

Sing It to Win It

by Jennifer Morgan

What do "Even Better Than The Real Thing" by U2, "Home" by Dierks Bentley, and "Roll With The Changes" by REO Speedwagon have in common? What about "I Am A Man Of Constant Sorrow" by Soggy Bottom Boys, "Ring of Fire" by Johnny Cash, and "Born Free" by Kid Rock? The first set all have an upbeat, happy, warm feeling to them. They make you want to sing along. The second set, however, makes you feel downtrodden. You can feel the working man's burden, sorrows, pains and life in a simpler time. During the 2012 presidential campaigns, incumbent President Barack Obama took on the first set of music listed as part of his campaign soundtrack, while opponent Mitt Romney used the second set as part of his campaign soundtrack.

For years, presidential candidates thought up catchy slogans to attract voters. However, in recent campaigns, presidential candidates began using catchy songs to do the same. When a viewer looks at the campaign soundtrack for a presidential candidate, the voter can see the personality of the candidate. It is wonderful that presidential candidates try to relate to we, the people—or do they? Could the use of soundtracks just be a political ploy to attract voters? If so, does it work?

During President Obama's campaign in 2012, many bands and other artists showed their support for President Obama by playing their music at different events. The Red Hot Chili Peppers, Pearl Jam's Eddie Vedder, Jay-Z and Beyoncé, and even Bruce Springsteen showed their support for President Obama through their music (Knopper).

President Barack Obama's campaign decided they would let the American public select some of the campaign songs, perceivably to draw in voters and gather information. It is not surprising Obama focused on African American voters even in his music. It comes as no surprise that "Keep Marchin"; by Raphael Saadiq was at the top of Obama's playlist. The Obama campaign advocates for civil rights and Saadiq's song "Keep Marchin" creates a positive, make-a-change message. In addition, Obama used this song with the hope he would maintain the African American vote. It worked. *The New York Times* reported President Obama received 93% of the African American vote in the 2012 election (Clift).

The second song on Obama's playlist for his campaign is "Tonight's The Kind of Night" by Noah and the Whale. This song has an alternative, hipster, indie sound to it. It is not unexpected that Obama chose this song to add to his playlist. The Obama campaign appealed to younger voters in the 2012 election. According to *The New York Times* article on the election results in 2012, President Obama received 60% of votes from 18-29 year olds and 52% of the votes from 30-44 year olds (Clift).

The Obama campaign playlist was composed of 28 tracks and included an array of artists ranging from Wilco to the Electric Light Orchestra to Ricky Martin. There were a total of five classic rock songs, which hit close to home with middle-aged, middle-class voters, key to Obama's election results. There were five indie rock songs for the college hipsters ready to change the world. There were two oldster rock songs to attract the upper class, educated, moderate Democrats. There were a whopping nine soul and R&B songs to connect with the African American voters. Country reigned with seven songs to attract working class, Middle America. The largest shock on the playlist was that it had no rap songs (Graham).

Obama picked songs based on his voter demographics, but what about Mitt Romney? When Mitt Romney ran for office in 2012, how did his campaign approach a campaign playlist? Romney's campaign playlist contained songs from every generation. When looking at Romney's campaign demographics, he leaned toward attracting older voters, blue-collar workers and farm laborers. Romney's first song was "I Am A Man of Constant Sorrow" originally published by Dick Burnett in 1913, rerecorded in 2000 by The Soggy Bottom Boys. The song itself is a traditional American folk song that became revitalized after the movie, *O Brother, Where Art Thou* was released in 2000. The song has a sweet southern sound with a prominent fiddle twanging along to the beat. The song attracts Middle America and voters of the South. When the results came in Romney won the majority in the 45-64 year old voters and the 65 and older voters (Clift).

Romney took a musical risk to a lyrical ballad "Read My Mind" by the Killers. The song has a heavy rock beat to it but the lyrics are quiet depressing. It is about a long distance relationship ending because each partner has grown away from the other. Why would a presidential candidate use a love ballad in his campaign trail? Mainly because the song appeals to the younger voters, an area of demographics Romney did not possess. But, this song was a poor choice to use to attract younger voters because of the lack of upbeat catchiness many young people are attracted to in their music.

Overall, Romney's playlist had a limited variety of songs. There were no pop or rap songs. There was one R&B, jazz, and disco song each. There were two indie rock songs, both by the same artist. There were two folk songs. There were four country songs by both a mix of female and male artists. And the genre winning by a landslide—classic rock. There were eight classic rock songs included in Romney's campaign list. We can all see the clear generation Romney was attempting to appeal to here.

However, many artists do not want their songs associated with candidates. In August 2012, Mitt Romney announced Paul Ryan would be his running mate for the 2012 presidential election. When Tom Morello, guitarist for the band Rage Against the Machine heard of the choice, he wrote an op-ed to *Rolling Stone* about Ryan. Paul Ryan is conservative Ayn Rand fan and an ideological hero of the Tea Party, yet is also a self-proclaimed lover of Rage Against the Machine. Morello wrote in his op-ed, "Ryan's love of Rage Against the Machine is amusing, because he is the embodiment of the machine that our music has been raging against for two decades." Mitt Romney took another hit when Rapper K'Naan sued Romney for not asking permission to use K'Naan's 2010 song "Wavin'; Flag" in Romney's Florida primary victory speech. K'Naan stated he would have happily granted Obama's campaign the use of the song; however, he did not support Romney (Emami). Additionally, Sam Moore asked Barack Obama to stop

using his 1966 song "Hold On! I'm Coming" in his campaign. Moore eloquently stated he had not agreed to the use of his song in the campaign and that his vote and support were private (Sneed).

Another risk of using music is misinterpretation. During the 2012 Democratic primaries, Hilary Clinton chose Tom Petty's "American Girl" to front her 2012 campaign. Clinton believed the song represented the true "American Girl," born and raised in America, working for her country. However, Petty released a statement saying the song did not represent the "American Girl" as Clinton described, but was simply the story of a girl whose heart had been shattered by a no good guy, something all girls can relate to.

With everything a presidential candidate must do to prepare for election season, music is probably on the bottom of their list. However, it really should not be. Music is important in our society. We hear it every day. From the car ride to work or school, to sitting our desks, to standing in the lunch lines, there are tunes all around us. We associate songs stuck in our heads with where we heard them or who sang them. Presidential candidates today have a wide variety of tools to better their campaigns and attract voters; music just might be the most important one. Music has the ability to inspire, motivate, and energize a campaign.

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