest and digest music as a whole.

I did not have a specific name for the type of research I was conducting at that time, but through writing this thesis with similar methods, I can conclude that historical analysis and discourse analysis were the most helpful and relevant methods for this thesis. While historical analysis enabled me to evaluate previous music and social movements to contextualize more recent ones, discourse analysis was especially helpful in discerning the meaning of specific song lyrics as well as evaluating audience response(s) to them.

#### **Historical Analysis**

A historical analysis approach is suitable for two main reasons: First, this thesis considers past social movements and their music, as a historical framework, that can shed light on how to interpret and explain their relevance to the role of music in #MeToo. Second, historical analysis is particularly useful for combining social and behavioral

science with the study of history, thus incorporating multiple research methods in order to help one understand human behavior(s) in full force (Startt & Sloan, 2019). To place my analytical effort in a historical perspective, I relied on four particular U.S. social movements and their music: the abolition movement/slave spirituals, the Civil Rights Movement, the pro-labor/anti-war movement, and the four waves of feminism. I chose these particular movements after speaking with professors and mentors for a few reasons: (1) because many who will read this paper likely come in with at least some background knowledge about these movements already; (2) because they are spaced out over the course of centuries rather than very close together in time; (3) because each of these movements aimed to tackle a different issue (slavery/labor rights/environmental protection/racial rights/gender equality/etc.), which lends itself to particular musical genres and themes that are more prevalent in some movements than others.

This historical analysis approach enabled me to create a new focus for evaluating the way(s) in which music has been used in past social movements and how that contributed to the way(s) in which music is still used in social movements and social unrest today. The history of music in social movements and music in #MeToo is not a simple succession of facts, rather it is a deep-rooted and complex story concerning how societal change happens, how human intentions matter, and how ends are influenced by the means of carrying them out. Because history is not culturally universal (Wyche, et al., 2006), it was important to narrow my focus to social movements that occurred in the United States for the purposes of this thesis.



## **Discourse Analysis**

Critical discourse analysis allows researchers to study written or spoken language in relation to its social context (Luo, 2022). In this sense, discourse analysis was an invaluable part of my research, especially when evaluating lyrics of certain songs in the context of the social movement they were a part of.

The techniques used to collect and evaluate historical facts that contextualize music's role in social movements and in #MeToo include both written records and audio/music recordings. Online databases, scholarly articles and journals, as well as relevant music and music charts provided me with significant primary and secondary sources about the role of music in social movements, and more specifically, the role of music in #MeToo. The types of archival and primary sources I looked at were mainly in the form of social media posts, original songs (see Music in Social Movements section of literature review), newspaper articles, Tweets, and other digital postings. Most of the lyric/song samples I used in this paper were taken from song charts or previous knowledge I had about certain movements' most-used and/or popular music.

I also perused some opinion/op-ed articles on a couple of the songs I selected. It was important to get an idea of audience reception(s) of these songs in order to provide me with a more comprehensive overview of the social context in which they were written. I sought out articles written by both men and women, as I thought would be particularly interesting and useful to get a male-identifying perspective on some of the songs that have been central to the feminist movement and #MeToo. While some men certainly identify as feminists and allies to the feminist movement, others are wary to call

themselves feminists and to align themselves with these movements. Since we still live in a patriarchal society, men have the power to push forward certain music and bring it to the public sphere more than many women do.

## CHAPTER 5

### #METOO

Tarana Burke coined the phrase “me too” in 2006 on Myspace after her own experience as a sexual assault survivor in addition to her work as an activist in the space. As a youth worker dealing predominantly with Black children and children of color, Burke came face-to-face with the tragic reality of how common sexual assault and violence was in the community. During an all-girls bonding session at their youth camp, Burke was approached by a young girl (named Heaven) who asked to speak with her in private. Heaven proceeded to detail to Burke the horrifying story of how her mother’s boyfriend regularly violated her, and Burke found herself in a position where she was not ready to tell Heaven that she understood her story; Burke knew firsthand what Heaven had been through, but could not find it in herself to share it just yet. She directed Heaven to another female counselor who could “help her better” (Burke, 2022), but the damage had been done. Burke described how Heaven’s face fell; Heaven felt rejected and utterly defeated by her shame in sharing her story with Burke, only to be redirected. As Heaven walked away from a guilt-ridden Burke, Burke still found herself unable to even whisper these now-famous words to Heaven: “me too” (Burke, 2022).<sup>11</sup>

In 2015, *The New York Times* reported that Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein was being questioned by police after a 22-year-old woman accused him of

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<sup>11</sup> While the #MeToo movement in the United States has spanned almost every city, state, industry, and walk of life, the focus of this thesis is the role of music in the #MeToo movement. Subsequently, the bulk of this section will highlight #MeToo’s history and sequence of events in the entertainment industry.

touching her inappropriately (Santora, 2015). The woman, Italian model Ambra Gutierrez, was silenced and shamed by many media outlets and lawyers in her attempt to bring forth charges against Weinstein; many claimed she was an opportunist and simply wanted attention. The Manhattan District Attorney at the time, Cyrus Vance Jr., decided not to file charges against Weinstein due to “insufficient evidence” (Santora, 2015). By 2017, accusations against Harvey Weinstein became more widespread, prompting both the entertainment industry as well as the general public to come to terms with the reality of Weinstein’s actions and the abuse going on in the industry.

Online, the hashtag #metoo and more widespread use of the term (coined by Burke) continued throughout 2017 when actress Alyssa Milano encouraged sexual assault and harassment victims (via Twitter, as seen above) to share their stories on social media. Milano was prompted to do so after seeing more and more headlines about Harvey Weinstein’s alleged sexual assaults on various actresses in the United States’ entertainment industry. These allegations hit peak notoriety after the New York Times published an article on October 5th, 2017 detailing the high-profile allegations against Weinstein (BBC, 2022). Actresses Rose McGowan, Uma Thurman, Romola Garai and Ashley Judd were among the women who came forward around this time. By October 10th, 2017, thirteen more women had come forward with allegations against Weinstein, and the New Yorker magazine published them (BBC, 2022). Among the women that had come forward, A-list actresses such as Gwyneth Paltrow, Cara Delevigne and Angelina Jolie were included. As Weinstein started being let go from many films and other career endeavors, his actions also reverberated in his personal life. His wife divorced him after



the second set of allegations came out, and Weinstein was blacklisted from most award shows. Harvey Weinstein stood trial for the allegations against him throughout the next couple of years and was found guilty of a criminal sexual act in the first degree and third-degree rape on February 24th, 2020. However, he was acquitted of first-degree rape and two counts of predatory sexual assault, both of which are charges that could have found Weinstein jailed for life (BBC, 2022). On March 11th, 2020, Weinstein was sentenced to 23 years in prison for sexual assault and rape. Weinstein's second trial on rape and sexual assault charges was due to start in Los Angeles on October 10, 2022 (BBC, 2022). On December 19, 2022, Harvey Weinstein was found guilty of three of seven charges against him. He was sentenced to sixteen years in prison in the Los Angeles trial, and his California prison terms must be served separately from his New York sentence (Beckett, 2023).

Harvey Weinstein was not the first nor the last person accused of sexual harassment and/or assault in the entertainment industry, in fact, by 2018, major figures such as Stan Lee, Bill Cosby, and R. Kelly were also accused by multiple victims. On April 26, 2018, Bill Cosby was convicted of drugging and molesting a woman, kicking off the first big celebrity trial and conviction of the #MeToo era (Chicago Tribune, 2018). As a pioneer who broke many racial barriers in the entertainment industry, Cosby (also known as “America’s Dad”) now faced the downfall of his career and reputation alike. Later that same year, Cosby was sentenced to three to ten years in jail for drugging and sexually harassing a woman at his estate (Chicago Tribune, 2018). At age 81, Cosby was the first celebrity of the #MeToo era to be jailed, forcing him to come to terms with his actions later in life.

Also in 2018, comic Stan Lee was accused of inappropriately grabbing his female massage therapist at a Chicago hotel in 2017 (Chicago Tribune, 2018), to which a lawsuit was then filed. R. Kelly, a famous R&B artist, was also confronted around this time with years of sexual abuse allegations at this time as well. On May 10, 2018, Spotify put out a statement saying it would no longer include R. Kelly on its playlists. While his music would remain on the platform, Spotify would not actively promote it (Chicago Tribune, 2018). #MuteRKelly took off around this time, calling for an end to Kelly’s career due to his years of abuse and misconduct. As more and more perpetrators were publicly called out, perhaps some victims felt more comfortable coming forward and sharing their own stories. Although #MeToo’s genesis in the United States’ entertainment industry is widely known to be associated with the accusation(s) and conviction(s) of Harvey

Weinstein, Weinstein was only one small part of #MeToo's kickoff in the entertainment industry and its far-reaching effects.

The phrase "me too," while now globally understood, has led to and become an entire organization dedicated to assisting all survivors - Black women and girls, people with disabilities, young people, queer and trans people, and communities of color - find the right place to begin their personal healing journey. However, #MeToo's work does not stop there; movement leaders are working to disrupt systems that allow sexual violence to proliferate in the world at large (Burke, 2022) and addressing the systemic (racial, socioeconomic, and even political) injustices that make some people and communities more vulnerable than others. The goal is that, one day, no one will ever have to utter the phrase "me too" again, and we will live in a world changed by the work and activism of today (Burke, 2022).

## CHAPTER 6

### MUSIC IN #METOO

As both a general phrase and hashtag, “me too” “does a great job of crystallizing the rage and vulnerability women feel in the face of rape culture” (Powers, 2017).

However, this conversation and subsequent rage is not new; writers and musicians have told the stories of violated women throughout time, particularly since the 1990s (Powers, 2017) when feminism and music intersected in both mainstream and underground music, as exemplified through the riot grrl movement. However, the riot grrl movement peaked just before the dawn of social media, virality culture<sup>12</sup>, and digital feminism fully took off. This is where both the fourth wave of feminism and #MeToo differentiate themselves from prior feminist waves. However, it is important to note that the lyrical discourses and performative onstage/media politics of explicitly feminist music (folk, punk, Hip hop, and more as discussed in the review of the literature) in the decades prior to #MeToo inform these later performances of social media activism and digital confrontation that are emblematic of the #MeToo era.

The fourth wave’s momentum lies (in part) in the women who share their stories online regarding sexual harassment, abuse, violence, and the objectification of women as a whole. This online culture was part of what enabled the #MeToo movement to take off when it did in the United States. By women sharing their stories in online spaces that

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<sup>12</sup> “Virality culture” or “viral” refers to text or media that spreads widely in a matter of seconds, minutes, or hours in the realm of social networks and other connected platforms. *Wired* refers to “going viral” as the process in which a media unit gets mass exposure through a sharing infrastructure (Veix, 2018).



reached hundreds (if not thousands) of other people in an instant, the stigma surrounding sexual assault and harassment started to be confronted. More and more people felt empowered to share their stories, including major celebrities, musicians, and other public figures (as mentioned in the contextual chapter). #MeToo was able to stay relevant, in part, by these musicians and celebrities using their own stories as creative inspiration for music and other shareable media. Becoming more than just a hashtag, the #MeToo movement also led to the development of tangible activist events such as the Women's March in 2017 (Miller, 2022). Some musicians that advocated through their music throughout the #MeToo movement include Amanda Palmer & Jasmine Power, Lady Gaga, Kesha, and Lynzy Lab.

Amanda Palmer and Jasmine Power released perhaps one of the more blunt songs of the movement, titled "Mr. Weinstein Will See You Now." Their collaborative single brings to light the abusive, grotesque exchanges between Harvey Weinstein and his female colleagues. Given that the accusations against Harvey Weinstein kicked off the #MeToo movement in the entertainment industry, this song even more powerful in calling Weinstein out by name. Palmer and Power sing in breathy, almost ethereal tones, and Power's lyrics are Harvey Weinstein's exact words that he allegedly said to victims before assaulting them:

You came here dressed for battle / You knew damn well

The sharpening of axes / The fat man rings a bell

(Don't touch me, I'm not here to help)

He'll smother what he captures (Move over)

You know damn well

You crouch down in the bathroom (Our time is at a loss)

The mirrors make you sick (Won't have you in me)

You hear him channel surfing (Won't have you near me, no, at any cost)

You knew this script (Run now, girl, run)

(Mr. Weinstein Will See You Now)

In the song's music video, the chilling imagery of women in white button-down shirts in a bedroom correlates with victims' accounts of how they first encountered Weinstein, and toward the end of the music video, the women run out of the bedroom fully naked, attempting to escape the house that they were assaulted in. This imagery combined with the brutally honest lyrics recreate the scarring, horrifying story that many women found themselves a part of after encountering Weinstein. This type of music truly captures the essence of advocacy through art - these women are sharing their survival stories in a way that *shows* you what happened to them and makes you *feel* a fraction of the way they did, rather than just tell you about it. Their vocal tones in combination with dream-like soundscapes are enough to give any listener chills. In addition, as a call to action after the song's release, 100% of the track's sales through online platform Bandcamp went to the Time's Up<sup>13</sup> legal defense fund.

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<sup>13</sup> Time's Up is a movement focused more on workplace equity and creating equal opportunities for women and people of color, whereas #MeToo deals with sexual violence of all kinds as its primary goal. They are certainly intertwined, though: "Time's Up can be thought of as a solution-based, action-oriented next step in the #MeToo movement" (Langone, 2018).

Songs such as “Mr. Weinstein Will See You Now” are important because of their content and messaging, but they also represent a key part of political music: a call to action. It is meaningful for artists to include some sort of call to action, especially in relation to the social movement they may be a part of. In this case, this song used platform sales to donate to a fund that will keep the mission of #MeToo alive by supporting survivors’ legal fees and other associated costs of coming forward and seeking justice. As more people are supported in coming forward, others will follow suit and the movement will continue to garner momentum.

Similar to Amanda Palmer and Jasmine Power, Lady Gaga is not one to shy away from sharing her deep emotions and lived experiences with audiences. She co-wrote “Til It Happens To You” for the 2015 documentary *The Hunting Ground*, which follows the culture of sexual assault and violence against women that occurs so rampantly on U.S. college campuses (Gallo, 2015). So often, when sexual assault occurs in academic settings, survivors are pushed out of the way and their stories are shoved under the rug. Whether it be to save a school’s reputation or to avoid messy paperwork and legal proceedings, these stories of assault on college campuses are often not taken seriously. If one’s own school or institution does not take their story seriously and address it, how can we expect others to? This leads to the cycle of victim blaming and disbelief that occurs in many sexual assault cases. A survivor’s friends, family, and loved ones may not even believe their story, or if they do, they may shame the survivor for “not doing enough” to prevent it or say they were “asking for it.” Lady Gaga sings about how, until you have

been a victim yourself, you should not judge, dismiss, or shame people who are alleging abuse:

‘Til it happens to you, you don’t know how it feels, how it feels

‘Til it happens to you, you won’t know, it won’t be real

No it won’t be real, won’t know how it feels

(‘Til It Happens To You)

Lady Gaga has been candid in the past about her own survival story; she revealed that, at age 19, she was raped by a male music producer who threatened to burn her music if she did not take her clothes off. Lady Gaga later found out she was pregnant and years later suffered “a total psychotic break” (Savage, 2021) that lasted years after the event. She uses her music to cope with her trauma as well as to share her story, and has stated that she will never name her attacker: “I understand this #MeToo movement, I understand that some people feel really comfortable with this, and I do not. I do not ever want to face that person again” (Savage, 2021). Gaga did not need to name her attacker in order to uplift and inspire others on a similar healing journey, however. Her songs, including “Til It Happens To You” show firsthand that Lady Gaga knows what it is like to be a survivor and to have your story ignored or shamed. By Lady Gaga being upfront and honest, she has emerged as a major player in #MeToo and her music continues to heal and inspire other survivors to do the same.

Kesha is another musician who became a main face of the #MeToo movement, especially after she accused her former producer Dr. Luke of sexual assault and battery in 2014 (Cronin, 2021). “Praying” was Kesha’s first solo release in over four years,

marking a major milestone for the singer; Kesha was allegedly barred from releasing new music during her long legal battles with Dr. Luke (*Praying*, 2017). She released the song “Praying” a few years later, saying that it was a song about empathizing with someone else even if they hurt or wronged you (Cronin, 2021). While many songs related to the #MeToo movement harbor anger (rightfully so) and resentment, “Praying” is a song about coping with trauma by forgiving those who wronged you, and praying for their healing journey:

I hope you're somewhere prayin', prayin'

I hope you're soul is changin', changin'

I hope you find your peace

Falling on your knees, prayin' (Praying)

Kesha has said that “Praying” was a song “about that moment when the sun starts peeking through the darkest storm clouds, creating the most beautiful rainbow” (Cronin, 2021). Kesha’s music gives herself as well as other survivors a light at the end of the tunnel; although music alone cannot heal trauma, it can certainly help. By going public with her story of survival and encouraging others to take productive paths of healing, Kesha positioned herself as a major face of the #MeToo movement and music industry again as a whole

When people hear music with lyrics such as those shared above, they oftentimes feel less alone in their story or struggle. Furthermore, they may even feel compelled to share their own. This was the case for Lynzy Lab, a young, unknown singer who posted an original song on Youtube at the height of #MeToo in 2018. The song, “A Scary Time”

details just that - how, although it is a “scary time” for men and boys, women often experience a much different set of scary times:

I can't use public transportation after 7 PM

I can't be brutally honest when you slide into my DMs

I can't go to the club just do dance with my friends

And I can't ever leave my drink unattended

But is sure is a scary time for men

Girls like to act like you're to blame and they're the victim

Her dress was short and she was drunk, she's not innocent

Thank god your dad's the judge and you won't be convicted

(A Scary Time)

Lab's honest lyrics perfectly describe the different power dynamics that men and women experience; women often have more to lose than men and are less likely to be believed and taken seriously. Women often have to put so much more thought into their safety than men do<sup>14</sup>, and do not have the same basic safety privileges that men do like being out at night or going out with other women. Lab's song ended up being shared on a global level; within days, the video of her singing the song had thousands of views. The video was also reshared to other platforms including Instagram and Facebook, which increased visibility. Currently, the video has over 1.7 million views on YouTube along

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<sup>14</sup> This is a generalized statement; there are certain groups that often have to take greater safety precautions than perhaps cis-gender, white men do, such as the LGBTQIA+ community and others.

with 46,000 likes (*A Scary Time*, 2017). Lab's lyrics mock the men who claim that it is a scarier time for men than it is for women, and call out those who think women are dramatic when it comes to their own safety and the precautions they take.

Similar to other songs that underscore the #MeToo movement, Lab's song features a call to action: encouraging listeners to vote on November 6 and "make some noise":

It's not such a scary time for boys

They've always had the upper hand, they've always had a choice

It's time for women to rise up,

Use our collective voice

The day to vote's November 6, so let's go make some noise (*A Scary Time*)

Voting for political representatives that advocate for women in all ways is an essential step forward for our society, and Lab's encouragement likely inspired people who were otherwise feeling hopeless and uncompelled to vote and make their voice heard. It can seem impossible for one person to truly make a difference, but voting is a great start. In order for laws that protect and advocate for women to pass, we need to elect representatives that will fight for us and see these initiatives through.

While putting out a song with powerful lyrics will not single-handedly end the cycles of sexual abuse and harassment that plague our society, they offer productive steps forward for people to share their own stories, connect with other survivors, and move closer to healing. Thanks to artists such as Amanda Palmer & Jasmine Power, Lady Gaga, Kesha, and Lynzy Lab, listeners feel less alone in their struggles. It is important for

artists to use their platform to stand up for what they believe in and inspire activism through their art.



## CONCLUSION & FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

Music propels many U.S. social movements forward, and it is an undeniable force in the current fourth wave as well as in the #MeToo movement. Music keys us into the cultural context that it was released in, but also has the power to both revisit the past and anticipate the future. In the #MeToo movement, specifically, the music echoes the struggle against sexual assault and harassment that has plagued our society for centuries, but it also foreshadows the era of greater accountability that we now seem to live in. While all is certainly not perfect, music in social movements has allowed us to take strides toward a better world and fight for what we believe in. While the #MeToo movement may not have one distinct anthem, the movement is a product of the multimodality that defines our present moment. #MeToo is emblematic of a confluence of things that are unique to the moment: social media campaigns, “pantsuit power” flash mobs, dances, and even Women’s Marches. Music is one component of this complex and rich modality.

With the overturn of *Roe v. Wade* in the summer of 2022, many people wonder what feminism will look like given the current attack on reproductive rights in the United States. Many activist movements have gained momentum since the overturn, and more and more public figures (including musicians) are using their platforms to express their views. While reproductive rights are still available in some states, many states have made abortion illegal and seek to legalize other aspects of *Roe v. Wade* (including privacy, same sex and interracial marriage, etc.). This is a volatile time in United States feminist history, and it is up to musicians and artists to use their platform to share their views and

create a space for public discourse about women and gender issues. As this overturn continues to evolve throughout the country, it will be essential for future research on political music and social movements to be conducted.

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