A CHANGE IS GONNA COME:

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE BENEFITS OF MUSICAL ACTIVISM IN THE
CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

By
ERIN NICOLE NEAL

A Capstone submitted to the

Graduate School-Camden

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of Master of Arts

Graduate Program in Liberal Studies

Written under the direction of

Dr. Stuart Z. Charmé

And approved by

____________________________________

Dr. Stuart Z. Charmé

Camden, New Jersey
January 2021
CAPSTONE ABSTRACT
A Change Is Gonna Come:
A Critical Analysis Of The Benefits Of Musical Activism In The Civil Rights Movement
by ERIN NICOLE NEAL
Capstone Director:
Dr. Stuart Z. Charmé

The goal of this Capstone project is to understand what made protest music useful for political activists of the Civil Rights Movement. I will answer this question by analyzing music’s effect on activists through an examination of the songs associated with the movement, regarding lyrical content as well as its musical components. By examining the lyrical content, I will be evaluating how the lyrics of protest songs were useful for the activists, as well as address criticisms of the concrete impact of song lyrics of popular songs. Furthermore, examining musical components such as genre will assist in determining if familiarity in regards to the genre were significant.

Ultimately, I found that music was psychologically valuable to political activists because music became an outlet for emotions they held within, instilled within listeners new emotions, became a beacon for psychological restoration and encouragement, and motivated listeners to carry out their activism. Furthermore, from a political perspective, the lyrics brought attention to the current socio-political problems and challenged social standards, furthered activists’ political agendas, persuaded the audience to take action, and emphasized blame on political figures by demonstrating that socio-political problems citizens grappled with were due to governmental actions as well as their inactions.
First, I will present what makes protest music valuable and how activists appreciated its utility, this is based on the research and evaluations of several scholars’ assessment of protest music. I will then address the considered limitations of protest songs based on analysis conducted by several scholars. I will then provide succinct insight into what psychologically and politically were the issues the Civil Rights activists grappled with and how these paralleled with music becoming a beneficial tool of utilization. Finally, I will offer an assessment of the content of the songs selected for this capstone in how those songs carried valuable psychological and political dimensions that were successfully utilized by activists, for the benefit of the activists in this movement.
Part One: The Benefits of Musical Activism in The Civil Rights Movement

Introduction

The 1950s and 1960s were a period of social and political turbulence that involved protests of socially constructed ideologies that denied social justice and equitable social policies. Civil unrest, riots, the assassination of top political and cultural leaders, and the infringement upon First Amendment Rights reflected the tumultuous atmosphere and discourse of the times. The Civil Rights Movement was monumental in the fight for social justice for the African American community as they resolutely rallied, marched, and protested social issues such as white supremacy, voting rights, and inequality. The Civil Rights Movement campaigned on a philosophy of nonviolence and sought to civilly pursue the goals of the movement such as racial integration and equality. By the mid-60s, this movement had achieved historical success (Weinberg 212). For example, racial segregation was “stripped of the institutional legitimacy it had previously enjoyed” and “America's culture and politics were transformed” (Weinberg 212). The road to these accomplishments was prolonged and arduous. Nevertheless, throughout this passionate struggle filled with angst and turmoil, music was there for solace and support.

This music that became identified with the Civil Rights Movement develop into a support mechanism for the activists, (Hsiung 23) encouraging their psychological well-being as well as verbalizing and furthering their political agendas. As the popular rhythms of the 60s started echoing personal desires, rebellion, and freedom, protest music reflected these sentiments and can be heard in the protest music of songwriters such as Nina Simone, Sam Cooke, and Bob Dylan. Furthermore, protest songs, categorized by
many as “freedom songs” expressed a musical tradition of African American’s usage of gospel hymns and songs inspiring their fight against physical and mental oppression. This paper asserts that the utilization of music benefited activists during The Civil Rights Movement because the songs contained powerful psychological and political dimensions that aided the activists in pursuing and supporting their socio-political goals.

An important ingredient in this movement was the musical expression of emotions, such as fear or frustration, and political demands that would lead to reform and peaceful negotiations. The music was an essential democratic platform for songwriters and organizers to rally protesters and express their angst regarding the socio-political climate surrounding the nation. Additionally, music connected them at a personal and group level to carry the messages of these movements as non-violently as possible.

*The Benefits of Musical Activism*

Before this paper moves forward detailing the psychological and political dimensions of civil rights songs, it is important to understand the value of music as a form of expressing activism. Music has proven to be a powerful device in developing social and communicational ties (Schäfer et. al. 7) by bringing unity amongst people to achieve a shared goal. Music establishes and identifies values shared with a community or at a national level by either demonstrating, supporting, or protesting an issue (Ziv Qtd. Brown & Street 779). Protest music confirms a collective resolution amongst a group of people, acts as a motivational resource, engages outsiders to take part in an effort, and
presents imperative issues with a targeted audience in mind (Denisoff, “Top Forty” 821; Ode).

An expression of discontent, dissent, and demand for change may represent the viewpoints of one individual or a large group of individuals such as a special interest group (Kizer 4). Music alone does not represent civil dissent. However, when paired with a political movement, music works to further express disapproval of social problems and inequities thereby motivating “strong public feelings,” and solidifying the bonds of the movement. Therefore, reducing the risk of the message being “intellectualized without any possible social action” (Stewart 384; Berger Qtd. Cooper 60; Denisoff, “Top Forty” 822). Music enkindled feeling and meaning for individuals as they coped with social problems such as class divide, racial inequality, discrimination, and the victimization of activists. Moreover, the music promoted activism by furthering political objectives through the expression of music, and advocates of civil rights utilized the lyrical content to call into question problematic governmental policies and countered with requests for societal change.

Music played a crucial role as a medium that influenced, inspired, and motivated, (August 80), and as the music became prevalent, it gave performers a discernible stage, “to criticize, mobilize, express dissenting views, raise an issue, and spread counter-hegemonic discourses and ideas about rights and freedom” (Kodosky 70). Songwriters such as Sam Cooke, Nina Simone, Joan Baez, and Bob Dylan, for example, vocalized their differing socio-political views of the status quo of the time, in poetical musical form (Cooper 53) and by the late 60s, songwriters’ reactions to the political turbulence grew angrier, more direct, and more forceful (Heilbronner 691).
Many protest songs exemplified the powerful tool of generalization within the music. Activists benefited from generalization within the lyrical content because generality offered non-complexity, therefore, enabling listeners to be readily motivated and encouraged to carry out their strengthened convictions amongst these different unified efforts, aspirations, and ideals with a succinct message (Ziv Qtd. Eyerman & Peddie 780; Kline Qtd. Spector & Kitsuse, 40). Moreover, music’s presentation of “black and white arguments,” with an uncomplicated message instilled an emotional attachment within its audience (Berger Qtd. Denisoff 60) and awakened consciousness to a social issue in an easily understood message of empathy (Berger 60).

For protest songs to become appealing and produce a response from the listener, the songs prompted empathy and support for a group, and or movement and the ideological concepts of that effort (Berger Qtd. Mondak & Reich 60). Significantly, when the listener is stirred emotionally and intellectually, the music’s function is achieved as these songs encourage these sentiments from within the listener such as anger or empathy for the victim (Berger Qtd. Mondak & Denisoff 60). This is attained by inducing a “we” mentality, a shared perception of “being in the same boat,” and these individuals soon commiserate this message of discontent. Therefore, through collective social action “we” soon strives for a transformative uprising that will aid in resolving these shared matters (Berger Qtd. Denisoff 60) and this epitomizes the advantages of generality conveyed in the music.

Another illuminating evaluation regarding the power of “song”, comes from Kerran L. Sanger’s article, “Functions of freedom singing in The Civil Rights Movement: The activists' implicit rhetorical theory,” which evaluated and assessed that singing
assisted activists amid the challenging atmosphere that surrounded their activism. Sanger summarizes the power of the songs as the following:

1. Song is not ordinary communication but rather a form of discourse that energizes those who engage in it and allows them to express themselves in ways not available in other forms of discourse.

2. Song is an especially powerful form of communication that achieves its power from the generation, expression, and venting of intense emotion.

3. The powerful rhetoric of song both derives from and enhances the spirituality of those who engage in it.

4. As discourse, the singing of freedom songs was inherently transformative. Those who sang not only expressed themselves but were changed—made new and better—in the singing (193).

Sanger brings up a revealing aspect of the music of The Civil Rights Movement, the term “freedom songs.” Amid the research for this capstone, at times protest songs and freedom songs became interchangeable. However, it is important to address how they possibly hold different meanings in regard to this political movement. Protest songs, express disapproval, usually about a political subject (“protest song”), and freedom songs, are songs about or in praise of freedom from acts such as slavery or oppression, usually sung at protest demonstrations (“freedom song”). Therefore, protest songs are about expressing a dissenting view and taking issue with a political matter such as discrimination, racism, and poverty, whereas freedom songs express many emotions within individuals such as hope, sadness, or determination. Both categories of songs can be utilized in protest as well as performed and expressed within demonstrations amongst
large gatherings, however, all these songs were not intended for utilization in group
demonstrations. For example, “Mississippi Goddam,” demonstrated a songwriter's ability
to protest an issue through the power of song, further demonstrating Kerran L. Sanger’s
critique of the many powerful attributes of “song”.

*Critiques of Protest Music’s Power to Motivate Political Organizing*

It would be remiss of this paper to ignore those who have expressed uncertainties
regarding the political usefulness of protest music. One of the most prominent critics of
the political effectiveness of protest music is R. Serge Denisoff, who analyzed the
characteristics, value, and limitations of protest music. Denisoff was particularly
concerned with the transformation of protest music in mass-market popular music, such
as Top 40s radio. This is an imperative viewpoint to evaluate since I will be discussing
songs that demonstrate the power of protest music, some of which carried crossover
appeal in popular music. This capstone paper maintains that popularizing these songs was
one of the many benefits of activism through music.

Denisoff does recognize the function of “freedom songs” as unifying and
mobilizing forces for the Civil Rights movement, with songs such as “Oh Freedom,” and
“We Shall Overcome, (Denisoff, “Songs of Persuasion” 583). Significantly, 95% of the
songs from the SNCC anthology were for internal usage of members already involved in
The Civil Rights Movement, or on picket lines, this is because freedom songs were for
that effort, this was similar to what labor songs had been for the Labor Movements of the
1930s (583). Civil Rights songs were intentionally repetitive so that verses could be
improvised to meet any possibility. For example, Denisoff states, “’Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Round’ could be sung for any occasion on the streets of any community,” and the simplicity and repetitiveness made the song easy to learn within a matter of minutes (Denisoff, “Top Forty” 819-20). Alternatively, Denisoff found that when protest songs were appropriated by popular music, they were no longer effective tools for political organizing.

Denisoff’s article, “Songs of Persuasion: A Sociological Analysis of Urban Propaganda Songs” offers his perspective on the function and goal of what he classifies as “propaganda songs,” which when in the “folk idiom,” are a communicational device that promulgates social, political, economic, and ideological concepts (582). Denisoff list the following as the six goals of a “propaganda song”:

1. The song attempts to solicit and arouse outside support and sympathy for a social or political movement.
2. The song reinforces the value structure of individuals who are active supporters of the social movement or ideology.
3. The song creates and promotes cohesion, solidarity, and high morale in an organization or movement supporting its world view.
4. The song is an attempt to recruit individuals into joining a specific social movement.
5. The song invokes solutions to real or imagined social phenomena in terms of action to achieve a desired goal.
6. The song points to some problem or discontent in the society, usually in emotional terms (582).
To achieve these functions the song must be easily comprehended once communicated as well as bring recognition to a “problem-situation” in the social system (582). Denisoff determines there are two different forms of “propaganda songs,” as either “magnetic” or “rhetorical,” and protest songs fit under the “rhetorical” model.

“Rhetorical” songs are divided into subcategories as “universal” or “specific”, as these songs can either transcend beyond the specific event it was written for or relay specific events on topics such as strikes, rent control, or massacres (585). Rhetorical is heard in many protest songs as the content expresses disapproval and/or described the social condition (587). However, Denisoff claims that these songs have limitations as they may describe a current or historical event, but they don’t require a “commitment on the part of the listener” to move forward with action, furthermore, the song may identify a problem, however, no solution is offered (Limeberry Qtd. Denisoff 76; Denisoff, “Songs of Persuasion” 584). Denisoff’s furthers this opinion in his article, “Protest Songs: Those on the Top Forty and Those of the Streets,” as he argues that there is no concrete evidence that songs amid the folk-song revival of the 1960s had an impact on the attitudes of an individual in association with a political issue, as “songs of persuasion” in the past only worked to reinforce existing attitudes (807-8).

Denisoff backs these claims from the works of additional scholars who observed limitations within protest songs, especially within popular music, where these songs are categorized as “disconnected radio programming,” and “background noise.” Denisoff references David Reisman’s theory of popular music as “social atomization” wherein songs are “sandwiched in between commercial and diffuse musical genres” and because of this “disconnected radio programming” listeners are not engaged enough to take in the
sentiments within these songs on Top Forty radio (Denisoff & Levine Qtd. Reisman 117). Denisoff also acknowledges Jacques Barzun’s critique which expands on Reisman’s analysis by adding that the music is nothing more than a sound individuals engage amidst their daily routines as music acts as “an increasing resistance to words…. Which is…reinforced by the desire to move into a world of sensations remote from those of workday life” therefore becoming “background noise” (Denisoff & Levine Qtd. Barzun 117). To add to this claim, Denisoff provides Paul Larzafeld and Robert K. Merton’s study on radio propaganda, in which they affirm that propaganda by itself is not enough and must involve “supplementation” wherein once the message within the music is received, it should then evoke an action (Denisoff and Levine 117-18). Denisoff and Levine conclude that radio is an inadequate propaganda tool, as the lyrical content within Top Forty popular music was immaterial and ineffective at communicating a message to its audience (118).

Denisoff considers protest songs as something that appeals to only a small audience. Furthermore, these songs, particularly, “propaganda songs” are geared toward “converting the faithful,” who are those already in support of the message conveyed and negative responses are from outsiders that are not already in support of the subject matter. Denisoff furthered this argument in a study conducted on a popular protest song of the 1960s called “Eve of Destruction” written by P.F Sloan in 1964 and performed by Barry McGuire in 1965, which was a song that expressed many social issues of the time such as nuclear war, the Vietnam War, voting rights, riots during the summer of ‘65 and civil rights.
From this particular study, Denisoff concluded that protest songs promulgated by the mass media do not function in carrying out intellectual commitments from its listeners, as a fraction of listeners, 36% queried in the study, correctly interpreted the meaning behind the song, and only 24% from the study advocated that its political usage amongst pop music could be appreciated (Denisoff, “Top Forty” 814). Furthermore, 28% of the respondents carried a negative view of the song and did not support advocating that political usage in music was appropriate (814). However, as Denisoff does acknowledge, 46% of the respondents did not have an opinion (814). Nevertheless, Denisoff concluded that protest music outside of a “supportive context” is not an effective tool of activism as that of the “freedom songs” of The Civil Rights Movement, and protest songs remain “reaffirmative” in their function (818). Denisoff emphasizes that there is no concrete evidence that songs of the folk-song revival of the 1960s had an impact on attitudes in association with a political issue and only work to reinforce existing attitudes (807-8).

Other critics have taken issue with Denisoff’s assessment of the limitations of protest music and how these songs had little impact on political issues. Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison’s book, “Music and Social Movements: Mobilizing Tradition in the Twentieth Century,” criticized Denisoff’s functional approach to analyzing protest songs. They note, for example, “For, as we shall see, it is often the seemingly simplest songs that evoke the strongest emotions, primarily because they are the bearers of musical tradition. Indeed, part of the power of protest songs stems from their use of familiar tunes, both sacred and secular. And while no doubt serving as magnets, they also open channels of identification through which the past can become present” (Eyerman & Jamison 43).
Furthermore, Eyerman and Jamison criticize Denisoff’s lack of acknowledgment of the “songs tunes” as those also held meaning and strong cultural traditions for the activists (43) as what was demonstrated in the gospel-inspired freedom songs of the Civil Rights Movement, as well as the popularization of protest songs channeled through genres such as Rhythm and Blues and Soul music. As they state, “There is more to music and movements than can be captured within a functional perspective, such as Denisoff’s, which focuses on the use made of music within already-existing movements. Music, and song, we suggest, can maintain a movement even when it no longer has a visible presence in the form of organizations, leaders, and demonstrations, and can be a vital force in preparing the emergence of a new movement” (43-44). Therefore, the music should be viewed from a broader perspective where “tradition and ritual” are part of that movements cultural identity as well as identification that represented “forms of collective meaning and memory” (43-44).

Eyerman and Jamison’s claims demonstrate the assertion of this capstone, as the music benefited the activists in aiding them in pursuing and supporting the goals of the Civil Rights Movement. The music, especially gospel-inspired songs, was a part of the activists’ “cultural identity” and it held “collective meaning and memory” for them that contributed as a support mechanism throughout the movement.

Other writers also challenged Denisoff’s claim that popular songs like “Eve of Destruction” were politically ineffective. P.F Sloan, along with many reports on such broadcasts as NPR.org, claimed that “Eve of Destruction” helped change the U.S. Constitution by highlighting the disparity between voting age and draft age. The song became a rallying cry for supporters of this change in law and soon thereafter the 26th
Amendment to the Constitution was ratified, changing the voting age from 21 to 18 (Hansen). Of course, it cannot be definitively proven that “Eve” played a part in this monumental constitutional change. However, it seems that Denisoff was only examining the very early stages of anti-war protest music before the explosion of protest demonstrations and draft card burnings. Furthermore, critiquing protest songs on popular radio seemed premature at this time, as “Eve of Destruction” was one of the first protest songs to become a number one hit on the popular charts making this phenomenon something new for the public.

Admittedly, Denisoff contributed significantly to the studies of protest music’s usage and benefits, however, his evaluated limitations of protest music along with scholars that support his claims are debatable, because these claims were evaluated during the infancy of protest songs in popular music, and their oversimplified approach does a disservice to this beneficial tools of activism. The purpose of protest songs in popular music may be to appeal to a targeted audience rather than generate mass appeal, this should not proclaim that they are ineffective, as there are many demonstrations of popular protest songs that were effective and made an impact on the activists. Protest songs are “‘editorials, instruments, and weapons of an alien ideology--all the more potent because of their innocuousness and general appeal’” (Berger Qtd. Rodnitzky 60). This general appeal seemed effective as songs like “Blowing in the Wind” produced mass appeal to a large audience crossing over into popular music due to Peter, Paul, and Mary’s cover version in 1963.

Denisoff’s claim that protest songs function as “reaffirmative” in nature is valid. Protest songs support a dissenting view to a social issue, and they back the claims of
those already in support. Along the way, they may also encourage outsiders to join in the movement. Eve of Destruction was released at a time when the nation was divided between the pro-war and the pro-peace sides, and many respondents in the study possibly did not support anti-war sentiment and found the song as an appeal to “communism” or “unpatriotic”. Also, the genre could have possibly played a factor, if students in the study were not fans of this type of music, they were more than likely to respond negatively to the song. Lastly, a few respondents did not feel that protest songs belonged on popular radio, and music should be for entertainment purposes only, but only 28% had this opinion. Furthermore, this response was conveyed by those identified as more “conservative” rather than “liberal” and protest music seemed to appeal more to the “liberal” population. These are significant factors. The music may convey the viewpoints of a small audience as opposed to a larger audience.

Denisoff states at the close of his “Top Forty” article, “The opinion formation function of protest songs on the Top Forty remains unsubstantiated with the burden of proof still in the hands of the advocates of "music is a weapon." As Pete Seeger observed in 1968: "No song I can sing will make Governor Wallace change his mind" (823). This illuminating statement is valid; however, it seems that it misses the true essence and benefits of what protest music does. Protest music’s purpose is not the same as a legislative proposal to government officials, instead, it is a tool that benefited the activists amid their struggles, and that is protest music’s true function and usefulness.

Researchers should not negate that protest music is a democratic and effective platform for activists. The goal of this paper and argument is best described by Bernice Johnson Reagon, one of the original members of the SNCC (Student Nonviolent
Coordinating Committee) Freedom Singers, who supports my assertion that the songs were changing, influencing, inspiring, and mobilizing the activist amidst their efforts. As Reagon states, "The music doesn't change governments. Some bureaucrat or some politician isn't going to be changed by some music he hears. But we can change people—individual people. The people can change governments" (Sanger Qtd. Seeger & Reiser, 193).

**Part Two: The Psychological and Political Dimensions of Protest Music**

*Psychological Dimensions of Protest Music*

Protest music is a useful device that can evoke a variety of emotions at the individual or group level, such as anger, sadness, and hope, and in addition to this, provide encouragement, stress relief, and motivation. Activists struggled through the political landscape that changed America forever and collectively benefited from the psychological benefits that protest music offered. Therefore, there are four elements that music encompassed to make an impact on the individual and/or activists’ groups either individually or shared. The four key elements are:

1. The music acted as an emotional outlet for an individual’s feelings they already held within such as anger, frustration, and grief.
2. The music evoked an emotional response by inspiring the listener to react to the viewpoint the music conveyed therefore evoking feelings such as empathy.
3. The music functioned as psychological restoration and encouragement for the protesters.
4. The music inspired the listener to carry out some type of action.

The first psychological element within protest music was that it exemplified an emotion already held within the individual such as anger, sadness, or grief, and the music was utilized as an emotional outlet to express those emotions (Sanger Qtd. Seeger & Reiser, 185). The music was cathartic as it inspired individuals to release suppressed emotions of anger, sadness, grief, and frustrations. Furthermore, at the group level, music confirmed others felt these same emotions and they were no longer isolated at the individual level, thus lessening the emotional burden as shared distress amongst brethren.

The second psychological element was that the protest music evoked an emotional response from its listeners, such as compassion and empathy for these suppressed groups. The lyrics were a powerful way to convey feelings about the plight of those affected, with the end goal of persuading and urging people to relate to or change their viewpoints. Empathy, for example, is the most prominent emotion that protest music triggered in listeners, as the songs drew awareness to an issue they may not have acknowledged, or grappled with, such as racism, discrimination. Furthermore, evoking an emotional response from the music can affect existing attitudes, and as a result, a new morality is built through this social community and connectedness elicited by the song (Schäfer et al. 6; Kizer 7).

The third psychological element is music functioned as psychological restoration and encouragement thereby changing one’s feelings about themselves and their self-esteem (Sanger 180). This viewpoint comes from social philosopher Richard Gregg’s theory perceiving the song functions as an “ego-enhancement” device for protesters as they searched for positivity in their identity and themselves amongst their cultural and
social hierarchy (Stewart 240). Thus, music could restore positive feelings within the individual through positive self-awareness. Self-awareness within the private realm helped listeners think about “who they are, who they would like to be, and how to cut their own path” (Schäfer et. al. 6). By the late 60s, the message of positive self-imagery resonated with strong and influential declarations of pride and self-esteem, demonstrated, in songs such as, “Say it Loud (I’m Black and I’m Proud), and “To Be Young Gifted and Black,” which exemplified cultural pride for African Americans.

The fourth psychological element demonstrates that music inspired protesters to carry out an action. The music offered encouragement, empowerment, and fervor during times of fear and anxiety. Singing the songs and listening to the music acted as a ‘calming agent’, a powerful fear managing device that aided in lessening their emotional anxiety, this is because music became a distracting device, an “anxiety avoidance” tool (Sanger 188; Schäfer et. al. 7). As a result, protesters were then energized to carry on and communicate their message through non-violent expression (Sanger 193).

Political Dimensions of Protest Music

Along with psychological dimensions within the music, political dimensions contained in the songs also functioned by effectively conveying the activists’ political messages. Protest music’s political purpose seeks to change current ideologies and cultural norms that are no longer agreed upon as the acceptable approach (Ziv Qtd. Peddie, 779). Protest songs help to express discontent or dissent that either suggests or proclaim change as essential, therein inspiring thought-provoking reflection amongst
individuals and groups well enough that mindsets and perspectives towards current conflicts of expression are changed (Kizer 4; Ziv 778). There were many issues that American’s were facing as the civil unrest of the turbulent 60s was echoed in the music either directly or inadvertently such as racism, and discrimination, as activists fought for social justice and social change.

There are four essential elements found in the songs that made the music politically valuable for individuals and groups. The four key elements are:

1. The music can bring attention to a current socio-political problem and challenge social standards.
2. The music can be utilized by activists to further their political agenda.
3. The music can convince the audience to take action to solve the current problem
4. The music can blame political figures for the socio-political problem(s).

The first element is that the music can bring attention to vital socio-political problems such as inequality and discrimination. Many of the protest songs of the 60s echoed the antagonism and frustration Americans had towards government and political powers that be as they called into question the social standards (Rosenstone 133; Ziv Qtd. Peddie and Street 781). These songs became expressive symbols effectively vocalizing inequality, racism, bigotry, and discrimination.

The second political element is that protest music could further the political agenda of activists. Political propaganda in music was not considered as aggressive as political speeches or pamphlets. Therefore, songwriters became the voice of their contemporaries, enabling activists to push their agenda in what is seen as nonaggressive.
Another point in conjunction with this element is that to further a political agenda effectively, many activists repurposed songs that suited their cause. Repurposed is defined as using something for a different purpose than what it was originally intended for ("repurpose") and in this instance, songs that were written as something such as a gospel hymn carrying a sacred message, was then repurposed to convey a different meaning or objective in conjunction with the political objectives of a particular movement. The political leaders of these protest movements either preserved the music and melody and then altered the lyrics to suit their cause, (Lynsky), or retained the lyrical content already within the song as the lyrics held meaning and effectively represented their issues, their struggle, and their feelings.

The third political element in protest music demonstrates that the current political climate is doing more harm than good. This is achieved by using examples from the past to convey claims of the calamity that might come further down the road; therefore, it was in the publics' best interest to change; this is defined as “deliberative rhetoric” (The VCG).

The fourth political element in protest music was it convinced the audience that political powers that be were to blame for the calamity that befell the nation. This approach is defined as epideictic rhetoric, also known as “demonstrative rhetoric” and “ceremonial discourse” (thoughtco.com), and this form of protest music can either praise or blame someone or something. Protest music used this type of rhetoric throughout the 60s and the music fostered activists’ contentions that blame should be placed on the status quo set by the powers that be (Kizer 6).
To demonstrate the benefits of the eight elements stated within the psychological and political dimensions of protest music, songs associated with Civil Rights Protest Movements will be evaluated to summarize how these psychological and political elements benefited activists.

Part Three: An Analysis of The Civil Rights Movement and The Music

The Civil Rights Movement and the Music

Protest music was not new when the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s were prevalent. For example, “Strange Fruit,” written in 1937 and performed by well-known Jazz Artist Billie Holiday in 1939, protested the lynching of African American males in the segregated south and is described by many scholars as one of the first significant protest songs of The Civil Rights Movement. However, historians view The “modern” Civil Rights Movement as beginning in the mid-1950s as demonstrations, rallies, and sit-ins emerged as a reckoning force of massive civil disobedience. The Civil Rights Movement of the 50s carried its momentum into the 60s and continued in its goal of addressing racial issues of inequality and proclaimed a right to humanity, peace, and civil liberties. Demonstrations for the sake of these injustices became instrumental and the music was a contributory component for activists because of its psychological and political benefits. The fervor for the usage of music was apparent in activist groups such as the SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) Freedom Singers, The SCLC (Southern Christian Leadership Conference), and was also utilized and encouraged by Civil Rights Activists Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Music was employed to further their
political agendas as part of their attempts of a nonviolent protest as well as utilized for emotional comfort and endurance.

The music was powerful in the African American community and this attribute is expressed by many scholars as a contributing factor of the African American tradition of song utilization. These traditions date back to African slavery in America, as slaves used music as a response to the conditions imposed by their bondage and the songs expressed this suppression (Sanger Qtd. Sanger 179). Additionally, songs were utilized in the daily life of a slave as they worked, during leisure, as well as in their aspirations for “a better life after slavery, whether that life was a spiritual afterlife or a temporal life after escape from slavery” (Sanger Qtd. Lovell 183). Importantly, from this tradition, the music captured their determination and belief as a people, to never give up on their beliefs that they could overcome slavery and the “limitations placed on them by White people” (Sanger, Qtd Sanger 183). During the struggle of Civil Rights, activists found that carrying on the tradition of music could be beneficial to the movement, in that music was a medium, particularly that of the Black churches, as the best way to achieve their goals (Sanger 183).

The psychological and political dimensions from the music of this movement captured the burdens of the distressing impact of racism African American’s experienced as they faced prejudice, violence, and even faced the chance of murder. Furthermore, they worked to obtain their rights as citizens to humanize their race and their rights to civil liberties afforded by their white counterparts.
The Psychological Dimensions and Benefits of The Music of The Civil Rights Movement

Amid The Civil Rights movement, activists addressed issues such as inequality and racism as they faced or endured police brutality, arrest during demonstrations, and murder. It was a frightening and frustrating time where activists felt several emotions such as fear, anger, and anxiety. For many activists, the struggle was long and arduous, bearing little fruit at times and through the music, they could sing and express years of suppressed hope, suffering, sadness, burdens, as well as joy, love, triumph, and gladness within their hearts (Sanger Qtd. Reagon, Carawan & Carawan 185).

Music acted as an emotional outlet for the civil rights advocates

Music’s usage as an emotional outlet was valuable for its listeners as well as the singer-songwriters as they too witnessed and endured many of the issues amidst the turbulence. The activists promoted music as a device that provided an emotional outlet for their excitement and fears, an outlet unavailable elsewhere (Sanger 184). Many activists of this movement reflected that singing aided in dismissing their feelings of fear and hatred and turned these negative feelings into positivity, (Sanger 191) as singing became an outlet to articulate the shared and intricate emotions of this social group (Sanger 185-6).

There were angry emotions such as Nina Simone’s “Mississippi Goddam,” a song filled with fury about the racial injustices happening in the south, particularly in Alabama and Mississippi. “Mississippi Goddam” was Nina Simone’s emotional response to the weariness that many American’s felt about the assassination of innocent lives; the
assassination of civil rights activist Medgar Evers in Mississippi to the murder of four children at the 16th Street Baptist church bombing in Alabama. For Simone, writing the song was her emotional outlet, her catharsis as she said she knew nothing about “killing” however, she knew how to play the piano and write music (Feldstein 100). Instead of “picking up a gun,” she sat down at the piano and composed a song to express her anger and frustration with the killings.

Expressing emotional turmoil amidst the turbulence and uncertainty of their welfare was essential. Emotional pain is felt in “Oh Freedom” categorized as a “freedom song” associated with the civil rights movement with performances by prominent singers such as Odetta and Joan Baez. The song expressed the feelings of the burdens of racism and hatred spewed across generations of physical and or mental slavery. The song offered hope that one day there will be racial freedom and equality from the proverbial shackles of inferiority, racial roadblocks, and barriers. The music offered an emotional outlet that protesters utilized to inspire feelings of hope, defiance, bravery, and determination to move forward. The song urged activists not to give in to fear, sadness, and despair, but to move forward towards freedom fearlessly. Liberating these emotions were crucial as courage was needed through the many demonstrations, marches, and sit-ins as they endured jail-ins, brutality, and bloodshed.

_The music evoked an emotional response_

The music evoked an emotional response in its listeners to feel a range of emotions such as empathy or anger. Empathy was an imperative reaction that protest music triggered in listeners, as the songs drew awareness to an issue they may not have
acknowledged, or grappled with, such as racism, discrimination. The end goal was to ensure that the song evoked an emotional response that helped to build a new morality through this social linkage (Schäfer et. al. 6; Kizer 7). For example, “Blowing in The Wind” was a song that evoked empathy and compassion within its listener. Bob Dylan called to question how long the journey must be for a man to be treated with humanity, particularly relevant to the African American male and his struggle for equality and humanity. The lyrical content though indirect, evoked images analogous to the civil rights acts of the 50s and 60s as protest marches tallied up miles of road traveled by African American males demanding the right to eliminate ideologies of racial inferiority. Dylan’s song expressed the views of an outsider looking in, where other outsiders could explore this viewpoint and evoke an emotion of compassion and empathize with the plight of African American males and their struggles for rights to humanity. Furthermore, this perspective was coming from a young white American male that possibly reflected the thoughts and feelings of many of his contemporaries. Through Dylan’s songs, other non-African Americans could reflect and find that they felt empathy for the plight of African American’s struggles, and the song successfully persuaded and urged people to relate to or change their perspectives.

Another song that evoked a response of empathy was Sam Cooke’s, “A Change Is Gonna Come.” The song expressed the lifelong struggles of discrimination and racism as hard burdens to bear, however, there was hope as he was self-assured that a change will come. Hearing these personal struggles within a song, so powerful and direct within the lyrics elicit several emotions such as empathy or compassion, stirring feeling from
anyone in America who too wanted to see “change” for the African American community and see an end to mistreatment, discrimination, and racism.

After Cooke’s untimely death, the verses in the song left listeners and scholars to interpret the song's content as real-life events, not just a summarization of discrimination and racism. For example, scholars have identified Cooke’s feelings regarding the events that took place on “Bloody Sunday,” which had occurred several months before the song's release, as the inspiration behind the verse where Cooke proclaims that he asked for help from his brother, but instead, his brother ended up “Kickin’ Cooke down to his knees. This interpretation seems valid as a representation of that event, as protesters struggled for racial equality and justice but instead, they found themselves as in the “Bloody Sunday” tragedy, assaulted by state troopers, “knocking many to the ground and beating them with nightsticks” (Politico.com; Cantwell). As news of this event spread across the American nation, “a national uproar occurred” (Politico.com) and a new unity among blacks and whites was exemplified by more integrated marches that began to occur. Political leaders at the highest level, such as President Johnson expressed the needs for change: “There is no issue of states’ rights or national rights. There is only the struggle for human rights. ... We have already waited 100 years and more, and the time for waiting is gone” (Politico.com).

Moreover, Cooke references at a more personal level the racism and discrimination he experienced. For example, one night, Cooke and his entourage were turned away from a “White’s Only” hotel. Cooke refused to leave and was arrested that night for disturbing the peace. When the story became news the next day, it outraged the African American community (Patch). Sam Cooke, along with several other artists, had
to face racism and Jim Crow laws as they toured through these segregated cities in the south. “I go to the movies, and I go downtown / Somebody keeps telling me, don’t hang around” (Cooke 10-12), which was subtle but direct. Those particular lyrics were omitted in its radio release and could only be heard by those who purchased the album (Freeland). Nevertheless, it outlined the racial prejudice and racism that Cooke witnessed and suffered.

With songs like “A Change Is Gonna Come,” the genre of soul music evolved as a vehicle of expression for the African-American community and is cited by many such as NPR, as one of the “most important songs of the civil rights era” (NPR, “Sam Cooke”). Although “Change” may have acted as a response to the horrid events that occurred several months prior, and acted as “reaffirmation” of these issues, the song evoked a powerful emotional response from its listeners, and soon became a song identified as an anthem of the Civil Rights Movement. “Change” embodied the sentiment that equality and justice for African Americans were “a long time coming,” however, through determination and perseverance they believed that, “A Change Is Gonna Come.”

The music offered psychological restoration and encouragement to activists

Restoration and encouragement resounded in African American music in the late 60s and early 70s, self-confidence and pride can be heard in James Brown’s, “Say It Loud (I’m Black and I’m Proud),” as the title professes, as well as throughout the call and response chorus of the children that participated in the song’s as they proclaimed, “I’m Black and I’m proud” (Brown 2). Brown encouraged African Americans to eradicate their feelings of inferiority and negativity within their race, and instead, they should be
proud to be African American regardless of their past struggles and to look positively towards their future and themselves.

Another song that embodied this message of “Black Pride” and encouragement was, “To Be Young, Gifted, and Black,” written by Nina Simone, which expressed to young African American’s that being African American was not something negative or something to feel ashamed of. This message of positivity was something the black community, particularly the youth needed to hear, and there was pride in being “black and beautiful,” and Simone worked to “capture that moment of joy in black identity” (King & Watson). This assertion is further claimed by singer-songwriter Meshell Ndegeocello. Ndegeocello released a tribute album to Simone in 2012 titled, *Pour une âme souveraine: A Dedication to Nina Simone*, and this album contained a cover version of “Young Gifted and Black.” As stated in the NPR article, “Nina Simone's 'Lovely, Precious Dream' For Black Children,” Ndegeocello expressed that while she was growing up, there was a necessity for this song, as Ndegeocello states, "It's the first time I heard those words said about young black people," she says. "You know, being of color, you did not feel that you were gifted — and especially if you're black " (King and Watson).

The music inspired the listener to carry out some type of action.

The music of The Civil Rights Movement inspired listeners to carry out some type of action. Activists of this movement have expressed throughout the years that the power of song was the appropriate tool to meet the needs of the movement and made the movement possible (Sanger 184). In many instances, the music was a device that
encouraged the activists to soldier on, as words of reassurance relayed through the song became influential. "Freedom songs" songs such as, “We Shall Overcome,” “We Shall Not Be Moved,” and “Keep Your Eyes on the Prize,”, for example, motivated the activists in the Civil Rights Movements. These songs were positive, inspirational, and encouraging. In an interview on NPR, Rutha Mar Harris, one of the Freedom Singers’ original members that performed at The March on Washington on August 28, 1963, talked about that day and the importance of the music. Harris stated, “There is no separation, and without the songs of the movement, personally, I believe there wouldn't have been a movement… we needed those songs to help us not to be fearful when we were doing marches or doing picket lines. And you needed a calming agent, and that is what those songs were for us” (Martin). The song lyrics inspired them to “not move” and stand their ground during their protests and distract them from the uncertainty of the danger that may await them.

Strength was found in unity. Individuals no longer were isolated and participation became a group effort (Denisoff, “Songs of Persuasion” 583). There was symbolism behind these songs as described by activists with songs such as “We Shall Overcome” where the song could hold different meanings at different times (Sanger Qtd. Seeger & Reiser, 185-6). Bernard LaFayette, a prominent civil rights activist, and organizer, described the music as a tool of hope and survival as he states, “We shall overcome”; sometimes you're singing about problems in the local community—"We shall overcome." But in the bus station, it was a prayer—a song of hope that we would survive and that even if we in that group did not survive, then we as a people would overcome. (Sanger Qtd. Seeger & Reiser 185-6).
Songs like “We Shall Not Be Moved,” and “Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around” were sung at the rallies and even when protesters were incarcerated due to these demonstrations. In unison they sang songs such as these as Dr. King proclaimed in his speech, “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop” the night before his death on April 3, 1968, he orates:

And we just went on before the dogs, and we would look at them, and we'd go on before the water hoses, and we would look at it, and we'd just go on singing "Over my head, I see freedom in the air." And then we would be thrown in the paddy wagons, and sometimes we were stacked in there like sardines in a can. And they would throw us in, and old Bull would say, "Take them off," and they did; and we would just go in the paddy wagon singing, "We Shall Overcome." And every now and then we'd get in the jail, and we'd see the jailers looking through the windows being moved by our prayers and being moved by our words and our songs. And there was a power there which Bull Connor couldn't adjust to, and so we ended up transforming Bull into a steer, and we won our struggle in Birmingham (King).

The songs were also cast as crucial in helping activists deal with the anger they felt toward their oppressors (Sanger 188). This sentiment was expressed by an activist, (identified as Heather) who was quoted in stating. “After we were attacked we'd come back to the church, and somehow always we'd come back bleeding, singing "I love everybody..." Then somebody would always stop, because it was hard to sing "I love Hoss Manucy" when he'd just beat us up, to say a little bit about what love really was. He's still a person with some degree of dignity in the sight of God, and we don't have to like him, but we have to love him. He's been damaged too. So we sing it, and the more we sing it, the more we grow in ability to love people who mistreat us so bad. (Sanger Qtd. Carawan & Carawan, 188).
The Political Dimensions and Benefits of the music of The Civil Rights Movement

Psychological dimensions within the music of the Civil Rights Movement benefited activists’ psychological well-being by offering inspiration, as they pushed legislative changes concerning civil rights for African Americans. The Civil Rights Movement sought to overturn segregation laws such as the Jim Crow laws that heavily affected southern states in America, ensure voting rights for African American’s, and prevent discrimination in such sectors as housing, education, and employment (Zunes and Laird). Political groups such as the National Association for the Advance of Colored People (NAACP) and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) advocated for peaceful protests such as boycotts to voice their petition for discrimination and inequality towards African Americans to cease (Zunes and Laird).

One distinguishing factor as addressed earlier in this paper has been the assessment of protest music in popular music by scholars such as R. Serge Denisoff. In studies conducted by Denisoff of his comparisons of civil rights versus popular music, he determined that what mobilized “freedom songs” and made them more effective tools of protest were how and why these songs were used. Denisoff demonstrates that “freedom songs” were used, “Outside legally sanctioned milieus. In the jails, in confrontations with southern sheriffs and police dogs, and at nonsanctioned, unlicensed marches, the freedom song was heard most often” and what gave mobility and usage to these songs were where they were expressed, the environmental and political factors that surrounded the protesters (Denisoff top forty 821). Therefore, music possibly contributed to why activists stressed the importance of unity in the music (821).
However, the utilization of popular music in protest music of civil rights is viewed by other scholars as effective as well, if not in the same fashion, in that popular music furthered the message of social issues to an audience triggering an emotional appeal as it speaks to that community of people. Furthermore, the music of the community, especially when mentioning the music of the late 60s, the utilization of genres such as R&B and soul amid the movement and within Black Power and Black Arts “can be considered an aesthetic and political convergence” (Heilbronner 698) as R&B was considered “a cultural weapon in the freedom struggle” (Heilbronner Qtd. Smethurst 699). This is demonstrated in many songs whether R&B, Soul, or Folk, that crossed over into popular music and appeal such as, “A Change is Gonna Come,” and “Say it Loud (I’m Black and I’m Proud),” and “Blowing In The Wind.”

The music brought attention to the current socio-political problems and challenged social standards.

Music brought awareness and challenged the social issues of the time. Singer-songwriters, for example, were inspired to write or sing about inequities they observed in the African American community. Bob Dylan, as one vital example, was in his early 20s when he came to prominence in the early 60s. Dylan represented a youthful and rebellious attitude that mirrored his contemporaries, as they protested “the establishment” and social norms of the time (Barkhorn Qtd. Wilentz). Dylan’s songs questioned inequities such as racism with his thought-provoking lyrics, leaving listeners to contemplate the immorality of racial injustice.
Bob Dylan’s “Blowing in The Wind” for example, became a Civil Rights anthem as it tackled a very multifaceted unanswered problem, racial inequality. The lyrics offered no answers instead the lyrics left humankind to contemplate and reflect solemnly. This summation brings to light condemnations discussed earlier in this paper by scholars that voiced limitations in protest music. However, the song illustrated a socio-political problem that appealed to white and black audiences with profound and subtle political undertones convincing listeners that discrimination had gone on far too long. The political undertones were not openly accusatory They were tactfully subtle towards the powers that be as Dylan questioned the current social state. Dylan asks, how long will it take for “some people”, to be “allowed to be free” (11-12). “Some people,” a reality that not all people were treated equally therefore enjoying the advantages of freedom. Dylan asked how long will it take before a man is entitled to respect, and how long do they have to protest to find it? Notably, the generalized lyrics did not state an exact racial category; therefore, it left its listeners to reflect on the current socio-political standards as something that could have affected any man.

“Blowing In The Wind,” was significant, it represented a songwriter, Bob Dylan, who in the folk idiom, spread a political message that crossed over into popular music and appeal, and was covered by many different musical artists from many genres of music. For example, Peter, Paul, and Mary’s version of “Blowing in The Wind” crossed over into popular music, where it gained substantial exposure. This is significant, as scholars claimed there were limitations with popular music tackling political issues, as they argued the songs may state a problem, however, no solution is offered, nor does the music mobilize its listeners. This dispute seems debatable. Singer-songwriter activists
such as Joan Baez and Pete Seeger epitomized individuals inspired to perform and write this kind of music and inspired them to become one of the many activists that supported Civil Rights for their fellow Americans, as they covered songs such as “Blowin’ In The Wind,” or performed freedom songs from the civil rights songbook.

Peter, Paul, and Mary, for example, who were a folk-rock group that covered “Blowing in The Wind” rose to prominence and performed the song for the thousands in attendance at the March on Washington in 1963. Video of the group singing the song at the March on Washington in 1963 captured integrated audience members holding hands up in the air and swaying side to side singing along to the song (Chakraborty). Mary Travers from the group reflected on that moment stating, “I had an epiphany looking out at those quarter of a million people, I truly believed at that moment that it was possible that human beings could join together to make a positive social change” (Chakraborty, 00:00:33 – 00:00:49). Travers statement is vital, as the solution to these problems actually lies within human beings coming together, voicing the need for social change. Contrary to the critics who question the power of this music to motivate people to a solution, protest music was an essential tool of the activists and their demand for solutions to these problems. “Blowin’ In Wind” embodied thought-provoking and persuasive lyrics coupled with simple music, thereby illuminating the words that asked questions in a non-threatening and non-accusatory manner and in this way supported the struggle of civil rights activists.
Music was used to further the political agenda of activists

Music furthered civil rights activists’ political agenda. The lyrical content in short and repetitive burst proclaimed injustices they fought to “overcome” in songs like “We Shall Overcome,” “We Shall Not Be Moved,” “Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around,” and “Oh Freedom.” The songs urged protesters to not let detractors “turn me around” as they sought “freedom” and for justice to prevail one day. The concept was straightforward and essential as music became their, “oral battlefield for conflicting social and political ideas” (Berger Qtd. Cooper 53). Berniece Reagon stated in an interview in 1988 on the radio program, Fresh Air, “We were really trying to change the structure of the local and state governments in the South that was organized by race. That was our target, and we really weren't thinking 50, 60 years into the future… (It was about) getting masses of African-Americans registered to vote, to actually change the political structure in the South” (Conan).

Many songs tied to the Civil Rights movement were hand-picked and re-purposed songs such as gospel hymns as civil rights advocates had to find ways to resonate with its community of activists as gospel music was significant and familiar in the African American community and culture (Denisoff, “Top Forty” 819). These songs remained within the sector of gospel music; however, they were repurposed to speak to the social issues that affected African Americans amidst the turmoil of the 60s. "We Shall Overcome" for example, became widely known as an effective song in marches and other situations of confrontation since it reaffirms the valor of the marchers and the honesty of the cause in its simple structure.
Mahalia Jackson lauded as “the soundtrack of the civil rights movement,” (Glinton) played an essential part starting in the 50s, as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. requested her to perform at many demonstrations such as The March on Washington in 1963, where she performed songs such as, “How I Got Over,” “We Shall Overcome,” and “We’ve Been Buked, and I’ve Been Scorned.” Having gospel artists such as Jackson perform was intentional by King. Requesting her to perform songs such as “Move On Up A Little Higher,” had pertinent qualities because the lyrics proclaimed, “I’m gonna walk and never get tired,” (Jackson 22), paralleling biblical scripture King would further advocate from “The Old Testament,” of “The Holy Bible”, particularly Moses’ struggle as he led the Israelites out of Egypt in “Exodus” (Tuason). King demonstrated these parallels and orated to the protesters that the long, arduous, and nonviolent struggle was a campaign for freedom and that they too will reap the rewards, “In the Promised Land” (Tuason Qtd. King). Utilizing traditions from the ‘Black Church’ propelled protesters as this well-known and established culture housed ideals of survival and liberation, instilling a vision for its parishioners as a haven that guaranteed freedom (Calhoun-Brown 169).

“We Shall Overcome,” held significant and useful characteristics and a variety of uses. “Overcome,” was a traditional spiritual, with a melody generally known “That it could be used in a variety of situations throughout both the labor and civil rights movements” (Berger Qtd. Horton 65). The song also was “emotionally charged” as a spiritual the activists were familiar with, therefore making it effective in a group setting as the song was widely used to “demonstrate commitment and solidarity among protesters at marches, strikes, and pickets” (Berger 65-66). These characteristics were helpful in that the listener may not know the interchangeable lyrics at first, however, they
do recognize the melody, and with simple and repetitive lyrical content added, the listener can then easily adapt to this change (Berger 65) and further support solidary in their cause.

*The music convinced the audience to take action to solve the current socio-political problem(s) and blamed political figures for these issues*

Deliberative and Epideictic rhetoric was heard in many protest songs. The music was effective in capturing these discrepancies such as the horrid acts of bombings, and the murder of activists and innocent victims amid the climate of social discourse. The songs promoted that change needed to happen, as change not happening soon enough resulted in the outcome of more bloodshed and deaths. Furthermore, if this was not rectified soon, only more bloodshed and death would soon follow. In its place, activists promoted a solution that offered a more positive outcome for the betterment of society. Lastly, many of the songs criticized political figures for the socio-political problems of the time.

Expression of these feelings was exhibited in songs such as the incensed “Mississippi Goddam” written by Nina Simone. “Mississippi Goddam” personified the ideologies of music as a beacon of truth, stressing the need for action and justice to rectify the evil deeds done against the innocent victims of the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing as well as the assassination of Medgar Evers. These acts were unwarranted cruel reminders of the burdens of hatred endured by African Americans and the slow progress of political powers that be bringing an end to these travesties. Simone expressed her lividity of the slow progress of justice for African Americans as they remained possible
victims of racism. “Mississippi’s got me so upset,” (Simone 1), Simone states as new reports of slain activists and innocent victims continue to come from the state of Mississippi along with Alabama. Simone states she cannot wait for “change” to come as progress is too slow and change needs to be swifter. Simone reiterates “Do it slow” as she voices that slow progress has resulted in more tragedy endured by the African American community and to continue at this pace, would produce more futile calamity and turmoil.

Conclusion of the Study

Summary of findings

To conclude, this paper has demonstrated that music benefited activists during The Civil Rights Movement because the songs contained powerful psychological and political dimensions that aided the activists in pursuing and supporting their socio-political goals. Psychologically, the music achieved certain emotional responses from its listeners. The music was an emotional outlet for activists, as well as a device that evoked an emotional response from its listeners such as empathy, anger, or sadness. Furthermore, music functioned as psychological restoration and encouragement for the protesters by instilling positive and encouraging feelings within themselves. Additionally, the music motivated listeners to carry out some type of action, as it motivated and lessened fear within protesters.

The political elements in protest music functioned by working to change current ideologies that were deemed problematic to society. The music brought attention to the current socio-political problems and challenged social standards. Moreover, songs were utilized by activists to further their political agenda, as well as to persuade the audience to
take action to solve the current problem. This approach emphasized that solving the current problem would avoid problems further down the line as well as safeguard the positive outcome they pursued. Additionally, protest music placed blame on political figures and demonstrated that socio-political problems that citizens grappled with were of their actions as well as inactions.

Overall, protest music acted as a bond of connectivity between individuals as they worked together in a shared goal. The music was part of the journey towards solutions, as the songs inspired, empowered, and unitized the people during their acts of protest amid The Civil Rights Movement.
Works Cited


Brown, James and Alfred Ellis. “Say It Loud – I’m Black and I’m Proud” Unichappell Music, Inc. o/b/o Dynatone Publishing Company


Ode, Kim. “One, two, three, four! What makes a protest song really soar? Protest songs have a long history, but the forms and the culture may be changing their purpose.” Star Tribune, 18 February 2017. https://www.startribune.com/one-two-three-four-what-makes-a-protest-song-really-soar/414016503/.


Seeger, Pete, Guy Carawan, Frank Hamilton, and Zilphia Horton. “We Shall Overcome”. Ludlow Music Inc. c/o the Richmond Organization
Simone, Nina. “Mississippi Goddam” W.B Music Corp.

Simone, Nina. “To Be Young, Gifted and Black” W.B Music Corp.


Tindley, Charles Albert. “We Shall Overcome” (Written in 1900). Public Domain

