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Amy Feeney

University of Denver, Amy.Feeney@du.edu

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**How American Protest Music Has Changed: A Study on the Lives and Music of Billie Holiday, Nina Simone and Janelle Monae**

**An Annotated Bibliography**

**By: Amy Feeney**

**November, 2018**

American protest music has been a prominent and acknowledged art form since the 1930's and has affected many artists both positively and negatively. I aim to examine what about protest music and society's consumption of it has changed, for better or worse, over the course of its existence. To do so, I will be looking at the lives and works of 3 women who were actively involved in music of protest spanning the existence of the genre, Billie Holiday, Nina Simone and Janelle Monae.

**Dictionary/Encyclopedia Articles**

**Rodnitzky, Jerry. "Protest Song." In *Grove Music Online*, edited by Deane Root. Oxford England: Oxford University Press, 2013.**

This entry in Grove Music Online defines protest music vaguely. It acknowledges that there is very little agreement on an actual definition and that perhaps any song that someone interprets as protesting something may be considered a protest song. The entry discusses how protest music has been around much longer than the activism that we consider having started in the 1960's. It also mentions that while protest music is generally an artifact of left wing politics, it does occur in far-right wing politics as well such as the Ku Klux Klan and the Nazi party. This

article is useful in examining changes and effects of protest music because it gives a broad definition of what protest music is and who uses it and how.

### **Dissertations and Theses**

**Marin, Reva. "Protest Notes: Abbey Lincoln, Nina Simone, and the Civil Rights Movement." Master's Thesis, York University, 2007. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.**

This thesis examines the lives and music of Abbey Lincoln and Nina Simone throughout their careers, taking note on how their music and involvement in activism changed. Through examination of their early music and involvement in the Civil Rights Movement as well as their later work while they were immersed in the Civil Rights Movement, Marin concludes that the inner activist was there inside each of these artists long before they even considered themselves activists. This thesis is helpful in understanding how protest music has changed over time because it takes a close look at how the music of two artist in the protest music genre have changed through the course of their careers. It allows the reader to see how their involvement in activism was foreshadowed in the events of their childhood and early careers.

**Tomlinson, Sarah. "“And I Want You to Walk Down Freedom's Road’: Rethinking Resistance in the Music of Nina Simone, 1958-1963.” Master's Thesis. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2016. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.**

This master's thesis looks at Nina Simone's musical life in its entirety, arguing that Nina Simone became involved in protest music and the Civil Rights Movement long before when most people say she did. It is generally accepted that Nina Simone joined the CRM after a church bombing in 1963, after which she wrote "Mississippi Goddamn." This thesis examines her musical and social activities around New York in her life, showing how she was involved in activism long before the bombing of 1963. This thesis gives a new perspective to Nina Simone's music and activism and aids in understanding how protest music has changed over time because it gives us a glimpse into one artist's entry into the genre of protest music and the events that led up to it.

### **Journal Articles**

**Brooks, Daphne A. "Nina Simone's Triple Play." *Callaloo* 34, no. 1 (2011): 176-97.**

**<https://www-jstor-org.du.idm.oclc.org/stable/41242603>.**

In her article, Daphne Brooks identifies Nina Simone's "Triple Play." By this she means the three characteristic things that made Simone's music so powerful and effective as protest music. Simone was known for being mean and aggressive toward her audiences which opened the door for some later artists to become quite famous while being this way toward audiences. It also reveals a bias in society while people are offended at Nina Simone's behavior toward her audiences, yet they have no problem with Miles Davis's solos during which he turns his back to the audience. Also, Nina Simone's multi genre music made her songs more accessible and harder to put into a box. She uses irony as a technique to reach her audiences and to drive home the meaning of the song. Simone also employs the use of curse words in her protest music to draw

attention and outrage. This article is useful in learning about changes in protest music because it identifies specific examples of techniques used to give a protest song its power in the 1960's.

**Carvalho, John M. "‘Strange Fruit’: Music between Violence and Death." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 71, no. 1 (Winter 2013): 111-19. <https://www-jstor-org.du.idm.oclc.org/stable/23597541>**

Using Jacques Atali's claim that "all music is a deritualized simulation of original violence," Carvalho explores Billie Holiday's performances of strange fruit as a supporting case study on this claim. The article examines the inception of the song from a poem by Abel Meeropol to its signature performance by Billie Holiday. Much more goes into the performance than just Holiday's sung rendition. The white club owner of the Café Society where the song was performed multiple times nightly, had a whole performance put together. Waitstaff and bussers were to stand silently and still during Holiday's performance and Holiday herself was illuminated by a single spotlight which only illuminated her face, leaving her "black body" shrouded in darkness. The article concludes that music is in fact a reliving of our original violence that has allowed us to become "civilized." Based on all the violence in Holiday's life, as well as the violence in her singing and the peace of mind it gives white people for being supportive enough of the black struggles to listen to the song and "appreciate it." This article is useful in examining the change of protest music over time because it examines the effectiveness of arguably one of the first protest songs as well as the audience reaction and how the performer is treated because of it.

**Hobson, Janell. "Everybody's Protest Song: Music as Social Protest in the Performances of Marian Anderson and Billie Holiday." *Signs* 33, no. 2 (Winter 2008): 443-48.**

**<https://doi.org/10.1086/521057>.**

This article discusses the protest performances of Marian Anderson and Billie Holiday. After not being allowed to sing for the Daughters of the American Revolution, Anderson was asked to perform at the Lincoln memorial center, which she did with the understanding that, though she may not like it, she was a representative figure for her people now. On the other hand, Billie Holiday's performance of the anti-lynching song, "Strange Fruit" was a less passive form of activism. The song itself had a more politically charged message, as well as Holiday being more willing to interested in using it for activism. The article discusses how the black woman is plagued by voicelessness and that her singing as a spectacle only reinforces that voicelessness. This article is useful in understanding the change in protest music over time in that it discusses two different perspectives on becoming involved as a symbol for Civil Rights and it raises the issue of whether the spectacle of it all is solving anything or only reinforcing problems.

**Jones, Cassandra L. "'Tryna Free Kansas City': The Revolutions of Janelle Monáe as Digital Griot." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 39, no. 1 (2018): 42-72.**

**<https://www-jstor-org.du.idm.oclc.org/stable/10.5250/fronjwomestud.39.1.0042>.**

In this article, Jones discusses the meaning of "Afrofuturism" and "Digital Griot" both as art forms similar to speculative fiction. These are ways of tying together the past present and future and to draw attention to societal problems using metaphors, symbols and stories. Janelle Monae has created across many albums an Afrofuturist world. Her alter-ego, Cindi Mayweather,

a cyborg, tries to have a life and, through her difference, must overcome many struggles which all correlate to real issues. Through her story-telling songs, Monae draws attention to problems with racism, sexism and heteronormativity. Like the Civil Rights Movement, Monae asks the question of what it means to be human and demands in her music that black and queer people be specifically included in what it means to be human. This article is informative in how protest music has changed and evolved because it draws parallels between Monae and the black women of the Civil Rights Movement and it discusses ways in which Monae uses technology to criticize society and demand justice through music.

**Loudermilk, A. "Nina Simone and the Civil Rights Movement: Protest at Her Piano, Audience at Her Feet." *Journal of International Women's Studies* 14, no. 3 (July 2013): 121-36. ProQuest Central.**

In this article, Loudermilk examines Nina Simone's self-discovery as a musician and as a protest songwriter for the Civil Rights Movement. With focus on how the audience was treated and how they responded to Simone's changes. Simone never wanted to be a singer, least of all to write popular music. She was trained as a classical pianist but after allegedly being turned away from a music school based on race, she started playing piano and singing for money. It was Simone's cross-genre style that won her immediate popularity, and it wasn't until Martin Luther King Jr. and 4 young black girls were killed that she became invested in her music and the Civil Rights Movement with her work "Mississippi Goddam". Throughout the shifts in her mood, voice and politics, possibly to be explained by mental health problems, Simone kept a strong fan base, but became quite angry and offended in her post Civil Rights Movement life. In addition, the appropriation of her music by white artists didn't help matters. This article is useful in

learning how protest music has changed over time because it reveals how Simone was personally affected by her work as a protest singer in the Civil Rights Movement as well as her audience's reactions, both negative and positive.

**Murchison, Gayle. "Let's Flip It! Quare Emancipations: Black Queer Traditions, Afrofuturisms, Janelle Monáe to Labelle." *Women & Music* 22 (2018): 79-90. ProQuest Music Periodicals Database.**

In this article, Murchinson takes a close look at the tools and tactics that Afrofuturists like Janelle Monae use to make their stories heard in their music. She discusses how through storytelling using music and video, Monae critiques modern society and calls indirect attention to problems with society. In her albums Monae plays an android who is trying to gain freedom and acceptance and the humans don't want her to have it. This article is useful in learning about the change in protest music because it examines a new means of getting the point across which relies on technological advances. This article gives us a look at the specific ways that Janelle Monae calls out problems through her music.

### **Monographs (Secondary/Tertiary)**

**Elliot, Richard. *Nina Simone*. Bristol, CT: Equinox Publishing, 2013.**

In his biography on Nina Simone Richard Elliot discusses some key points of Simone's life and music. He discusses how she began in music, what genres she used in her music and points out that to classify her as genre-less overlooks her contributions to many genres of music

including blues, jazz and gospel. Elliot also discusses how and why Simone got involved in politics and how that worked its way into her music. In addition, Elliot examines Simone's spiritual, personal social life to better understand her motives and feelings. This book is a good resource for examining how protest music has changed over time because it examines the life of Nina Simone with attention to how she influenced politics, and how politics influenced her and her music.

**Lynskey, Dorian. *33 Revolutions per Minute: A History of Protest Songs, from Billie Holiday to Green Day*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2011.**

This book gives brief histories and backgrounds on a whole collection of songs from Billie Holiday's performance of "Strange Fruit" in 1939 to Nina Simone's Performance of "Mississippi Goddamn" in 1963 all the way to Green Day's performance of "American Idiot" in 2004. It gives social and political context for each song as well as describing what the effects of the performance were. This text is useful in examining how protest music has changed over time because it gives the reader a general idea about each time-period and basic circumstances surrounding the inception of each protest song included.

**Simone, Nina, and Stephen. Cleary. *I Put a Spell on You: The Autobiography of Nina Simone / with Stephen Cleary*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1993.**

This autobiography of Nina Simone follows her life and her struggles as a musician and as a black woman during the Civil Rights Movement. It follows her development from child prodigy pianist, Eunice Waymon, to the famous Nina Simone. The autobiography is her personal

account of her life, struggles and successes. This book is helpful in studying the change in protest music and its effects on musicians as Nina Simone recalls her time writing music for the Civil Rights Movement. She describes the ways it negatively affected her and her audiences as well as concluding that she wouldn't have changed a thing and she says she felt joy in "fighting for the rights of my brothers and sisters everywhere."