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Protest Music of the 2010s

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Protest Music of the 2010s

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Abstract

Throughout U.S. history, music has served as a soundtrack to transformative social and cultural movements. Songs like “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,” “Lift every Voice and Sing,” and “We Shall Overcome” are linked to key events that inspired hope and change. Collectively, these songs are known as protest music. Protest music can act as a type of social commentary, expressing a wide range of emotions, and have a uniting element, calling leaders and groups to action for tangible results. At its core, protest music is a musician’s creative response to events happening in the world around them. The 2010s saw the rise of several social movements that initiated national conversations about perpetuated inequalities and injustice. This project will examine the music associated with these movements, the artist(s) who wrote the music, and the reception this music received. The goal of this project is to achieve a greater understanding of how American protest music has evolved in the 21st century.

Protest Music of the 2010s

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Introduction

Throughout American history, music has served as a soundtrack to transformative social and cultural movements. For instance, during the American Revolution, soldiers fighting for independence sang the song “Chester,” as a proclamation of unity against their British adversaries (Bidwell, 1944, p. 175). In the early 19th century, slaves sang spirituals of freedom, like “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” and “Wade in the Water ” on plantations and along the Underground Railroad (African American Spirituals). Members of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s sang unifying freedom songs, like “Woke Up This Morning” and “Lift Every Voice and Sing” as they marched and participated in non-violent protests (Becker, 2016; PBS). Uniquely, even a nationally beloved folksong, “This Land Is Your Land” by Woody Guthrie, was intentionally written as protest music, hoping to be a critique on American hyper-nationalism in the 1940s and 50s (Jackson, 2002, pp. 249-251).

Collectively, these songs are known as protest music: music that is generally associated with a broader social and cultural movement. In addition to its political connections, protest music can act as a type of social commentary, expressing a wide range of emotions and feelings that words cannot. While protest music may be dismissed for its general negative connotations, it seeks to be honest and forthcoming about the surrounding realities of its topic (Lynskey, 2011, xiv-xv). Furthermore, protest music can have a uniting and communal element to it, calling leaders and groups to action for tangible results. At its core, protest music is a musician’s natural creative response to events happening in the world around them.

The 2010s saw the rise of several social movements that benefited from the growing power of the internet and mass media. From climate awareness and Black Lives Matter to gun control and the #MeToo movement, 2010s social movements were wide-ranging, initiating national conversations about intersectionality, perpetuated inequalities, and injustice. This project will also look at the reception of these pieces of music after they were released, connecting them with a corresponding social/political movement or issue. The ideal outcome of this project is to achieve a greater understanding of how American protest music has evolved in the 21st century.

“Occupy the USA” by Emma’s Revolution

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XoBKwxYDJSE>

Year Released: 2011

Genre: Folk

Album: Revolutions per Minute

Themes: Occupy Wall Street, Standing up to Corporations

The story of “Occupy the USA” starts in Washington D.C. For almost three years, the federal government had been considering a bid by the Canadian natural gas company, TransCanada, to build a major international pipeline extending from Alberta to South Texas (CBC News, 2021). While TransCanada touted the economic benefits of the pipeline citing job growth, concerns arose about the pipeline’s environmental impact. Even though the State Department conducted studies showing the impact would be minimal, a majority of environmental groups were not convinced. As the State Department conducted final public hearings, protesters linked to the growing Occupy Movement descended on Capitol Hill, calling on President Obama to reject the large-scale Keystone project. Emma’s Revolution was apart of the protestors, armed with their guitars and poeticism to lead the expectant crowds.

Emma’s Revolution is a folk singer-songwriter duo consisting of Pat Humphries and Sandy Opatow. They have been creating music for over 20 years, putting themes of justice and activism into lyrics and song. Over their tenure, they have released 4 albums and numerous singles, ranging from topics like Black Lives Matter and the #MeToo Movement to immigration reform and reproductive justice (Emma’s Revolution Bio).

The inspiration of “Occupy the USA” was a satirical Facebook Post (Montgomery, 2011). The post recognized that the U.S. would often get involved in prolonged conflicts around the world to spread democracy. Feciously, it suggested that “the U.S. should invade the U.S. and win the hearts and minds of the people back. (Montgomery, 2011)” Additionally, Humphries and Opatow were deeply influenced by the overarching themes of the Occupy movement: worker’s rights, wealth equality, anti-corruption, and critiquing large corporations’ influence in government. Written over a few days, “Occupy the USA” premiered on October 6, 2011, at a demonstration outside Freedom Plaza, in Washington D.C. (Humphries & Opatow, 2011).

Written in 4/4 time, “Occupy the USA” is a song that has deep roots in the folk music genre. The studio track features the jubilant voices of Humphries and Opatow along with acoustic guitars, an electric guitar, a bass guitar, and drums. The dynamic range of this piece is very narrow, as it is mainly one level of volume throughout the whole piece. Even though the dynamic contrast is not great, this piece highlights the timbres of each individual instrument by including an electric guitar solo and providing moments for unison syncopation at the ends of the verses.

One of the great characteristics of this song is that it is singable. The melody of the song fits with a one-octave range and is scalar. Additionally, the harmonies surrounding the melody are consonant and gentle to the ear. Emma’s Revolution was known to perform and share original music like this at protests and demonstrations around the country. The feasibility of the melody lends itself well to be picked up by audiences who are hearing this song for the first time (Humphries & Opatow, 2011). When the audience starts singing along, the gravitas of a performance ceases, and the communal enjoyment of music begins.

The image shows a musical score for the first verse of the song "Occupy the U.S.A." in 4/4 time, key of B-flat major. The score is written on a single treble clef staff. The lyrics are: "Wel-come to the U - S oc - cu - pa-tion To win the hearts and minds de-fend all hu - man-kind. Tell the banks and the cor - por - a - tions, We're here to oc - cu - py the U - S - A". Chord symbols are placed above the staff: D^b above the first measure, A^b above the second measure, E^b above the third measure, A^b above the fourth measure, D^b above the fifth measure, A^b above the sixth measure, E^b above the seventh measure, and A^b above the eighth measure. The lyrics are hyphenated across measures to fit the rhythm.

Chorus of "Occupy the U.S.A."

From a lyrical standpoint, there are two elements of this song: the chorus, and the verse(s). The chorus is the most revisited section of this song. It summarizes the message of the song succinctly and reflects the themes of the Occupy Movement.

"Welcome to the US Occupation

To win the hearts and minds

Defend all humankind

Tell the banks and the corporations

We're here to occupy the USA"

Each of the verses in this song gets more specific of different aspects of the Occupy movement and the issues Humphries and Opatow wish to see change. The first verse directs frustration to lawmakers in Congress. In the aftermath of The Great Recession in 2008, many Americans questioned if their government was genuinely acting in their best interest by bailing

out larger banks and corporations. This attitude extended to issues of healthcare, as the government seemed to move slowly on reframing public health insurance, while private insurance got more and more expensive. Verse 2 focuses mainly on the environmental concerns of the Keystone XL Pipeline and how the obscurity in its development increases in the need to organize. The third verse speaks to the tactics of the movement and the tools that individuals have to foster change. Additionally, it has a great emphasis on worker's rights, with lines that say

"We do all the work so we have the power to stop it

No workers, no work

Not until we share the profits"

The last verse echoes the sentiments of the previous verse but primarily shows support for unions and the rights of individuals to organize collectively.

Due to the light and jovial nature of the song, people may question the legitimacy of this song as protest music. The toe-tapping rhythm and the simplicity in the melody may remind listeners more of cheeky satire. In contrast, I find those characteristics of the song key to its success. In its simplicity, "Occupy the U.S.A" succeeds in communicating its message. While the rhymes and rhythm patterns are not complex, the heart of the song is conveyed in a clear way. Additionally, in performances of the song, the audience is visibly engaged, both with the music and Emma's Revolution. The progress of Occupy Wall Street may have yet to be tied to this song, but "Occupy the U.S.A." serves as a unique and creative narrative and reflection of the sentiments of Occupy's active participants.

“To A Place Of Celebration” by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette

Links: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xv3r4kuvhKw&t=282s>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c6P6OffcbHA&t=14s>

Year Released: 2016

Genre: Hymn, Sacred Music

Themes: Gun Violence, Response to the 2016 shooting in Orlando, Florida

On Saturday, June 11, 2016, the atmosphere at the Pulse NightClub was electric and lively. Located in the heart of Orlando, the Pulse NightClub is a well-known LGBTQ+ bar and dance club. As the night went on, no one could have foreseen the tragedy that was about to ensue. Just past 2 AM early Sunday morning, after the last drinks had been served, gunfire started in the building (Zambelich & Hurt, 2016). People throughout the building were sent in a frenzy, hitting the floor, hiding in bathrooms and under furniture, and running quickly to exits. The shooter's name was Omar Mateen, a 29-year-old American citizen whose parents were from Afghanistan. After 30 minutes of shooting, Mateen called the police and engaged in hostage negotiation with them for almost an hour. Over the course of the call, Mateen claimed to have dressed victims in bomb vests and had set explosives outside in a vehicle. During this time, the police rescued as many people as they could, shuttling the injured to ambulances and hospitals. The struggle the police had was locating where Mateen was in the building. At 5:02 AM, the police finally triggered a controlled explosion, breaching a wall in the building and surrounding the shooter until he was killed. In total, 49 people died that night, with over 50 others suffering from injuries. Up to that point, it was the largest mass shooting in US history, and still today it is the largest attack against the LGBTQ+ community (Ray, 2021).

Carolyn Winfrey Gillette, a pastor in the United Methodist Church from Harris, Pennsylvania, has been a hymn writer for over twenty years (Bio, n.d.). Gillette is drawn to the universal nature of hymns. Their melodies are relatively simple; the tunes, familiar; their texture, warm and inviting. She began writing hymns after attending a Christian worship conference in Pennsylvania, where she learned about setting psalms, passages from the Bible, to hymns (Kay & Nics, 2016). Where Gillette shows her individuality is in the lyrics. Borrowing the meter and melodies to older hymns, Gillette writes new lyrics covering a large variety of topics, like Advent, Easter, Heaven, the Kingdom of God, and Creation. For Gillette, hymn-writing is more than just writing songs of praise and worship. In an interview with the *New Yorker*, Gillette comments: “A lot of songs [that are written] for the church are joyous and upbeat, praise songs. But there is a place for lament, sadness, and responding to the grief around us in the world (Kay & Nics, 2016).” She continues by likening hymn-writing to sermon-writing, saying one should “be armed with a Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other (Kay & Nics, 2016).” Gillette has written hymns in response to immigration and refugee crises, the September 11th Attacks, natural disasters, school shootings, and aspects of the Coronavirus pandemic. After hearing about the Orlando Pulse Nightclub shooting, she felt inclined to write a hymn to reflect the grief and pain the church was feeling. The hymn she wrote was called “To A Place of Celebration” and it stands as one of her principal hymns on gun violence.

“To A Place of Celebration” has four verses and is written in an 8, 7, 8, 7 meter. The meter corresponds to the number of syllables in each line of the song. Like a sonnet or a haiku, the meter is like a poetic framework for a hymn writer to follow. It also lends her lyrics to be transferred to different melodies. Gillette notes two different hymns that her lyrics can be sung to: “Why Do Nations Rage Together?” and “God Whose Giving Knows No Ending.” What is

interesting about these two hymns is that they have completely opposite tonalities. “God Whose Giving Knows No Ending” is found in a major key (F major), while “Why Do Nations Rage Together?” is found in a minor key (F minor). It is up to the performer or music director to decide what hymn to accompany “To A Place Of Celebration,” as either one will implicitly suggest a different type of emotion. To be specific, the major key may elicit more feelings of optimism and reassurance, versus the solemnness and reflectiveness of the minor key.

To A Place of Celebration

Set to “God Whose Giving Knows No Ending” by Benjamin Franklin White

F Gm/F F F F/E Dm F/C Bb C/Bb Bb F

To a place of celebra-tion filled with laugh-ter, dan-cing joy,
 Wea-pons kill—and so does si-lence; hear our prayer as we con-fess:
 Give our lead-ers strength for ac-tion, give them minds to mend our flaws,
 Give us love to change our vi-sion; give us love to cast out fear.

“To A Place of Celebration” set to “God Whose Giving Knows No Ending”

Fm Ab C Db Bbm/Db C Fm Ab Eb/G C/E Fm Bbm C7 Fm

To a place of celebra-tion filled with laugh-ter, dan-cing joy,
 Wea-pons kill—and so does si-lence; hear our prayer as we con-fess:
 Give our lead-ers strength for ac-tion, give them minds to mend our flaws,
 Give us love to change our vi-sion; give us love to cast out fear.

“To A Place of Celebration” set to “Why Do Nations Rage Together?”

Like most of Gillette's hymns, the texture and instrumentation are not specified. The performance of this hymn is totally dependent on the context they are used in. Gillette's hymns are sung in many Protestant churches around the United States and the world, which can feature a variety of instrumentation (Bio, n.d.). There is a wide range of recordings of "To A Place of Celebration." Some have featured a choir accompanied by a traditional pipe organ and piano; others are produced with guitars, strings, ambient pads, and vocal overdubs. By not leaving any concrete rules for performance, Gillette opens the door to individual musical interpretation. This is an extension of her work and the evolution of the hymn genre; As Gillette re-imagines the lyrics of hymns that have been sung for decades and hundreds of years, the melodic and harmonic context of these hymns evolves again, as present-day musicians put their own spin on these traditional harmonies.

The lyrics of "To A Place of Celebration" are sung from the perspective of people praying to God. The power of the lyrics is felt in that as a unified group of people singing together, they are collectively sharing in grief and in petitioning requests made to God. Gillette cites verses from both the Old and New Testaments as her inspiration for the text of the hymns (Gillette, n.d.). These verses talk about the power of love over fear, the promise of resurrected souls in heaven, and the way of life Christians are called to live on earth.

The first verse of this hymn summarizes the situation in Orlando broadly. It addresses the grief that many have felt as a result of the lives lost and those impacted. It is a verse of lament and a cry for healing for the city and the nation. The second verse is a self-reflecting verse on the sin that exists in the world. It notes how the world has been marred by violence, clouding its vision and in making it lose sight of Christ's goal. It also cries out for justice in our society. The third verse is a call to action, a style of writing that Gillette calls "prophetic hymn writing." It

prays for wisdom and strength for community leaders, enabling them to do their job well. It also makes an explicit call for “legislation that will curb guns' awful toll.” It has been noted that in some congregations this verse has been left out, due to its more direct commentary on the politics of the issue. Regardless, the inclusion of such a statement reflects Gillette’s desire to see tangible progress in making sure these horrors of mass shootings do not happen again. The final verse is centered around the love of God. The phrase that is repeated the most in this verse is “give us love,” reflecting a desire to meet the struggles of today with love as the main tool. It is a verse that promotes unity, peace, and healing.

“Quiet” by MILCK

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JCnexOFOxCo>

Year Released: 2017

Genre: Indie Pop/Lo-fi

Album: This Is Not The End

Themes: #MeToo, Sexual Assault Awareness, Women’s March, LGBTQ+ Rights

Hailing from Los Angeles, California is a singer-songwriter named Connie Lim, or as she is known by her stage name MILCK (pronounced ‘milk’). Lim is a Chinese American and music has been a part of her life from a young age. Although pressured by her parents to pursue a career in medicine, Lim opted to become a musician. She chose the name MILCK as a play on her initials, paying homage to her roots and her family. Written from a deep well of personal experiences, “Quiet” was Lim’s self-described “personal therapy.” Lim is a survivor of sexual assault from a young age. She has also suffered from depression and anorexia. For years, Lim suppressed the feelings and experiences she had pent up inside. She describes the song as a cathartic response to a dream she had exclaiming that she could not keep quiet anymore. She had to let it out (Blair, 2019).

During the U.S. 2016 Presidential election, Lim was struck and shocked by the rhetoric that surrounded women and women’s issues. Even though the election featured the first female nominee of a major party in Hillary Clinton, the overall discussions and narratives about healthcare access and gender equality discouraged Lim (Morel, 2017). After President Trump won the election, Lim felt compelled to organize a group to sing “Quiet” at the Women’s March in Washington D.C. This march was planned to be held the day after Trump’s inauguration in

January 2017. With members from D.C. and L.A., Lim performed “Quiet” over seven times that day at sporadic places on the street. The performances were recorded and quickly went viral on social media.

While Lim wrote “Quiet” mainly from her own experience, the public reception of the song saw that it resonated with so many others. “Quiet” became an anthem for the broader women’s rights movements in the U.S., which push for gender equality in healthcare, the workplace, and society. “Quiet” became an anthem for those members in the LGBTQ+ community and those who support them. “Quiet” rang true for those suffering from anxiety, depression, and other mental illnesses. Furthermore, “Quiet” became closely associated with the #MeToo movement, a movement that brought voice to survivors of sexual assault and domestic/workplace violence. In the short time following its premiere, Lim was invited to give many more performances of “Quiet” for the general public. She also had the opportunity to record two different studio versions of it. On the internet and YouTube, you can find hundreds of different covers of the song, from all over the world. “Quiet” had a larger and more massive reach than Lim could have even imagined (Blair, 2019).

Written in common time, the studio version of Quiet features a variety of live and electronic sounds, ranging from piano, strings, and electric guitar to synth bass and airy pads. This provides a unique and evolving texture, one that likens itself to soundtracks in cinema and video. Opposite Lim’s soaring vocals, there are softer, rounder background vocals. They fill out the sound and with their harmonies, mimic a choir of voices accompanying Lim. “Quiet” features a variety of dynamics; both wide, large crescendos and abrupt diminuendos. Notably, as the music increases in volume, so does the intensity of the instruments and the complexity of

their parts. The strings start a new motive, the drums get livelier, and the piano riffs become broader.

Quiet

MILCK

♩ = 72

F Am G F Am G

I can't keep qu - i - et (No, No, No) I can't keep qu - i - et (No, No, No) A one wo-man ri -

6 F Am G F Am G

- ot (No, No, No) I can't keep qui - et They'll be some-one who un - der stan -

10 F Am

ds (Let it out, let it out, let it out)

Excerpt from “Quiet” - Chorus

The overall message of “Quiet” is centered around not being quiet anymore. Lim proclaims that she can not be silent anymore, she can not hold in and suppress these feelings she has. She must let out her emotions and tell her story. Somebody else has to hear what she’s going through, and maybe they will understand. The intro section of the song is a collection of phrases that Lim was told as a child, especially as a child of traditional Chinese immigrants.

“Put on your face, Know your place,

Shut up and smile, don't spread your legs”

Lim notes that those phrases, while meant as instruction and guidance, actually followed and troubled her for years (Morel, 2017). The following verse explains how Lim plans not to follow that advice anymore. While most of the song is an anthem of empowerment, Lim notes in the verse a concern about sharing her story. She sings, “Would I be that monster, scare them all away,” admitting a fear that sharing her story will elicit a greater negative reaction than the

positive, liberating one she desires. Lim describes that as a survivor of trauma and abuse, she has felt at times that a monster inside her that she must keep in, a monster of her abuser and memories of her past. The inclusion of this I believe shows an extra level of vulnerability on the part of the artist, one that many in the listening audience can relate to.

“Alright” by Kendrick Lamar

Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z-48u_uWMHY

Year Released: 2015

Genre: Hip-Hop/Rap

Album: To Pimp A Butterfly

Themes: Police Brutality, Black Lives Matter

As a line of work, policing can be one of the more dangerous occupations. Police officers are called into a variety of complex and high-stress situations. Often the first to arrive on the scene of a crime, accident, disaster, or confrontation, police officers are charged with the high task of de-escalating situations, protecting victims, arresting offenders, and ensuring safety and security to the surrounding community, all while navigating elevated emotions, nerves, and passions.

Notwithstanding, this decade has highlighted the strained relationship between police officers and members of minority communities. According to the Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health which analyzed the death rates of victims of police shootings between 2015-2020, Black, Indigenous, & People of Color (BIPOC) were found to have a higher death rate than their white counterparts (Lett et al, 2020). In addition, they were also found to have lost a greater number of years of life compared to white victims of police shootings. A further study published by the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences found that about one in every 1,000 black males can expect to be killed by police (Edwards et al, 2019). They also found that the risk increases for minorities between ages 20 and 35. Additionally, it is found that there is a lack of accountability among the ranks of the police when it comes to police violence. A study

by Mapping Police Violence found that between 2013-2020, 98% of reported police killings did not result in the police officer being charged with a crime (Police Violence Map, 2021).

For many members of the black community, these statistics outline a solemn, shuddering reality of policing that they know too well. While the risk is commonly known; it is the names of the victims that reverberate and ring true. Names like Trayvon Martin of Sanford, Florida; Eric Garner of New York City; Michael Brown of Ferguson, Missouri; Tamir Rice of Cleveland, Ohio; Walter Scott of North Charleston, South Carolina; and Freddie Gray of Baltimore, Maryland. The stories of these men and many others inspired people to organize through movements like Black Lives Matter and #SayHerName. Large demonstrations were held across the country demanding police reform, accountability, and overall justice for the victims and their families. At these demonstrations, it would not be a surprise to hear Kendrick Lamar's "Alright," a song that reflects the feelings about the situation.

Kendrick Lamar is a rapper from Compton, California. His journey with music started at a very young age, writing lyrics about his experiences living in the city. His first EPs and albums showcased not only his talent with the pen but his original flow or rhythmic style. Included in Lamar's impressive discography are five mixtapes and four albums, his first one released in 2011. Recognized as one of the more popular music artists today, Lamar belongs to a great lineage of West Coast rappers: Snoop-Dogg, Dr. Dre, NWA, and his greatest musical influence, Tupac Shakur (Bauer, 2021).

His song "Alright" was released on his third studio album entitled "To Pimp A Butterfly" in 2015. The album stands out as an aggregation and celebration of African-American musical styles like hip-hop, RnB, soul, funk, and jazz. Throughout the album, Lamar describes and speaks to elements of the black culture, addressing poverty, the motivators of success, racism,

inequality, self-doubt, and colorism. “Alright” stands out as a song of encouragement on the record. The song’s reoccurring hook is its central message:

“We gon’ be alright

We gon’ be alright

We gon’ be alright

Do you hear me, do you feel me? We gon’ be alright”

Sung by Grammy Award-winning rapper and producer Pharrell Williams, this catchy chorus infuses a great amount of hope. Even though the present realities may look bleak and discouraging, take heart, look alive, keep the faith, because “we gon’ be alright.”

The rest of the lyrics of the song were inspired by a trip Lamar took to South Africa (Limborg, 2019). On that trip, he went to Robben Island, where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned for eighteen years (History.com, 2021). Combined with visiting such hallowed grounds, Lamar wrote lyrics that were a visceral reaction to the victims of police brutality and how he felt Black Americans were being treated. The longer verses in the rap speak directly to the consumer culture and economic hardships for the Black community. Lamar explains how the Black community has been undervalued in the workplace, marketplace, and has a customer, but also how the community has chased pursuit of fame and money in the wrong places (Alright, 2015). By exploring this cycle, Lamar is calling his listeners and followers to break out of it and look to attack the root causes of the discrimination they face.

A part of the song that stands out on its own is the pre-chorus. In it, Lamar calls the listener to think about what they’ve overcome before. Not only is he alluding to other movements for equal and civil rights, but what someone may have overcome in their own life. It

is a perfect lead-in to the bouncy, lively chorus: Even though trials and tests may come, “we gon’ be alright.”

*“Wouldn't you know; We been hurt, been down before
Nigga, when our pride was low; Lookin' at the world like, "Where do we go?"
Nigga, and we hate po-po; Wanna kill us dead in the street fo sho'
Nigga, I'm at the preacher's door
My knees gettin' weak, and my gun might blow; But we gon' be alright”*

Musically, this song features a collection of different instruments: keyboard, bass guitar, a variety of pads, live drums, and a drum pad. Additionally, there is a saxophone soloing throughout the whole song, adding a unique jazz improvisatory element to the piece. The vocals of this piece are split between Lamar and his collaborator Pharrell Williams. Williams is featured on the chorus and in the underlying resonant and pitch-bending comping-chords. Lamar’s creativity shines through the unique rhythms he chooses in his verses. The different groupings of accents drive the piece forward, keeping the song in a march-like motion. Additionally, they make the song more interesting to listen to. Below are a few examples of Lamar’s accent patterns:

I re - cog - nize you're look - in' at me for the pay cut But hom - i -

3
cide be look - in' at you from the face down What mac e - lev - en ev - en boom - with the bass down

Excerpt from Verse 1, Rhythmic direction/arrival towards beat 3

5

Tell the world I know it's too late Boys and girls I think I've gone cray

7

Drown in-side my vi-ces all day Won't you please be-lieve when I say

Excerpt from Verse 1, A laid-back eight-note pattern, sung a little behind the beat

9

I can see the ev-il, I can tell it I know it's il-leg-al I don't think a-bout it, I de-po-sit ev-ry oth-er ze-ro

11

Think-in' of my part-ner, put the can-dy, paint it on the re-gal Dig-gin' in my pock-et, ain't a pro-fit, big e-nough to feed you

Excerpt from Verse 2, 3+2+3 rhythm pattern on sixteenth notes

13

Pat Dawg, Pat Dawg, Pat Dawg, my dog that's all Bick back and Chad I trap the bag for y'all

15

I rap, I'm black, on track so rest as-sured My rights, my wrongs I write 'til I'm right with God

Excerpt from Verse 2, sixteenth-note + eight-note rhythm that is repeated five times in a bar

The reception to “Alright” after its release was massive. Both the song and the accompanying music video were nominated for awards at the 58th Grammy Awards. Lamar walked away with Grammys for Best Rap Performance and Best Rap Song for “Alright,” as well as Best Rap Album for the full project of *To Pimp A Butterfly*. During Black Lives Matter

demonstrations across the country, “Alright” was commonly sung by people as they marched and as they gathered together (Blake Piffin, 2015). “Alright” stands as a quintessential protest song. It is both relevant and provocative; honest but optimistic; challenging yet unifying. Whether intentionally or not, Lamar provided the world with a song that was fitting for the moment it was created and that continues to inspire others today.

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