User-Generated Campaign Music and the 2012 U.S. Presidential Election

MICHAEL SAFFLE

Introduction: YouTube and American Politics

On the evening of November 6, 2012, Diane Sawyer of ABC News invited a handful of American citizens who had voted earlier that day to tell the network's national television audience about their "very own" election soundtracks (see Screen Captures 1 and 2).¹ The songs those citizens identified and partially sang—some of them (citizens and songs) more playful(ly) than others—included "The Star-spangled Banner," James Brown's "I Feel Good," Shorty Long's "Devil in the Blue Dress,"² Marvin Gaye's "Let's Get It On," Bruce Springsteen's "Born in the U.S.A.," and "God Bless America." Sawyer's election-night feature story was created to amuse rather than inform: a diversion from the more serious business of tabulating votes and anticipating concession speeches. Nevertheless, her story referenced an important aspect of a vigorous and even viciously fought presidential campaign: that aspect was music.

Screen Capture 1: Diane Sawyer on *ABC News*, November 6, 2012.

¹ ABC News, "2012 Election: Music Americans Thought About While Voting," YouTube video, November 6, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k612wv59Og0>. Unless otherwise indicated, every URL identified in the present article was accessed on April 25, 2013. Titles for most of the YouTube clips identified below appear in the text, not in the notes.

² Co-written with William "Mickey" Stevenson and also known as "Devil in a Blue Dress."

Screen Capture 2: After singing a phrase from “Devil with the Blue Dress,” the woman interviewed observes: “When I walked in there I saw all this red,” almost certainly a reference to Democratic blue and Republican red.

Increasingly, Americans want to watch as well as listen to their very own election soundtracks. What’s more, they want to (re)create election music of their own. According to Dewey Clayton, Barack Obama’s 2008 presidential campaign inspired “more artists to create unsolicited music and music videos than any other candidate in American political history.”³ This phenomenon—that of “unsolicited,” user-generated musical posts to websites—has increasingly characterized the post-millennial mediascape as a viable means of political participation, and YouTube emerged during the last two elections as the chosen platform for audiovisual posts of almost every kind.⁴ By November 2008 YouTube had itself become so influential that *Newsweek* dubbed it “the most important political venue” of that election year.⁵

In addition to creating original campaign compositions and distributing them online, new-media users have produced parodies of existing music, covered familiar songs, and created mashups of materials drawn from a variety of audiovisual sources. One of the best-known online election songs, the “Yes We Can” mashup by will.i.am, arguably helped Obama defeat John McCain in November 2008. By April 2013 “Yes We Can” had been watched some 27 million times.⁶ Nor did 2008 represent the pinnacle of user-generated political influence. “Barack Obama vs Mitt Romney: Epic Rap Battles Of History, Season 2”—one of several clips discussed below—received some 64 million hits during the 2012 presidential campaign.⁷

³ Dewey M. Clayton, *The Presidential Campaign of Barack Obama: A Critical Analysis of a Racially Transcendent Strategy* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 144.

⁴ YouTube was officially activated on February 15, 2005; by 2006, according to *USA Today*, nearly 20 million people had visited it. See Caroline Heldman, “YouTube Nation.” YouTube video. No posting date available. <https://robertoigarza.files.wordpress.com/2009/04/art-youtube-nation-heldman-2008.pdf>. Accessed August 15, 2015.

⁵ Jessica Ramirez, “The YouTube Election,” *Newsweek*, November 9, 2008, <http://www.newsweek.com/youtube-election-85069?from=rss>. Accessed August 15, 2015.

⁶ “Yes We Can – Barack Obama Music Video,” YouTube video, February 2, 2008, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jjXyqcx-mYY>. Prior to the 2008 election, however, “Yes We Can” had been watched “only” 15 million times; see Clayton, *Presidential Campaign*, 144.

⁷ “Barack Obama vs Mitt Romney. Epic Rap Battles of History, Season 2.” YouTube video, October 15, 2012, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dX_1B0w7Hzc.

Practicing politicians as well as political and social theorists have started paying attention to music and its modes of public influence. John Street, for example, recently challenged those who would “reduce the politics of music to words and lyrics.”⁸ For Street, musical genres and styles are extremely important; so are the audiences associated with them. What, he asks, “does it mean to call a sound or rhythm or melody ‘conservative?’”⁹ (What, for that matter, we might reply, does “conservative” itself mean?) Yet even Street, who evaluates a great many forms of politicized musical expression from a great many critical perspectives—including those of Theodor Adorno, Serge Denisoff, Simon Frith, Jürgen Habermas, Dave Liang, Greil Marcus, Friedrich Nietzsche, Plato, and Roger Scruton—pays absolutely no attention to YouTube. Street certainly does not “overlook culture generally and music particularly,” as he complains many political scientists continue to do,¹⁰ but he has overlooked both the Internet as a medium of creative expression, and user-generated campaign music as a fascinating new political phenomenon.

Other scholars have discussed digitalized sources of political information but ignored music.¹¹ The contributors to at least one collection of essays refused, for example, to consider musicalized YouTube campaign clips among the music videos they examine in considerable detail.¹² Contributors to a second anthology considered the role of YouTube and TV advertising during the 2008 presidential campaign, but they scarcely mentioned music.¹³ One especially important point overlooked in these publications is the rise of user-generated political “advertising.” Certainly, musicalized clips that foreground political messages must be considered advertisements of one sort or another, even if candidates do not solicit or pay for them.

My principal purpose in writing the present article is to identify and describe several different styles and “sizes” of user-generated YouTube posts that foreground music *and* politics. In the virtual pages that follow I examine nine quite different online clips more or less directly associated with the 2012 U.S. presidential election. With one exception, these clips were posted to YouTube between February and November 2012. With the contents of these and a few other clips in mind, I suggest preliminary answers to these questions: (A) How do different kinds of politicized musical posts “work” in musical as well as political terms?; and (B) What similarities and differences exist between so-called “music videos” and politicized, user-generated YouTube clips that incorporate actual musical performances?

Question B is mostly addressed in the present article’s concluding pages. In attempting to answer question A, I encountered two problems. The first is that I cannot possibly discuss in adequate detail such important and closely related musical issues as “audience,” “authenticity,” “genre,” and “style.” However, I do mention these issues in terms of the clips I consider below. Second, attempting to place all nine clips into a smaller number of distinct and meaningful categories is difficult. It seems unnecessary to mention that some clips support Romney, some Obama, and some third-party candidates. Nor do distinct groups

⁸ John Street, *Music and Politics* (Malden, MA and Cambridge: Polity, 2012), 42.

⁹ Ibid, 153.

¹⁰ Ibid, 174.

¹¹ As one example among many, see Travis N. Ridout, Erika Franklin Fowler, and John Branstetter, “Political Advertising in the 21st Century: The Influence of the YouTube Ad,” paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, D.C., September 2–5, 2010. http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1642853. Accessed August 15, 2015.

¹² See *Rewind, Play, Fast Forward: The Past, Present, and Future of the Music Video*, ed. Henry Keator and Thorsten Wübbena (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2010). Similarities and differences between user-generated YouTube posts and traditional music videos are discussed at the end of the present article.

¹³ See Ann Crigler et al., “YouTube and TV Advertising Campaigns: Obama versus McCain in 2008,” in *iPolitics: Citizens, Elections, and Governing in the New Media Era*, ed. Richard L. Fox and Jennifer M. Ramos (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 103–124.

of YouTube clips employ their own kinds of materials associated with their own political messages. Clips posted on behalf of Romney and Paul appear more often to employ patriotic icons: flags, eagles, and so on. Thus, “The Best Man for the Job: Ron Paul!” presents Paul himself in front of an American flag. In “Barack Obama vs. Mitt Romney,” however, images of both candidates share the virtual spotlight with Abraham Lincoln and the eagle that carries him off. (The actor playing Romney does carry a flag for a few moments, but the message of the clip seems to be that flag-carrying may be an empty gesture.)

A method widely employed in online election clips of various kinds is *bricolage*. Defined decades ago by anthropologist and cultural historian Claude Lévi-Strauss as “the reworking of pre-existent material by using non-professional tools,”¹⁴ *bricolage* is associated with many—but not all—of the clips discussed below. The two “Douche and Turd” clips described below are reworked almost entirely from pre-existing TV material, but “They’ll Do Anything” seems at once non-professional and entirely self-made. “Obama! A Modern U.S. President,” on the other hand, employs *bricolage* within a highly professional and in many respects original production. For these reasons each YouTube clip is discussed more or less separately from every other.

Authenticity and “They’ll Do Anything”

Citizens upset by deceitful presidential candidates (or by other politicians, for that matter) may enjoy musicalized YouTube clips that question integrity and trustworthiness as aspects of the electoral process. Here the crucial musical issue would seem to be *authenticity*. The word “authentic” is difficult to define, because its meaning shifts from context to context. With considerable skill, musicologist Richard Peterson has proposed six culturally significant definitions of that concept. For Peterson, what is “authentic” is: (a) *real* rather than simulated; (b) *genuine* rather than faked; (c) *original* rather than copied; (d) *well-made* rather than kitschy or tasteless; (e) *unchanged* rather than altered; or (f) “*credible in current context*.”¹⁵ Of these definitions, the last is perhaps the most important where user-generated YouTube campaign music is concerned. Most of us, for instance, cannot easily determine whether a given candidate’s playlist is his own original compilation or a fake produced and publicized by his associates. What we can determine is whether someone else’s musical choices—genuine or faked, antique or current—seem credible, and whether they match our own.

Country music, the field Peterson has examined, is often considered “authentic” insofar as its origins, performers, and certain of its stylistic gestures are concerned. This is especially true of old-time or traditional, folk-like forms associated with the Appalachians as a geo-political region, or with African Americans as an influential ethnic minority. Because the Carter Family, Jimmie Rodgers, and Delta blues seem less commercialized than the more explicitly commodified products of the Nashville music machine, they possess a certain old-time appeal. Certainly they are “still being carried on today” in conjunction with political protests.¹⁶ An “ordinary” man or woman, black or white, singing a simple, home-made song in an untrained, regionally accented voice and accompanying him- or herself on an unamplified guitar or banjo may seem more forthright, trustworthy, and “American” than a symphony orchestra, a jazz band, or Bob

¹⁴ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 19.

¹⁵ Richard Peterson, *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 206-09. Italics added.

¹⁶ *Wikipedia*, s.v. “Music and Politics,” last modified May 3, 2015, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Music_and_politics. Exceptions exist, but today’s blues songs and singers more often seem “resigned to fate” [ibid].

Dylan after he “went electric” and left his “roots” behind him. For many listeners, even commercialized country music seems more “sincere”—which is to say, credible in their own cultural contexts—than anything “arty” or “refined.”

A good example of a recent politicized YouTube post that embodies most of these musical attitudes and tropes is “They’ll Do Anything” by Michael McRae (see Screen Capture 3).¹⁷ Obama’s first-term election intensified the split between so-called conservatives and liberals, and by 2012 a considerable number of voters were questioning the trustworthiness and decency of both parties’ presidential candidates. McRae’s post also reminds us that opposition to politics of any and every kind has been a preoccupation of many Americans for decades. His YouTube page asks us to remember Will Rogers’ response “when asked if he would consider running for public office? Rogers said ‘No. It would ruin me for honest work.’”¹⁸

Screen Capture 3: Michael McRae launches into “They’ll Do Anything.”

The lyrics, music, and audiovisual style of “They’ll Do Anything” exemplify political cynicism (or, some might say, realism) as well as folk-like “authenticity.” Using modest equipment—a fixed camera, a microphone, and an acoustic guitar—McRae performed and recorded his own song in what appears to have been his own basement or recreation room.¹⁹ Two intriguing touches make his clip especially appealing to disenchanted YouTube users. First, he introduces his song by referencing what, at the time, was highly controversial material: the sound of a TV news announcer reporting the Supreme Court’s decision on June 28, 2012, to endorse the 2010 “Obamacare” healthcare bill. (According to McRae’s YouTube post, “They’ll Do Anything” was composed just two days later.) Second, McRae’s clip incorporates his song’s lyrics in the form of subtitles, including lyrics he rejects at one point to emphasize

¹⁷ Michael MacRae, “They’ll Do Anything – Election Song 2012.” YouTube video, June 30, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kITdzGP3O1c>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ In a note appended to his YouTube post, McRae identifies his place of residence as Nashville and reports only that it was “written and recorded at Home” [ibid].

his distrust of “politic” speech. On screen the words we see are “Yes, we are free / to elect these fine ladies and gentlemen.” What we hear McRae sing, however, is “Yes, we are free / to elect these idiots” (see Screen Capture 4). This audiovisual device casts doubt on the ways politicians express themselves, and it represents one of many devices YouTube users employ when they create and post their musicalized political opinions online.

Screen Capture 4: Compare “fine Ladies and Gentlemen” with McRae’s “idiots”: the one printed, the other sung.

Third-Party Candidates: “The Best Man for the Job” and “Gary Johnson 2012”

For most Americans the 2012 election was a two-party race; third parties seemed irrelevant. The facts, however, are more complex. First, several individuals campaigned for the Republican Party’s nomination, including Michele Bachmann, Newt Gingrich, Fred Karger, Ron Paul, and Rick Santorum, and each of them had loyal supporters. Second, at least five “third parties”—the Constitution, Green, Justice, and Libertarian parties as well as Americans Elect—nominated presidential candidates of their own. According to national guidelines, every one of those parties’ candidates was eligible to receive as many as 270 electoral votes.²⁰ Of Republican and third-party contenders, Ron Paul and Gary Johnson—the latter the 2012 Libertarian presidential candidate—received the most online attention.²¹ Paul earned 190 votes at the Republican National Convention in Tampa, Florida, while Johnson earned 1% of the popular vote nation-wide, 3% of the vote in Montana, and 4% in New Mexico, his home state.²²

²⁰ Seventeen other parties also nominated presidential candidates, many of them without hope of electoral votes. For additional information about these parties and candidates, see Wikipedia s.v. “United States Third Party and Independent Presidential Candidates,” last modified July 4, 2015, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_third_party_and_independent_presidential_candidates_2012. Accessed August 15, 2015.

²¹ Other candidates also received online user-generated support. Bachman, for example—together with Sarah Palin, another if less successful Republican contender—was honored with a quasi-classical musical clip: DC Douglas, “A Sarah Palin/Michele Bachman Ticket 2012,” Funny or Die video, April 5, 2011, <http://www.funnyordie.com/videos/31776578c2/a-sarah-palin-michele-bachman-ticket-2012-dc-douglas-tweak>.

²² According to “U.S. President – National Overview,” no posting date,

Gary Johnson, Ron Paul, and their parties inspired several user-generated YouTube music clips. One Paul-themed example is “The Best Man for the Job: Ron Paul!” by Anthony McKeon.²³ McKeon’s clip combines hand-held-camera shots of a Ron Paul rally in Washington, D.C., with a statement by Paul himself, excerpts from TV programs in which the candidate participated, and scenes of McKeon and his musical collaborators singing and playing the “Best Man” song (see Screen Captures 5, 6, and 7). Supported by a small backup vocal group as well as a trombonist, tuba player, and percussionist, McKeon performs much of the time by himself while standing in front of a large American flag mounted on a recording studio wall (Screen Capture 7).

Screen Capture 5: Ron Paul on camera: to change America “you’d have to have music.”

Screen Capture 6: Footage of Ron Paul on PBS, used by McKeon in “The Best Man for the Job: Ron Paul!”

<http://www.boston.com/news/special/politics/2012/general/us-president-election-results-2012.html>.

²³ Anthony McKeon, “the Best Man for the Job: RON PAUL!! Anthony McKeon USA Election Song (2012),” February 24, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bIh2MNQSpis>.

Screen Capture 7: McKeon recording his “Best Man” song in front of an American flag.

According to his personal YouTube page, McKean

came across Ron Paul via the internet, and as a result he felt compelled to do something, hence this video clip. “Ron Paul has always been treated unkindly by the mass media. This inspired me to do a lot of research on his ideology and philosophy. As I got deeper into the man, I realised that it did not matter if he was from the left or the right; his major ideas reflect how I’ve always felt – stop the war machine, decriminalise drugs, freedom and liberty for all.”²⁴

McKeon’s lyrics don’t mention music, but his candidate does. Near the beginning of “Best Man,” Paul himself says that transforming American politics requires two things: “young people would have to be involved, and you’d have to have music.” McKeon takes both requirements to heart. Although his clip itself is carefully (i.e., professionally) put together, the musical performance and performers it features seem spontaneous and sincere. Casually dressed and mostly youthful, McKeon’s musicians appear to be having a good time, and the acoustic (rather than electrically amplified) sounds they produce contribute to a vernacular vibe.²⁵

In 1988 Ron Paul was the Libertarian Party’s candidate for president, but Paul and Gary Johnson are quite different individuals today. The user-generated YouTube clips supporting their failed 2012 candidacies are also quite different. “JVINCE” (a.k.a. Justin Vincent), a self-proclaimed “independent musician,” uses rap lyrics supported by an energetic mechanical rhythm track to make a great many political points in just two and a half minutes.²⁶ At the beginning of “JVINCE – Gary Johnson 2012,” we hear Johnson himself state that he isn’t a quitter, has climbed Mt. Everest (see Screen Capture 8), and

²⁴ Formerly available at <https://www.youtube.com/user/anthonymckean/featured>. The British spellings of “realize” and “decriminalize” are McKeon’s own. Apparently, too, he quotes himself after referring to himself as “Anthony” and “he” at the beginning of the passage in question.

²⁵ See H. Wiley Hitchcock, *Music in the United States*, 3rd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1988). Hitchcock contrasts “vernacular” or everyday, accessible, and even folk-like musical idioms with the “cultivated” styles—symphonies, string quartets, and so on—traditionally associated with wealthier and better-educated audiences.

²⁶ JVINCEMUSIC, “JVINCE – Gary Johnson 2012.” YouTube video, September 17, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8scZJVhJdGo>.

“Take this to the bank: I would die!”²⁷ Unlike McRae’s and McKeon’s gentler and more seemingly spontaneous musical performances, JVINCE’s song is presented entirely as a soundtrack; the composer never appears as a musician in his clip (although it contains a single shot of his face). Whether he recorded the music himself is moot, but the song itself does not strive for the same kind of “authenticity” apparent in either “They’ll Do Anything” or, as we shall see below, in Sylvia Mejia’s “Re election [*sic*] Support Song for Obama 2012.”

Screen Capture 8: A shot of Mt. Everest near the beginning of JVINCE’s Gary Johnson clip.

Screen Capture 9: The American eagle and flag as illustrations for the words “Vote for freedom! Vote for Gary Johnson!”

²⁷ Johnson’s comments, which refer to the sincerity of his political convictions, seems to have been adapted (and slightly altered) from his May 2012 Libertarian Party Convention acceptance speech; see Mike Riggs, “Gary Johnson Just Gave the Best Speech of his Presidential Campaign,” May 5, 2012, <http://reason.com/blog/2012/05/05/gary-johnson-just-gave-the-best-speech-o>. In JVINCE’s clip, however, its meaning is ambiguous.

Using a technique called “the Burns effect” or “burnsing” (after television producer-director Ken Burns, who employed it in his 1990 *Civil War* TV documentary series), JVINCE or his engineers pan relentlessly across a rapidly changing succession of mostly pre-existing stills to simulate an unrelenting sense of filmic motion. By drawing upon photographs, poster-like portraits, and large white letters on black backgrounds—the last spell out “YOU / ARE / LIB / ER / TAR / I / AN” eight times, alternating at the end of each repetition with the image of a stylized eagle superimposed upon an American flag (see Screen Capture 9)—“Johnson 2012” exemplifies how a thoroughly professional show can be assembled with little or nothing more than laptop software, a collection of images, and a lively soundtrack.

McKeon’s clip was posted to YouTube on February 24, 2012, JVINCE’s clip months later, on September 17. In February 2012 the Republican Party’s national convention was still months away, whereas in September the Libertarian Party’s convention lay months in the past. With these facts in mind, the audiovisual styles of “The Best Man for the Job: Ron Paul!” and “JVINCÉ – Gary Johnson 2012” make more than aesthetic sense. Each clip was aimed at a particular *audience*, with “Best Man” pleading for a candidate who might receive his party’s nomination, and “Gary Johnson 2012” advertising a party candidate already campaigning in most of the nation’s electoral districts (albeit with little hope of success). For some twenty years, online sites have catered to self-defined “virtual communities” of like-minded individuals, including “political groupings” of various stripes.²⁸ At the same time, rap as a musical style—at least as JVINCE employs it—suggests *ethnicity* as well as *audience*. In racial terms it reaches out to black as well as white YouTube users; as a style, it facilitates the transfer of political information within a short and rhythmically enlivened period of time.

Recycled Material: “Douche and Turd”

Two election-oriented YouTube clips exploited material adapted from *South Park*, an animated situation comedy broadcast since 1997 by the FOX television network. Both clips exploited the same musical number: “Douche and Turd,” a satirical song featured in an episode of the same name (Season 8, episode 8). The episode in question was broadcast for the first time on October 27, 2004, shortly before that year’s national elections.²⁹ Both clips make fun of political contests between equally unattractive candidates. *Bricolage* is central both to the construction of these clips and to their reception. In other words, both clips consist largely of borrowed material, and both can better be understood when the original *South Park* episode and its own political message are taken into account.

The plot of “Douche and Turd” involves PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals), a real-life organization that, on screen, criticizes the imagined town’s elementary school for endorsing a cow as its mascot. The school agrees to choose a new mascot, and the show’s four fourth-grade protagonists—Stan Marsh, Kyle Broflovski, Eric Cartman, and Kenny McCormack—conspire to guarantee that “a giant douche” and “a turd sandwich” will be the two most popular write-in choices among their fellow students (see Screen Capture 10). Stan, however, refuses to vote at all and is banished for un-American behavior. After watching Sean Combs assassinate the PETA people because of their imagined preference for farm animals as sexual partners, however, Stan returns and votes for the Turd Sandwich, only to learn that an

²⁸ Paul Hodkinson, *Media, Culture and Society: An Introduction* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2011), 258. For additional information about online communities, see Kevin A. Hill and John E. Hughes, *Cyberpolitics: Citizen Activism in the Age of the Internet* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998).

²⁹ The entire episode is available online at <http://www.southparkstudios.com/full-episodes/s08e08-douche-and-turd>.

overwhelming majority has already elected the Giant Douche. The addition of an animated debate between an “actual” giant douche bag and a sandwich containing lettuce and tomato as well as feces, adds to the raunchy fun (see Screen Capture 11). *South Park* often seems merely vulgar, but its episodes usually satirize real-life political and social problems. To make certain no one misses the episode’s 2004 political point, the “Douche and Turd” song is illustrated in its original iteration with a fleeting but unmistakable image of the White House (see Screen Capture 12). A second iteration accompanies the episode’s concluding credits.

Screen Capture 10: From left to right: Stan, Kenny, Kyle, and (Eric) Cartman discuss their plans for electing a giant douche or a turd sandwich as South Park Elementary School’s new mascot.

Screen Capture 11: The Douche Bag-Turd Sandwich debate as a metaphor for the 2004 televised Bush-Kerry debates.

Screen Capture 12: As a dejected Kyle thinks about his worthless vote for Turd Sandwich, an image of the White House moves across the screen.

Entitled “Douch [sic] and Turd Election Song 2012,” the earlier *South Park*-based clip was posted to YouTube on June 2 of that year.³⁰ “Douche and Turd 2012,” the later clip, was posted on August 13.³¹ Both clips seem as sceptical of American presidential candidates and the electoral process as “They’ll Do Anything.” At the same time, although both “Douche and Turd” YouTube clips identify Romney as the “douche” and Obama as the “turd,” each clip carries a different political message. The June 2 clip opens with a shot of men (and one woman!) standing in front of a public urinal; later we see shots of a public demonstration, a voting box into which a ballot is being inserted, and the Statue of Liberty superimposed upon an American flag (see Screen Capture 13). The June 2 clip’s visual tempo is slower; the images of Obama and Romney it utilizes are attractive, press-release photos; and the clip ends with a question mark. There is no real choice, it seems; there is only scepticism. Nor was “VTChannelRandom,” the clip’s creator, merely lazy. In a note appended to the clip, the creator explains, “I origionaly thought of this myself (No joke) and after searching the south park song on youtube I saw people already made something like this... But i still made it anyway [sic].”³²

The *South Park*-based August 13 clip is faster moving. Its visuals consist entirely of candidate images, including shots of Joseph Biden and Paul Ryan (respectively, the Democratic and Republican vice-presidential candidates) standing next to their parties’ presidential nominees. Furthermore, it ends with a last-minute, somewhat lacklustre endorsement of Ron Paul—although, as “Neuman357,” its author, adds, “Gary Johnson would suffice” (see Screen Capture 14). Each photo lasts less than a second on screen, with 34 photos in the clip’s first 23 seconds. The last four seconds are devoted to a single shot of Paul superimposed upon an American flag. Both clips, however, foreground the “Douche and Turd” song. Their musical appropriations were effective because their YouTube audiences probably recognized the song’s source and understood its satiric significance. After all, by 2004 *South Park*’s creators had already

³⁰ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZX9mFQAYVC0>.

³¹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=endscreen&NR=1&v=OEhmmtGPYzE>.

³² Ibid.

abandoned their initial fascination with “town life” and increasingly emphasized “current events and cultural phenomena”: a shift in style and emphasis closely related to the series’ “substantial presence on the Internet.”³³

Screen Capture 13: “Voters” casting their “votes” for Romney (as “douch”) or Obama (as “turd”).

Screen Capture 14: The last shot of the August 13 “Douche and Turd” YouTube ripoff.

These last facts are *demographic* as well as more broadly cultural in character. They were and still are crucial to the character and success of most online political posts. Younger users and users in search of entertainment are increasingly drawn to YouTube (as well as shows like *South Park*) rather than to radio, television, or other electronic media. Nor should entertainment in and of itself be discounted. Although YouTube serves as an archive for thousands of “significant” audiovisual items, the Romney concession speech and Obama victory proclamation among them,³⁴ it also serves millions of users exclusively as a

³³ Sean Nye, “From Punk to the Musical: ‘South Park,’ Music, and the Cartoon Format,” in *Music in Television: Channels of Listening*, ed. James Deaville (New York: Routledge, 2010), 147.

³⁴ See, respectively, “Mitt Romney Concession Speech: 2012 Presidential Election GOP Candidate Delivers Remarks from Boston,” *ABCNews*, YouTube video, November 6, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aQruYgVP2SY>; and “Election

source of fun. As Catherine Zimmer reminds us, the “tube” in YouTube suggests “the tradition of television” as a medium of entertainment as well as information.³⁵ Moreover, YouTube is a “motivated medium”: one that must be sought out rather than stumbled over.³⁶ For these reasons, as Zoe Oxley explains, many men and women, “given the choice of turning to [digital] media for political information or nonpolitical information,” choose “the latter.”³⁷ Which is to say: fun rather than enlightenment.

The Principal Party Candidates I: Mitt Romney and “O.P.M.”

YouTube user “IrishCreme2012” claims that “Obama/Romney 2012 Election Song: Other People’s Money,” also known as “Other People’s Money” (or simply as “O.P.M.”) is an “official video”³⁸—which, in this case, means a YouTube post created and distributed on behalf of Mitt Romney and the Republican Party. As an endorsement of Romney, however—much less by him and his party—“O.P.M.” is both unusual and suspect. For one thing, Romney’s candidacy inspired far fewer web-based endorsements, especially musicalized endorsements, than did Obama’s. For another—and this seems more significant—Romney ran on a platform that valorized conservative Christian values. Yet IrishCreme2012’s lyrics refer to Obama as a “Marxist prick” (see Screen Capture 15). One image includes the word “fuck,” and twice the image of a vomiting pumpkin accompanies the words “It’s makin’ me sick!” (see Screen Captures 16 and 17). Still another shot conjoins an image of a 1950s-style businessman in suit and tie with a photoshopped caption that reads: “How’s that hope & change bullshit workin’ for ya now?” (see Screen Capture 18). A similar caption accompanies a cartoon image of George W. Bush in cowboy gear.

Screen Capture 15: IrishCreme2012’s opinion of Obama is accompanied by an image of the American flag.

2012. Obama’s Complete Victory Speech.” *New York Times*, YouTube video, November 7, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nv9NwKAjmt0>. The former item was posted to YouTube on November 6, 2012, the latter on the following day.

³⁵ Catherine Zimmer, “Reading and Writing about YouTube: The You in YouTube,” in *The World is a Text: Writing, Reading, and Thinking about Culture and its Contexts*, 3rd ed., ed. Jonathan Silverman and Dean Rader (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2008), 109.

³⁶ Crigler et al., “YouTube and TV Advertising Campaigns,” 106.

³⁷ Zoe M. Oxley, “More Sources, Better Informed Public? New Media and Political Knowledge,” in *iPolitics*, 31-32.

³⁸ IrishCreme, “Obama/Romney 2012 Election Song: Other People’s Money OFFICIAL VIDEO,” YouTube video, October 10, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hEutIYdTzP8>.

Screen Capture 16: In 2012 gasoline prices remained a hot presidential-election issue.

Screen Capture 17: IrishCreme2012's vomiting pumpkin.

Screen Capture 18: An attack on Obama's 2008 "Hope and Change" election slogan.

The "official" endorsement appears at the very end of "O.P.M.," when Romney's voice states that he "approves this message" (see Screen Capture 19). This mode of authentication raises a problem for user-generated online claims of *authenticity*: now that anyone can (and does) create political proclamations for world-wide deployment, who's to say who is authorized and who isn't? The late date—October 12—suggests that "O.P.M." was a last-minute, pre-election effort. The clip's contents suggest that IrishCreme2012 supported Romney almost entirely as a reaction against Obama's more explicitly socialized policies. And—this is hinted at rather than clearly stated—because Romney might be more inclined than Obama to use nuclear weapons against "our" enemies (see Screen Capture 20).

Like JVINCE, the creator of "Gary Johnson 2012," IrishCreme2012 uses rap to convey a message. As a contemporary musical style, rap is embraced especially by younger Americans; it employs urban rather than rural tropes, and it is traditionally associated with African Americans. Some online venues have long catered and continue to cater to racial enclaves, including diasporic communities.³⁹ Furthermore, as Jim Farber puts it, the "twangy world of country" often suggests Republicans, "while rappers, R&B stars and rockers veer in a decidedly Democratic direction."⁴⁰ These generalizations are not always true, however, and Farber himself admits that "not every musician falls into lockstep with their genre's party line."⁴¹ Thus, "O.P.M." is a Republican rap number, whereas "They'll Do Anything" is as suspicious of

³⁹ See Hodkinson, *Media, Culture and Society*, 214-215.

⁴⁰ Jim Farber, "Election Day 2012: When Music and Politics Collide," *New York Daily News*, November 6, 2012, <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/politics/music-politics-collide-article-1.1197669>.

⁴¹ Ibid.

Republicans as it is countrified. Perhaps more importantly, a refusal to adopt musicalized party lines may well become more frequent—and popular—as user-generated YouTube posts increase in number and complexity. “O.P.M.” may therefore represent an attempt by one black (as well as three white) Republican sympathizers to appropriate for white (as well as black) YouTube users a musical style more often associated with the Democratic Party and its candidates.

Screen Capture 19: Romney’s “official endorsement” of IrishCreme2012’s clip, almost certainly photoshopped to establish faux-authenticity.

Screen Capture 20: Can Romney save us from the Bomb?

The Principal Party Candidates II: Barack Obama's "Re election Support Song"

On August 28, Sylvia Mejia posted her "Re election [sic] Support Song for Obama 2012" to YouTube.⁴² In Mejia's own words, "Re election Support Song" was created as a "poetic musical tribute to Barack Obama to lovingly support him in his reelection campaign." As an example of *bricolage* it exemplifies what can be done by a seemingly less sophisticated user of audiovisual technology in support of a political candidate. Perhaps this accounts for its comparative obscurity. Prior to April 2013 Mejia's clip had received fewer than six hundred hits, as opposed to some 2,600 for the older "Douche and Turd" parody, 7,000 for the newer. This is scarcely unusual; many YouTube clips are watched by only a handful of individuals. By April 2013, for example, "O.P.M." had received just over 500 hits.

But Mejia's work is exceptional in several other respects. We have already seen that many musicalized, election-oriented YouTube videos are lively, with slick, rapidly changing images; several of them, including JVINCE's Gary Johnson endorsement, use rap lyrics. Others employ trustworthy, traditional American musical styles that privilege acoustic instruments and sincerity over amplified sound and technological flair. Mejia's "Re election Support Song" is slow-moving and sincere. It doesn't foreground either an actual performance or a popular musical style, and it lacks a concrete and detailed political message. We learn, for example, that "the world is falling apart"—not, more specifically, that the global environment is in trouble (see Screen Capture 21). Or is it climate change that's being alluded to? Apparently, YouTube users are supposed to understand that "world," at least in Mejia's clip, references every possible aspect of the natural world. In any case, that word is accompanied by and superimposed upon an image of the ocean: the most widespread natural "object" of all.

Screen Capture 21: Mejia's image of a world falling apart—but which "world," precisely?

⁴² Sylvia Mejia, "Re election support Song for Obama 2012." YouTube video, August 12, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YSZJKWawwGg>.

Screen Capture 22: Mejia's image of Obama, implying that in November 2012 his "mission" remained unfulfilled.

Screen Capture 23: Children of mixed races hold an American flag, seemingly in Obama's honor.

Furthermore, the political message of "Re election Support Song" arrives at a snail's pace. We have already seen that the opening 23 seconds of "Douche and Turd 2012" contains 34 different images. During the same span of time Mejia gives us only two lines of dialogue and a single, fluctuating visual reference: that of ocean waves (Screen Capture 21). After 86 seconds, however, the tempo accelerates and Obama himself "takes over" the "Support Song" screen (see Screen Capture 22); we also see a group of young people holding an American flag (see Screen Capture 23) and learn that "It's American sharing for a planet of joy" while we listen to a somewhat livelier and vaguely "ethnic" (i.e., African-American and/or Latin) rhythm track.

My observations are not meant to disparage "Re election Support Song." Rather, they are intended to identify the politicized sentiments it invokes: stereotypically, those of leftists (as lovers of the natural

world, peoples of all ages and races, and so on): the very individuals that rightists often disparage as “soft” or “mushy.” I also want to point out how different musicalized and politicized user-generated YouTube clips can be from one another. An additional and possibly spurious issue also seems worth mentioning: of all the clips I consulted while researching and writing the present article, only “Re election Support Song” failed to open promptly on screen. In fact, getting it to play a second and third time took some effort. Perhaps it contains a software flaw. If so, it will almost certainly receive less attention than its more competently engineered companions on the World Wide Web.

Candidates at (Virtual) War: The Epic Rap Battle between Obama and Romney

“Barack Obama vs Mitt Romney: Epic Rap Battles Of History, Season 2,” posted to YouTube on August 15, 2012, has already been mentioned. In certain respects this clip resembles a number of other politically motivated presidential-election YouTube posts: it employs rap, conflates real-life photography with digitally manipulated imagery, and strives to entertain as much or more than it sets out to inform. Furthermore, its underlying style and substance have nothing directly to do with politics. An entire series of online rap battles features contestants ranging from “Dr. Seuss vs. Shakespeare” to “Napoléon [Bonaparte] vs. Napoleon Dynamite”—the last a character in a recent independent film.⁴³ The attention generated by this series, plus the timeliness of the 2012 presidential race, almost certainly contributed to the extraordinary popularity of the Obama–Romney battle clip.

Screen Capture 24: Reaching “across the aisle” of contentious party politics, Lincoln promises to “bitch smack” both Obama and Romney “of the people, by the people, for the people!”

⁴³ The eponymous hero of *Napoleon Dynamite* (2004; directed by Jared Hess), a nerdy, listless, and alienated teenager, transforms himself into a “dynamite” free-form dancer. For additional information about rap battles online, see the series website at <http://epicrapbattlesofhistory.com>. The “Napoléon/Napoleon Dynamite” battle video is also identified on that site.

Screen Capture 25: Immediately afterward, a giant American eagle carries Lincoln to safety.

“Barack Obama vs Mitt Romney” and other YouTube posts nevertheless offer users an opportunity unique to digitalized venues where information can be exchanged as well as published: *response*. Each and every viewer is invited to vote for the battle’s winner and post his or her comments to the appropriate webpage. The choices are clear: Obama, Romney, or ... President Abraham Lincoln! (see Screen Capture 24). Yes, Lincoln makes an appearance on screen about halfway through the clip. After denouncing his successors, he “bitch-slaps” both Obama and Romney as punishment for their faults, then calls for an “[American] Eagle!” to carry him to safety (see Screen Capture 25). Posting opinions about clips to YouTube pages, mentioning clips (whether positively or negatively) on public or private blogs, or otherwise entering the digitalized conversations that occupy important parts of the World Wide Web: all these opportunities are among the characteristic and diverting features of user-generated and user-regenerated political posturing.

The Epic Rap Battles of History series is also commercialized in ways that distinguish the Obama–Romney clip from others identified above. The post in question is not the product of love, individual political enthusiasm, or musical creativity per se. Instead, the videos in the Rap Battles series are themselves commercial products, and users on the series’ various websites are invited to publicize its offerings by tweeting their friends and family members as well as by purchasing T-shirts and other products (see Screen Capture 26).⁴⁴ Furthermore, and especially in terms of the Obama–Romney battle clip, the concept of user-generated campaign music acquires two rather different implications. First, that rap is no more than marginally musical. Everything is spoken rather than sung during the Obama–Romney battle, and the clip’s background rhythm track scarcely contributes to the rhymed exchanges of virtual insults. Second, that the commercial value of the content may be altogether distinct from user-generated political commentary. Or maybe not: as Alicia Marwick points out, “Given the personal engagement between many users and commercial products (as seen in [online] fan sites, display[s] of

⁴⁴ Ibid.

logos on personal profiles, viewing commercials on video sites, and so forth), it is overly simplistic” to decide what may or may not be commercialized.⁴⁵ Nor was the Obama–Romney rap battle entirely a critical success. Writing for *Mother Jones* online, Deanna Pan pointed to a “mediocre” performance by the series’ Romney impersonator and mildly disparaged the clip’s musical style as “faux-freestyle rap.”⁴⁶

Screen Capture 26: The conclusion of the Obama/Romney rap battle. Which mock candidate do you prefer?

Long-term Musicalized Electioneering: “Obama! A Modern U.S. President”

Parodies of familiar musical numbers abound on YouTube. Since Psy laid claim to global fame by posting “Gangnam Style”⁴⁷—a clip that, by April 2013, had received more than one billion hits—dozens of knock-offs have appeared in its wake. One of these, “Mitt Romney Style,” has won praise for its “high-quality production value,” if for nothing else.⁴⁸ Furthermore, the “Romney Style” clip looks like Psy’s work—enough, at least, to make it fun to watch (compare Screen Captures 27 and 28).⁴⁹ Another parody, entitled “Puttin’ on the Mitt – The Mitt Romney Song,” was based on Irving Berlin’s 1929 pop song “Puttin’ on the Ritz.”⁵⁰ “Mitt” features black-and-white footage of a Depression-era dance band against which two appropriately dressed male performers appear on screen.⁵¹

⁴⁵ Alicia Marwick, “The People’s Republic of YouTube? Interrogating Rhetorics of Internet Democracy,” paper presented at the Association of Internet Researchers conference, Vancouver, Canada, October 2007, 16.

http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1884349.

⁴⁶ Deanne Pan, “In the YouTube Music Vote, Mitt Romney is Toast,” *Mother Jones*, November 5, 2012,

<http://www.motherjones.com/mixed-media/2012/11/romney-obama-partisan-songs>.

⁴⁷ Psy, “Gangnam Style,” music video, July 15, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9bZkp7q19f0>.

⁴⁸ Ibid. Pan ranks “Mitt Romney Style” as tenth in a list of ten “invariably fucking awful” songs (i.e., YouTube clips). She identifies and evaluates the Obama/Romney rap battle as a “bonus” clip at the end of her article.

⁴⁹ Complete “Mitt Romney Style” lyrics may be found at <http://newsone.com/2054699/mitt-romney-style>.

⁵⁰ TyrannosaurusRocks, “Puttin’ on the Mitt: The Mitt Romney Song,” Funny or Die video, November 5, 2012,

<http://www.funnyordie.com/videos/b3621adda7/puttin-on-the-mitt-the-mitt-romney-song>.

⁵¹ Another anti-Romney parody of the same Berlin song was posted to YouTube on February 2, 2012, by TurnUpTheNight1 (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WCDbAKNMn40>). It received 5,400 hits by April 2013.

Screen Capture 27: Psy in a Seoul, South Korea, elevator, with a dancer standing above him. Today one of the world's most iconic virtual images.

Posted on October 11, 2010, more than two years before the 2012 presidential election took place, “Obama! A Modern U.S. President”⁵² parodies “I am the Very Model of a Modern Major General” from *The Pirates of Penzance*, one of Gilbert and Sullivan’s Savoy operas.⁵³ It also makes gentle fun of Obama’s personal and professional persona—including his purported willingness to clean up after his dog (see Screen Capture 29)—even as it confirms some of his accomplishments. The clip’s creator, identified in his post as “ronniebutlerjr.” and named Ron Butler in real life, takes credit for the clip’s lyrics but not for its music.⁵⁴ A highly successful spoof, “A Modern U.S. President” received over a million hits prior to November 6, 2012, and more than 1,800,000 hits by April 2013.

Butler’s spoof entertained American voters well in advance of both the Democratic Party’s September 2012 convention in Charlotte, North Carolina, and Obama’s successful bid for a second term two months later. Like “Re election Support Song,” “A Modern U.S. President” contains music that might seem “refined” to some YouTube users. It is certainly less casual in its imagery; the chorus that responds to each of Obama’s verses is anything but laid back (see Screen Capture 30). The clip’s professional production values unquestionably contributed to its enormous popularity, as did opportunities to comment on Butler’s YouTube page—1,408 responses had been posted by April 2013.

There seems to have been no similar pro-Republican, pre-election YouTube clip that simultaneously made gentle fun of Romney and confirmed his virtues for America’s voters. On the other hand, plenty of Democrats ridiculed Romney relentlessly. We should remember that friendly satires like “A Modern U.S. President” are *roasts*: send-ups that acknowledge a celebrity’s fame even as they mock his

⁵² http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y54FRMedT_s.

⁵³ For general information about the Gilbert and Sullivan operettas, known as “Savoy operas” because many of them were produced between 1881 and 1896 at London’s Savoy Theatre, see Christopher Hibbert, *Gilbert & Sullivan and their Victorian World* (New York: American Heritage, 1976). For the lyrics to “I am the Very Model of a Modern Major General,” see W. S. Gilbert, *The Savoy Operas* (Ware, UK: Wordsworth, 1994), 120-122. Strictly speaking, *Pirates* was not a “Savoy opera”: it was first performed at London’s Opéra Comique on April 3, 1880.

⁵⁴ “Pete Peterkin,” the very first responder to ronniebutlerjr’s YouTube post, asked ronniebutlerjr whether he wrote the music himself. Not everyone today, it seems, is a Gilbert & Sullivan fan.

or her foibles. The criticism leveled at both Obama and Romney in the Epic Rap Battles clip discussed above is far less gentle, and the appearance of the ludicrous Lincoln figure near its end mocks the entire election as well as its two principal candidates.

Screen Capture 28: A Mitt Romney impersonator in an American elevator, again with a dancer standing above him. “I’ve got large amounts,” the lyrics run, “in Swiss bank accounts.” NB: “CH” stands for CollegeHumor, the producers of this “Gangnam Style” parody.

Screen Capture 29: Ron Butler as Barack Obama, about to take the family dog for a walk.

Screen Capture 30: Obama's business-suited "chorus" of supporters and White House workers.

Conclusions: User-Generated Campaign Music and Music Videos as a Genre

The importance of technology today can scarcely be overestimated. "What matters," as Langdon Winner reminded us several decades ago, "is not technology itself, but the social or economic system in which it is embedded."⁵⁵ Emerging technologies are sources of aesthetic as well as political and social change, but not every new gadget changes everything. At least some past links, ideas, and styles remain in place.

As a genre, the music video is usually defined in terms of, or at least associated with, the MTV (Music Television) cable network. MTV began broadcasting in August 1981. By 1994, however, the network had more or less ceased to exist as a music-video venue, and VJs, or video jockeys (a term adapted from DJ, or disc jockey) gradually vanished from MTV programs. For this and other reasons, scholars interested in the history and characteristics of the music video genre have viewed it as a phenomenon of the 1980s and 90s and have therefore mostly overlooked or deliberately ignored YouTube, which dates only from 2005 and has never been devoted primarily to performance-driven pop music videos.

A great many twenty-first-century YouTube clips differ radically from one definition of music videos: that of "short film[s] paid [for] by the music industry to be shown by TV channels."⁵⁶ YouTube clips are prepared, preserved, and distributed in digital rather than analog or "filmic" format; they are often created and disseminated without hope of financial gain; and by definition they are not intended for commercial television. Often, of course, YouTube users simply copy or rework what television has created, transforming more or less original material (depending upon one's definition of "original") into confections or mashups of various kinds. In other words, *bricolage* is often the most striking feature of

⁵⁵ Langdon Winner, *The Whale and the Reactor: A Search for Limits in an Age of High Technology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 19-20.

⁵⁶ Gianna Sibilla, "'It's the End of Music Videos As We Know Them (But We Feel Fine): Death and Resurrection of Music Videos in the YouTube Age,'" in *Rewind, Play, Fast Forward*, 225.

YouTube postings. Gianna Sibilla acknowledges the importance and influence of user-generated YouTube posts and proclaims them the “most interesting” contemporary audiovisual form of expression.⁵⁷ Yet even Sibilla limits her discussion to ways that ColdPlay, R.E.M., and other established pop-music groups use the Web to promote their commercialized recordings.⁵⁸ She ignores the political music clips on YouTube altogether.

We have already seen that user-generated YouTube music clips often reference commercialized forms of expression, including folk, country, rap, and quasi-classical styles. Many—although far from all—online posts, including political music clips, also address the youthful urban audience associated with MTV during the 1980s. Hundreds of excerpts from *Phineas and Ferb*, an animated half-hour series produced by the Disney television network (to choose but one example), can be found on YouTube. Some of these clips were posted by Disney’s own employees as advertisements for *Phineas and Ferb*. A great many more, however, were posted by enthusiasts for their friends and fellow fans. Some of these user-generated posts are quite technologically primitive while others are closer in quality to their TV-based originals.⁵⁹ The point I wish to emphasize is that these and a great many other online posts cannot easily be distinguished from 1980s music videos except in terms of their platform: YouTube rather than MTV.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Ibid, 228.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 229-231.

⁵⁹ For an “official” example of a Disney-generated *Phineas and Ferb* Web post, see http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0nKG_O0Ei_o. The post re-presents “Squirrels in My Pants,” one of the series’ most popular songs; by April 2013 the “Squirrels” clip had received more than 2,500,000 hits. For a technologically primitive re-recording of the same musical material, see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qWeDS7bLIU0>. This amateurish clip, posted to YouTube by “dapockercat” on August 15, 2008, appears to have been manufactured using a hand-held digital camera pointed at a TV set; nevertheless, by April 2013 dapockercat’s clip had received more than 191,000 hits. For a high-quality, user-generated recreation of the same material—this one posted by “pbryan_999” to Daily Motion, another venue for online audio-visual posts, see http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xlapwi_phineas-and-ferb-squirrels-in-my-pants_music#.UXqnMoIyGdM. No posting date provided. Accessed August 15, 2015.

⁶⁰ I would like to thank Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, especially the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences, for support both toward the completion of this article and for its presentation in entirely digitalized form at the thirty-ninth national meeting of the Society for American Music, held in Little Rock, Arkansas, March 6–10, 2013. I would also like to thank Daniel Colby, who engineered my digitalized Little Rock presentation. Finally, I want to thank James Deaville for his generous advice and assistance. Jim’s encouragement and assistance over the years have helped me better understand small-screen music, including politicized TV news broadcasts and computer-music interactions. This article is dedicated to him with gratitude and respect.

Abstract

According to Dewey Clayton's book-length study of Barack Obama's initial Presidential bid, more artists created "unsolicited music and music videos" during 2008 than for any other candidate in American political history. "Unsolicited," user-generated musical posts to websites, especially YouTube increasingly characterizes the post-millennial mediascape as a viable means of political participation. In 2012 new-media users produced politicized parodies of existing music, covered familiar songs with political lyrics, and created politicized mashups of materials drawn from a variety of audio-visual sources; they also composed and performed their own political songs. This article considers different styles and "sizes" of user-generated YouTube posts that foregrounded music *and* politics during the 2012 U.S. presidential election. It also suggests preliminary answers to such questions as: What is user-generated campaign music? What kinds of politicized musical posts exist? How do such posts "work" in musical as well as political terms? And: what similarities and differences exist between so-called "music videos" and politicized, user-generated YouTube clips that incorporate actual musical performances? Finally, this article evaluates new-media, user-generated political-musical posts in terms of concepts associated with 1980s and 1990s commercially generated music videos.