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*Nationalism and the Public Sphere:
Debating the Limits of Patriotism in Popular Music
Since September 11th*



RHCS Honors Thesis by Mark Melvin

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*I pledge that I have neither given nor received any unauthorized assistance
in the completion of this work.*

Mark Melvin

Mark A. Melvin

"When I hear music I fear no danger. I am invulnerable. I see no foe."

– Henry David Thoreau

"There is nothing better than music for the upliftment of the soul."

– Inayat Khan

"I ask you, Mr. President, please let everybody everywhere sing a song all night long. Love songs, work songs, new hope songs. This will cure every soul in our jail, asylum, and sick in our hospital too. Try it and see, I know, I am a prophet singer."

– Woody Guthrie

At various historical moments, music has been a part of change and movement within social dynamics. From minstrels entertaining the courts of kings to plantation slaves singing spirituals of emancipation, the localities of music are diverse and ever shifting. Music is, and always has been, forming and reforming dynamic relationships with culture, art, and politics. With the emergence of mass media and mass distribution in the 20th century, music has become more than an art form that can only be experienced by a live audience; consequently, music has formed even more unique relationships within the cultural, artistic and political spheres. These new mass mediated forms of music, quite likely, have the greatest potential to construct pervasive meaning in our society due to their large audience and vivid imagery, which can be seen in mediums such as music videos, televised concerts, and on the internet.

Given the potential to create meaning in society, my concern regarding popular music in contemporary society revolves around a belief that music *was once* the greatest tool of social movement/resistance against dominant interests in America and abroad. Documentaries on the 1960's regularly show protests from the streets of Birmingham, Detroit, and Chicago. In cases of protest, the songs of Arlo Guthrie, Bob Dylan and the

Byrds, for example, are often the fiery anthems of disenfranchised Americans. In his book, The Sixties: Years of Hope Days of Rage, Todd Gitlin argues that in the 60's, "Music...and other forms of mass-distributed culture began speaking in their own ways directly to the young, challenging the affluent society's claims that its social arrangements were sufficient nourishment for the humans spirit."ⁱ In Gitlin's view, popular music not only spoke to, but also was a voice for those American's who felt marginalized by mainstream culture.

Many of the same musicians typically associated with challenging what Gitlin called "affluent society," such as the band Pink Floyd, can be still heard on radio stations around the U.S. Their music, however, has been appropriated for actions unintended when the songs were originally composed. Several months ago, in September 2001, my radio was tuned to Richmond Rock 106.9, as Pink Floyd's "Run Like Hell" rang through the speakers echoing the lyrics, "run, run, run, run."ⁱⁱ The hard-edge, melodic tune abruptly struck an awkward chord as President George W. Bush's voice, dubbed into the track, declared, "We will hunt down our enemy, we will smoke them from their hiding places, and we will send them on the run." Enter Pink Floyd, again echoing, "Run, run, run, run." The combination of the voice of America's top political figure with a song about a shallow young man whose past catches up to him as he takes advantage of a young lady in his car, created a disturbing marriage of America's war on terrorism and popular music (popular music being used synonymously with rock and roll).

The intersecting discourses of government action and popular music point to how an art form that has been associated with protest against government actions, is now being used as a tool to deliver the "patriotic" propaganda of a dominant (i.e., male, white, anglo, Christian, and middle/upper class) sociopolitical ideology. Johnny Carson spoke

about the dilemma of having rock music associated with the government when he stated “You can’t associate [rock] with any sort of disenfranchisement when its headquarters is the White House.”^{xiii} The difficulty then for musicians, music consumers and scholars, is understanding how the world of popular music is or has been, affiliated with political commitments (e.g., Americanism/patriotism) and how those political commitments are constructed in the mass media.

Thus, this paper is about investigating popular music texts and interpreting the production and depiction of mass mediated Americanism. In order to give my interpretation of the relationship between Americanism and popular music, I will begin with a reading of three texts. The first text is a remake of Marvin Gaye’s single, “What’s Going On.” The new version, which debuted on October 23rd, 2001 to benefit children with AIDS and the United Way 9-11 Fund, was performed by a wide variety of artists including Alicia Keys, P-Diddy, Fred Durst and Nelly Furtado. Next, I will move to a discussion of R. Kelly’s video, “World’s Greatest.” “World’s Greatest” was taken from the Interscope soundtrack of the Sony Pictures film, “Ali,” which opened Christmas day 2001. The film “Ali,” starring Will Smith, was made to celebrate the life of legendary boxer Muhammad Ali. The third text I will be examining is U2’s Super Bowl half time show performance that aired on February 3rd, 2002. U2, a band that has long been associated with social change, performed two songs during the Super Bowl including “It’s a Beautiful Day, and “Where the Streets Have No Name.”

In choosing the texts above, I did not have a rigid formula or selection criterion for including one text over another. Rather, as I watched television, I simply identified the texts that reached out at me. My method was simple; I always kept a blank VHS cassette in the VCR, when I saw a particular text that potentially related to patriotism, I

began to record that text. In each text I saw numerous images that I felt should be unpacked and discussed in terms of Americanism.

The Public Sphere of Communication

The three texts listed above provide an opportunity to examine the relationship between Americanism and popular music since 9-11. The intersection of government action and popular music can be interpreted through the examination of two queries containing question regarding the relationship between Americanism and popular music. The questions in each query make examining such a relationship crucial, particularly since the tragedy of 9-11. The first of the two queries regarding the intersection of politics and popular music revolves around the questions: Can popular music be a forum for the question of being American; and the corollary question, can music create an ideal meaning of how one should be an American. The answers to these two questions certainly are not black and white. At different locations and in different contexts music can certainly serve multiple purposes, functioning as a forum, or a tool for creating meaning.

To begin a discussion of these queries, I will first offer a more abstract picture of the ways popular music texts, as locations of Americanism, have the potential to function in the mass media. Philips offers insight into this question with his interpretation of the “public sphere” of communication.^{iv} According to Philips, rhetoric should ideally be positioned as an “instrument for understanding and improving human relations.”^v Following from this assumption, Philips argues that the public sphere is the exemplar of social rhetoric. The public sphere, according to Philips, “is the site where citizenry debates matters of common concern and discursively formulates core values.”^{vi} Thus, the

public sphere can be viewed as a space where individuals gather, literally or figuratively, to engage in reasoned debate and attempt to come to some subjective comprehension of public issues. As Philips keenly points out, however, this interpretation of the public sphere is the ideal, and not the reality of how the public sphere functions today.

Three main areas in which Philips bases his critique of the public sphere are openness, impartiality and intersubjectivity. In regards to openness, Philips points to the writing of Habermas and Goodnight and their presupposition that all individuals have open access to the public sphere of communication. Yet, citing the work of Stallybrass and White, Philips investigates the exclusionary character of the public sphere. "...The public sphere, while portrayed as an open arena for deliberation assumes strategies of decorum...and style...that create barriers to entry...The public sphere becomes merely another discursive site with its own forms of exclusion."^{vii} This dilemma exists primarily because of what Philips calls the "coffee house" culture. In other words, there are certain rules one must follow to engage in public discourse and debate. If one falls outside these rules, that individual is excluded. Thus, deviance from accepted social norms leads to exclusion from the public sphere.

Next, Philips engages Habermas's assertion that the public sphere must be impartial. Habermas argues that leaving behind personal motives is a prerequisite for participation in the public sphere. Leaving behind one's partiality, however, is an impossible and, moreover, restricting condition to place on those wishing to engage in social discourse. Eliminating partiality, in Philips' view, not only hinders one's understanding of resistance, but also serves to eliminate diversity.^{viii} To Philips, partiality is natural; and when one conforms to standards of impartiality, unique symbolic points of view are eliminated.

Finally, Philips contradicts the notion of intersubjectivity. "The public sphere attains consensus through common, intersubjective experience. [One way] of attaining an impersonal stance is through intersubjectivity...through [an intersubjective consensus]...humans develop their role identities."^{ix} Therefore, by recognizing one's subjective role in social discourse, one may dismiss their subjectivity and come to a consensus or common experience with other individuals in the public sphere. Yet I, along with Philips, believe that these views are discriminatory because they, in fact, limit the possibility of resistance. "Left with what is held as a common basis of deliberation and argumentation, resistant communities have little hope of overturning oppressive structures."^x Ultimately, limitations such as exclusion, impartiality and intersubjectivity have the pragmatic effect of pushing groups with an alternative point of view to the periphery of the public sphere of communication and social debate.

Keeping in mind the ideal verse actual natures of the public sphere, one can now revisit the first query dealing with the intersection of politics and popular music in regards to Americanism. Can popular music be a forum for the question of what it means to be American; and/or, can music actually create an ideal meaning of how one "should be" as an American. To place these questions within the context of popular music since 9-11 a more appropriate inquiry would be: Does popular music, acting as a public sphere since 9-11, represent an open and non-intersubjective arena for social discourse consisting of unique and partial view points, or does popular music as a public sphere discourage critical examination of patriotic/American discourse and delegitimize a wide variety of view points, or does popular music serve multiple functions? By examining the texts introduced earlier, the possible answers to these questions can emerge.

Americanism in Popular Music Texts

Marvin Gaye's song, "What's Going On," remade and released initially on MTV and later distributed on the radio and in record stores, features various artists from multiple genres in a collaborative effort to raise money for both the AIDS Foundation and the United Way 9-11 Fund.^{xi} The predominant colors featured in the video are black and white, which create somewhat of a colorblind effect. The set is simple and primarily comprised of black plastic drop cloths or large, dark open warehouse rooms. The video also features a strobe light effect that flashes erratically to give the feel of lightning. The camera angles often feature close-up shots of artists' faces and the blindfolds each artist is wearing.

As I was watching the "What's Goin' On" video, I immediately noticed that the artists are bound and blindfolded with black fabric, each with white letters that spell some form of social/economic/cultural group or descriptor. Some of the words included: radical, lower class, black, Asian, white, upper class, Christian, gay, poor, revolution, capitalist, Muslim, blue-collar, patriot and straight.. Throughout the video, the artists wrestle with their bindings and, in the end of the video, each is able to free him/herself from the cloths. The removal of the blindfolds and cloths seem to indicate that people can be blinded and bound by stereotypes, and the only way to free one's self from these stereotypes is to undo the binding and open your eyes.

One of the most emotionally charged and image-laden points in this video is when Fred Durst, lead singer of the alternative rock band Limp Bizkit, belts out the lyrics: "Can somebody tell me what's going on? We've got human beings using humans for a bomb."

Durst's line creates a direct indexical link¹ to the tragedy of 9-11 and gives new significance to the ideological struggle of freeing one's self from the incarceration of social bigotry.^{xii} For example, since 9-11, America's war on terrorism has been interpreted by some as a religious war and/or a war against Islam. Furthermore, given that the 9-11 terrorists were Arab Muslims, there has been and still is the potential for racial profiling based on being Arab or Muslim. Brummett points out that, "people are not only influenced not only through words [verbal texts] but also through the images they see [nonverbal texts]."^{xiii} Therefore, when the word "Muslim" is represented as a blinding stereotype and subsequently removed so the artist can see, the video can potentially heighten awareness of Arab and Muslim stereotypes in a time when such stereotypes are particularly volatile.

Yet, despite its connection with 9-11, the blindfolds and words written on them in the "What's Going On" video represent a set of signs the work together to create a meaning that is present in the world with or without the events of 9-11. In other words, freedom from the blinding and constraining effects of stereotypes have a broad meaning that is widely held regardless of particular circumstances. Thus, the meaning of the symbols in the video are diffuse, or not confined to or influenced by one source, thus, the video's role in a post 9-11 public sphere, as well as the relationship to Americanism, is difficult to identify because few direct references are made to 9-11 and patriotism.

In terms of Philip's view of partiality, the video certainly represents personal motives. For example, not every individual would advocate using the mass media to raise money for the AIDS Foundation. Opposition to raising money for AIDS could, in part,

¹ Brummett describes three ways in which symbols can act as signs. Symbols can act individually or in combination with one another and take three forms: 1)Indexical (association) 2)Iconic 3)Symbolic

come from individuals who attach a negative social stigma such as homosexuality, drug use, or promiscuity to the AIDS virus. Thus, one meaning of the video, supporting those with AIDS, is a diverse viewpoint with partiality in regards to how one views the AIDS virus.

With regard to intersubjectivity, however, there does seem to be a common way in which accepting diversity is represented in the video. Some of the original lyrics of the song, still used in the new version, include, “we’ve got to find a way, to bring some loving here today,” “we’ve got to have some understanding here today,” and “there’s too many of us crying/dying.” One message created by the lyrics is that in order to free yourself from bigotry, you must have love and understanding for those who are crying and/or dying. Because the video was carried on MTV, the song can potentially create a common role for consumers of MTV. For example, an implied role identity is that, by having the ability to watch this video, or simply by watching the video, one must express love and understanding to those in need. Yet, by empowering those watching MTV with love and understanding in a common role to free our eyes from stereotypes, so to speak, the video oversimplifies and limits the possibilities for battling stereotypes.

Furthermore, the video represents what Berlant calls the personalization of politics. The personalization of politics is where issues associated with an individual’s character overshadow places of critique that should be occupied with ideological struggles about life. Berlant argues that, “the appearance of squeaky cleanness (read: independently wealthy conjugal heterosexuality) is marked as an index of personal virtue.”^{xiv} In the video, the ideological struggle, as I mentioned earlier, is centered on breaking free from stereotypes. This struggle, however, is overshadowed by the

embodiment of “independently wealthy conjugal heterosexuality,” as represented through the artists.

Moreover, by being the spokespeople for noble causes, the fight against AIDS and supporting 9-11, the artists in “What’s Going On” become a representative index of personal virtue which can potentially serve two purposes. First, these artists may obtain a more favorable view from the general public, critics and music journalists, which likely can improve their image in the music industry. Second, such an improved image and favorable reviews due, in part, to their positive personal virtue, could help increase record sales ultimately making more money for the artist. Now that more time has passed between the tragedy of 9-11, as well as the release of “What’s Going On,” a good question to ask is which of these artists have continued advocating AIDS awareness and/or supported America’s response to 9-11? Furthermore, which artists have cashed in on their participation in “What’s Going On,” only to cease their advocacy of the issues represented in the video?

After examining “What’s Going On,” the connection between the text and Americanism becomes more evident. The video seems to speak more directly to MTV’s consumers, young affluent Americans, which are those who are not necessarily victimized by hate or stereotypes. For Americans who are not subject to such stereotypes, their responsibility to simply love and understand individuals of other cultures and struggle to help individuals free themselves from racism, hate and fear.

With the exception of one line of the song delivered by Fred Durst, the presence of the word Muslim and the fact that the video benefits the United Way 9-11 Fund, a relationship to Americanism and patriotism in the context of 9-11 is evident, but more subtle in “What’s Going On.” One probable reason for the subtle connection to 9-11 is

that the video, originally intended solely for AIDS victims, was co-opted by a new cause following the tragedy of 9-11. A more obvious relationship between popular music and Americanism/patriotism in light of 9-11 is the video, "World's Greatest," by R&B star R. Kelly.

The video "World's Greatest" was debuted on November 27th. "The World's Greatest," is, according to a spokesperson for Interscope Records, "a patriotic ballad driven by the beat of a marching drum," and is the first single from the soundtrack for the movie "Ali," celebrating the life and career of boxing legend, Muhammad Ali.^{xv} R. Kelly's video is the musical centerpiece for the highly anticipated film about the boxing legend.

"World's Greatest" is set in a boxing ring, the primary site of Ali's famous athletic career. In half of the video fans surround the boxing ring with R. Kelly, later accompanied by a full choir, located in the middle of the ring. Similar to "What's Going On," the video is primarily in black and white; however, unlike the previous text, the use of black and white does not construct the message of colorblindness. Rather, black and white are used to draw attention to the objects of the video that are in color, those colors being principally red, white and blue. Red cups in the audience, signs with the words "Knock Out," t-shirts worn by choir members with the word "Hero" in bold red type, and numerous American flags held by audience members are a few examples of the emphasis on the colors of America. R. Kelly himself is adorned with American flag boxing gloves, a long red silk robe, and a red, white and blue title belt.

Pertaining to the use of red, white and blue, a connection can be made to one of several characteristics of television as a medium described by: commodification. Brummett argues, "A commodity is a good, something that is bought and sold, something

with intrinsic value.” In addition, part of the logic of television is to create commodities through programming.^{xvi} In other words, television programming, including music videos, is supersaturated with advertising. Grossberg writes that, “any description of rock [popular music] must recognize that it is...commodity production and consumption.”^{xvii} Often, the advertisements blend into regular programming such that everything might be an advertisement for something. “The impact of commodification is that it creates an intense concern for commodities in the minds of those who use television a great deal.”^{xviii}

In the case of “World’s Greatest,” a rational line of thought would be to expect the video to create a commodity and advertise something. I would expect the commodity advertised in “World’s Greatest” would be the movie “Ali.” Clearly, if a film soundtrack is released to generate earnings for a film, then the soundtrack would somehow promote the film. The video, however, is hardly an advertisement for “Ali.” In the four minute video, Muhammad Ali is shown three times and never for more than three seconds, and no footage of the film is shown. Rather, the commodity given priority are the colors red, white and blue which I mentioned were virtually the only colors shown in the text. I am not assuming that “World’s Greatest” is causing people to rush out and purchase red, white and blue merchandise. Yet, one only has to look at the American flag magnet on the back of the SUV in front of them, or the countless American flag garments being worn since 9-11 to recognize that the colors red, white and blue are truly an American commodity. Thus, an arguable part of being American since 9-11 is exhibiting America’s colors, and “World’s Greatest” commodifies the red, white and blue aspect of being an American.

A second commodity within the text of “World’s Greatest” could also be R. Kelly himself. For example, by utilizing his music video to promote jingoism and create a red, white and blue commodity, R. Kelly may be seen as a patriot in his own right, and a ardent supporter of what President Bush calls, “the good fight.” In turn, by being affiliated with America’s good fight, R. Kelly could potentially be loved by many more music consumers, if not for his musical ability, simply for the fact that he is a champion for America’s war. Consequently, R. Kelly has possibly used the tragedy of 9-11 to commodify himself. The argument of self-commodification, for that matter, is one that can be made for each text in this work.

Nussbaum’s discussion of patriotism problematizes utilizing red, white and blue to represent justice and freedom. Nussbaum argues that when nationalist sentiments “substitute a colorful idol for the substantive universal values of justice and right” that nationalism, in this case Americanism, and ethnocentrism are not strangers but related. According to Nussbaum, such “emphasis on patriotic pride is...subversive of some of the worthy goals patriotism sets out to serve.”^{xix} Nussbaum’s goal is to describe connecting one’s self or a nation with the rest of the world through the use of patriotism or national pride. A crucial question underscoring the use of red, white and blue in “World’s Greatest” is how does such jingoistic use of America’s colors inhibits America from connecting to the rest of the world.

Another aspect of “World’s Greatest” worth examining is the use of termanistic screens, which potentially create an intersubjective view of who America’s heroes are as well as exclude certain groups from the distinguished title of an American hero. A termanistic screen is when certain vocabulary is used to allow consumers of mass media to “think certain things.”^{xx} Thus, a termanistic screen enables people to see the world in

certain ways. For example, when one uses the words money, wealth or material gain, one often thinks of professional success; money, in this example, is a terministic screen for achievement.

In "World's Greatest," the words "hero," "the world's greatest," "that little bit of hope," and "star up in the sky," are all combined with images of fire fighters, police agents, military officers, Christian ministers and service workers. The repetition of such vocabulary in conjunction with the images on the screen, lead to a mass mediated construction of who America's heroes are and/or should be. Rhetoric associated with being a hero becomes a terministic screen that enables individuals to hold a common [intersubjective] view that Americans who have directly joined America's battle against terrorism since 9-11 are our exemplar citizens and true patriots.

With regard to Philips' critique of openness, the question must be asked, who is being excluded from the video's construction of patriots and patriotism? Heroism, in "World's Greatest," is a status that has been reserved for individuals directly involved with the fight against terrorism. Throughout the video no homage is paid to victims of the 9-11 tragedy, likewise non-Americans and non-Christians are excluded from heroic representations. Furthermore, individuals advocating issues such as the preservation of Alaska's wilderness, or groups taking a critical stance against war are completely excluded from "World's Greatest." For example, Senator John Kerry (D-MA) who has threatened to filibuster "any bill that permits drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge."^{xxi} Thus, Senator Kerry can be viewed as a hero to America and its ecosystem, yet, is he and other like him are not constructed as heroes. My belief that he and others like him are heroes is because they personify American values such as freedom of expression freedom to publicly express discontent over social issue.

A final aspect of this video worth noting is an important irony within the text of “World’s Greatest.” As I mentioned earlier, the obvious hero of the video, Muhammad Ali, is only shown for a total of nine seconds in a four minute video. The irony lies in the fact that “World’s Greatest” is mass mediated jingoism. For example, the fire works display in the boxing ring, combined with red, white and blue, along with the choir, shout the words, “look at me, I’m an American!” Also, to be American, in “World’s Greatest” means sporting red, white and blue colors and viewing our police, ministers, military, and other service personnel as heroes. Yet, Muhammad Ali, again the true hero of the video, was imprisoned for dodging the draft and protesting America’s incident in Vietnam.^{xxii}

The third and final text in this essay is U2’s Super Bowl half time show. The beginning of the half time show was inconspicuous in relation to 9-11, and seemed like any other concert U2 would play in a stadium. The lights were enormous, as was the stage, which gave the performance less intimate feel. Bono, the lead singer of U2, entered the stage by walking through the crowd while singing, “Beautiful Day.” Once on stage, the camera often focused on Bono’s face or body, with some shots of the crowd and the other members of U2.

Following the energetic first song, the tone on stage became more solemn as Bono began to whisper into the microphone as crowd members within and around the large red heart stage began to waive red glow sticks, which made the heart double in size. The heart was clearly a sign of love, similar to “What’s Going On” and “World’s Greatest,” videos. As U2’s guitar’s player, The Edge, began to strum the first chords of, “Where the Streets Have No Name,” a tall white screen dropped from the dome ceiling providing a backdrop to the stage. Then, as Bono began to sing, “September 11th, 2001,” was projected in large glowing white letters on the screen. The date then began to rise,

followed by the names of the victims on board airplanes in the 9-11 tragedy, with the flight number preceding each list of names.

Through the imagery of the screen with the victims' names, the U2 performance added a new element to being American, which was not present in either of the first two texts. The new aspect of Americanism was remembering the victims. The theme of remembrance that U2 portrayed, apart from love, did appear to be the focus of the performance.

Approximately three minutes into "Where the Streets Have No Name," Bono was singing the chorus of the song which states, "We'll be building and burning down love." With these words, the large screen, which resembled a tower, fell from the ceiling in one fast motion. The sign of the screen falling resembled the World Trade Towers collapsing and created an iconic connection with the tragedy.

As the performance was drawing to a close, Bono began to repeat the words, "love, love, love," as he made the shape of a heart on his chest, reiterating the themes present in all texts that being American is loving one another and coming together to make our country a better place to live. Just before the half time show broke to a commercial break, Bono opened his coat to reveal an American flag as the lining of his jacket. The American flag again represented the colors red, white and blue as a way to display American pride, similar to the commodification of the colors in "World's Greatest." Simultaneously, a red, white and blue E-Trade logo appeared in the bottom left hand corner of the screen. E-Trade, an internet stock market broker and sponsor of the half time show, represents America's economy and our capitalist system.

When comparing the first two texts, one can draw three major similarities between them. In terms of their context, both "What's Going On," and "World's

Greatest,” were produced on a set without a live audience, each was distributed as a music video and both occurred within two and a half months after the events of 9-11. The third text, U2’s Super Bowl halftime show performance, was produced within a much different context. Grossberg notes that, “Understanding how rock functions requires that it continuously be placed back into its context to ask what were its conditions of possibility and what were the conditions constantly constraining its possibilities.”^{xxiii} Therefore, it is important to mention some of the significant contextual differences of the U2 text before analyzing the text.

First, U2’s performance was a live concert. Rather than being staged on a set with an opportunity to have numerous takes until the performance was perfect, U2 had only one chance to deliver the half time show which was played in front of over 60,000 live spectators and millions of individuals in the television audience. Second, the U2 performance was not intended for the music video format and has not since become a music video. Rather, the event was fashioned to supplement a sporting event. Thus, consumers of mass media do not have the opportunity to see this performance while casually watching television. Instead, television viewers have one primary opportunity, the Super Bowl, to witness this performance, which drew a much higher collective audience. Third, while the majority of performers in “What’s Going On,” as well as R. Kelly, are American, the members of U2 are Irish citizens. Finally, the performance took place nearly five months after 9-11 on February 3rd, 2002. Again returning to Grossberg’s critique of the music industry, that time can change the structures that determine a rock and roll event and the event’s meaning.

U2’s Irish ethnicity is an important contextual aspect to consider when viewing this performance. Furthermore, I continue to use the phrase “being American” when I

refer to U2. My reason for referring to U2's actions as representative of Americanism is because I believe, regardless of where an individual is from, an individual or group can still represent America and patriotism. In his "State of the Union" address from September 20th, 2001, President George W. Bush declared, "either you are with us, or you are with terrorists."^{xxiv} My read on that comment is, "either you support America's war, or you are America's enemy." Whether or not the members of U2 support the war is questionable. They did show, however, that they are "with us" and, thus, their actions can be characterized as Americanistic.

In addition, feelings of love, remembrance and coming together have been portrayed as acts of collective public citizenship. In other words, as Americans or supporters of America, we should collectively show love for the United States and for one another. The large heart, Bono's hand motions, and the words "love" were all symbols for those acts of collective citizenship. Warner has argued, in light of a tragedy, "media sensationalism around collective public citizenship acts is partly driven by a desire to increase ratings and to whet the consuming public's appetite for mass disaster." Drawing a 40.4 Nielsen rating figure, Super Bowl XXXVI and the U2 performance, on CBS, was the most-watched TV program during the past 12 months. By way of comparison, this year's Academy Awards telecast drew a preliminary overnight rating of 26.2.^{xxv}

The Question of Being American

After offering my read of the three texts above, I again pose the question: Does popular music, since 9-11, represent an open and non-intersubjective arena for social discourse consisting of unique and partial view points, or does popular music as a public sphere discourage critical examination of patriotic/American discourse and delegitimize counter view points?

A significant gray area exists in the question above. First, popular music does not have to fit into one category or another. Restricting popular music to one function in the public sphere restricts a discussion of the rich and dense possibilities that lay within the realm of social discourse. Second and most importantly, for what/whose notion of being American could popular music potentially be a public sphere? An investigation of the second of the two initial queries, what does it mean to be American, will help tie together possible relationships between popular music and Americanism.

A good place to begin such an analysis is with the President of the United States, George W. Bush. In his "State of the Union Address," given on September 20, 2001, President Bush offered a clear opinion on Americanism and what our duties are as Americans. President Bush used his address to focus on the tragedy of 9-11. President Bush began by offering Americans a clarion call to action when he stated, "Tonight we are a country awakened to danger and called to defend freedom," followed by the claim that together, "*we [will] bring our enemies to justice.*"^{xxvi} In these opening statements, Bush is giving a rallying cry that all Americans will band together to defeat our "enemies" (i.e. terrorists and those who harbor them). Yet, not only is Bush calling Americans together, he is also setting the tone for how Americans and the mass media should act in the months to come:

Bush's rhetoric of "defense," "enemies" and "justice" perhaps foreshadows America's impending use of military action in response to 9-11. On October 7th, 2001, United States military forces began bombing sites in Afghanistan. Through the use of the word "hero" in association with images of military personnel, "World's Greatest," airing after the attacks on Afghanistan commenced, constructs a supportive meaning regarding America's assault abroad. Granted, President Bush did not tell R. Kelly how to behave in his video. Nonetheless, a connection can be made to President Bush's address in that "World's Greatest" enables a construction of Americanism/patriotism that supports military attacks and enables viewing our armed forces as America's heros.

The next portion of Bush's speech specifically discusses Al Qaeda and the Taliban. Bush makes a comparison between Al Qaeda and the mafia and asserts that the Taliban is committing murder. Bush continues with the claim that both Al Qaeda and the Taliban are "the heirs of all the murderous ideologies of the 20th century." Following his indictment of the above organizations, Bush returns to the common struggle of Americans to defeat terrorism. Bush states that Al Qaeda and the Taliban hate our [Americans'] freedoms, and if you are not with us [the United States] in the fight for our freedom, "you are with terrorists."^{xxvii}

An important phrase to note is Bush's wrap up of this portion of the speech. Bush states that the fight against these organizations is "civilization's fight," and that, "the civilized world is rallying to America's side." An inductive leap leads to two implied conclusions embedded in Bush's use of the word "civilized." First, that because America is leading "civilization's fight" that America is the leader of civilization and the civilized. Second, that if any other nation wants to be civilized then they must follow America in the war against terrorism.

As was mentioned before, the band members of U2 are not American. Yet, through Bono's display of the American flag, the memorial made to the victims of 9-11 and Bono shouting the word "America," U2 can potentially represent the "civilized" individuals Bush spoke of that align themselves with America's war. U2, through their symbolic support of America in their performance, declared, "We are all American." Thus, in U2's performance, U2 did not necessarily represent a rock and roll voice for President Bush, but the constructed meaning was similar to that of Bush's. The meaning of being an America or supporting America is, regardless of nationality, we should all be one with the United States as civilized people.

In the final portion of his "State of the Union," Bush describes specifically what Americans should be doing as "civilized people." In a mural of requests Bush asks that Americans, "uphold the values of America...fight for our principles, and our first responsibility is to live by them [principles]." Bush continues by imploring Americans to "support the victims of the tragedy with your contributions...[be patient in our struggle]...[continue your participation and confidence] in the American economy...finally, please continue praying...for those in uniform and for our great country." Bush outlines these obligations with his assurance "of the rightness of our cause."^{xxviii}

In all three texts, connections can be made to the obligations President Bush offers individuals in the "State of the Union." First, in "What's Going On," we see a case where the music industry intersected with artists and the media as a vehicle for raising funds to support the victims of 9-11. Next in "World's Greatest," the depiction of police, fire, service and military persons serve as a salute to those Americans that President Bush urged us all to pray for. Finally, in the U2 half time performance, the presence of an "E-

Trade” logo, colored in red, white and blue, make a symbolic connection with supporting America’s economy via the stock market.

President Bush’s “State of the Union” is well-known example of one facet of the query over being American since 9-11. Furthermore, Bush sets the tone for this aspect of Americanism and, in turn, sets the tone for how a post 9-11 public sphere could possibly function. Yet, as Philips points out, one key to the ideal public sphere is unique partiality. In other words, to be a place that promotes critical social debate, popular music as a public sphere ideally will represent alternative views to those of President Bush (who arguably speaks for and to dominant political and social beliefs in America). Therefore, a question emerges concerning the second query: What alternate or counter views of being American have been expressed since 9-11?

One such alternate view is was reported in the October 15th, 2001 edition of the Richmond Times Dispatch, the New York Times News Service report on the Eugene V. Debs cooperative house on the campus of the University of Michigan. The article is the story of a group of students at the University of Michigan who believe Americans and President Bush should take greater caution and be more critical of the government’s response to 9-11.^{xxix} The students living in the Debs house reflect the quandary of the strong-willed, but small anti-war movement. Lara Jirmanus, a recent graduate of Harvard, expressed her view by making the distinction that the struggle over America’s reaction to the attacks of 9-11 is not pro-war America against anti-war America. “Who wants war? What we’re saying is that this isn’t going to work, to go and attack more people.” Fadi Kiblawi, a 20 year old Kuwait-born Palestinian, defended Jirmanus’s stance with his own view that, “Being American does not mean blindly supporting the American government. It means using your civil rights to say what you think America should be.”

The positions these two students construct create a clear clash with the discourse used by President Bush in his “State of the Union.” While on one hand, the top representative of American political power is asking all Americans to be civilized and join the war on terror, these students advocate a critical and introspective stance in regards to America’s current reaction to the 9-11 tragedy. The New York Times News Service stated, “Instead of bombing Afghanistan, these students suggest prosecuting Osama bin Laden and other international terrorism suspects through an international war tribunal.”^{xxx}

There is, however, discord over Americanism and the war among the students at the University of Michigan. Advocating one of the many aspects of the question of being American are individuals like those in the co-op house, speaking for new policy and alternatives to war. Yet for every co-op house there is a fraternity, religious organization or political group with an American flag hanging in the window. According to Peter Apel, a senior at the University of Michigan in charge of the “Young Americans for Freedom,” pro-war organizations such as his have become, what he claims to be, “the hub of *patriotism* on campus.” There is clear evidence in this example that the controversy between students favoring the view of Americanism as President Bush prescribes and students such as those in the co-op exists at the University of Michigan and likely campuses across America. Students and President Bush, though, are not the only individuals presenting alternative narratives on the notion of being American.

Senator Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.) and Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.), both staunch supporters of environmental rights, have debated Bush’s war policy and the negative effects policy has on the o-zone layer as well as the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska. The problem with the o-zone revolves around a little known

controversy over F-16 fighter fuel. In recent years the EPA has complained that F-16 fighter fuel is punching holes in the o-zone layer. Despite the introduction of a more environmentally friendly fuel, the EPA and Congress have now said that since the tragedy and as a result of 9-11 the need to increase the use of F-16s in U.S. airspace for national security, the o-zone issue is “not an issue worth worrying about,” according to the EPA. Furthermore, both Boxer and Daschle posit that conservative politicians, including Bush, are using the war as an excuse to push oiling drilling in protected Alaskan regions to prevent American dependence on foreign oil.^{xxxi} The ideas of the two senators also agreed in that America will have a hard time defending the preservation of protected Alaskan lands in light of 9-11.

Keeping in mind the opinion’s of President Bush, students at the University of Michigan, and Senators Boxer and Daschle, three of the myriad alternatives to the debate being American have been introduced to the United States public via the mass media. The importance of critically consuming mass media lies in reflecting on how the opposing views over Americanism are being portrayed in the popular music texts in this paper and in the mass media at large.

Thinking Critically About Popular Music in Mass Media

In this paper I have accomplished three key objectives. First, my goal was to introduce readers to the space of the public sphere and introduce three popular music texts along with three alternative views of Americanism in order to create an argument for how popular music functions in the public sphere since 9-11. I have pointed out issues of openness and exclusion, as well as partiality. In addition, all three texts have been introduced, clear connections can be made among the texts. The themes of love and coming together are a common intersubjective view of being American that is constructed in these texts.

Furthermore, while I have made connections between President Bush's view of Americanism and the texts, I was unable to draw connections between the texts and the views of the University of Michigan Students and the Senators advocating the protection of the environment. I am drawn back to my initial claim that music was once the greatest tool for resisting dominant beliefs in society. In my opinion, for the world of popular music to ever function as an ideal public sphere, resistance to dominant beliefs should be represented.

My second goal was to allow my audience to think more critically about popular music and the function of popular music in the mass media of creating and representing meanings of Americanism since 9-11. I offered a read of the Marvin Gaye, R. Kelly, and U2 texts that showed a lack of resistance and alternative view points of being American. Lawrence Grossberg points out the importance of the issue of resistance in popular music arguing, "Whether or not [rock] has become [part of dominant culture], it does seem that rock is losing its power to encapsulate and articulate resistance and opposition."^{xxxii} He argues further that if popular music has formed a relationship with a dominant

sociopolitical sphere, there is a potential that it will become a "rich and powerful manipulative, having all the wrong politics."^{xxxiii} Thus, I argue that consumers of mass media should question popular music vis-à-vis being American, in order to resist potentially obtrusive and dangerous constructions of Americanism and unquestioning patriotism.

My third objective was to not tell the audience what to think. Rather, I hoped to introduce the audience to texts and examine potential questions that could be asked of each text. After presenting aspects of each text in terms of potential problems, I aimed to pose questions and leave certain issues open ended in order to allow the audience to draw their own conclusions from the texts in this paper, as well as other they may experience after reading this paper.

Clearly, there are countless questions that can be explored from here. The project of experiencing the relationship between Americanism and popular music is never ending and the relationship is multi-faceted. Granted, I presented a facet of Americanism that was established by President Bush and the three texts in this paper. But, only recently has popular music represented the vast array of opinions per being since 9-11. In the April 11th, 2002 issue of Rolling Stone, author Paul Alexander discusses John Kerry and his discontent with President Bush and his 9-11 policy. Senator Kerry actually calls President Bush a "false patriot" in light of his attempts to open protected lands in Alaska to drilling. Furthermore, on Bush's war Senator Kerry comments, "I would have made some different choices."^{xxxiv}

To me, the bottom line of this paper, and the question of Americanism in popular music, particularly since 9-11, is to always question how meaning is being created or delivered to you, the consumer of mass media. In consuming mass media always remain

critical and question the images you see within texts. Ask questions such as who is being excluded from a text? What alternative views are available? What is this text trying to sell me? Finally, seek out those texts that do present truly alternate and unique views within popular music and the mass media. By following these practices, consumers of mass media will not only increase their understanding of issues such as being American, but also increase the potential that popular music will function as an ideal public sphere in which rich and meaningful social discourse can occur.

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